

Teens hold Mardi Gras fundraiser

Jennifer Burke/Catholic Courier

ITHACA — On Feb. 22, youths at St. Catherine of Siena Parish — who were decked out in jester hats and Mardi Gras beads — worked to combine the spirit of Fat Tuesday with the spirit of giving as they raised money for charity.

On that day, members of the middle-school youth group hosted a Mardi Gras-themed carnival to raise funds for the Tompkins County Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and Free the Children, an international organization that empowers children to help end poverty and exploitation of other children.

Youth-group members researched the charities they wanted to raise money for and spent hours constructing the carnival games, said Tanya Bollenbach, coordinator of the parish's middle-school youth ministry.

"It's another way to promote leadership within the middle-school group and get the group working together as a team and also support a charity," Bollenbach said.

"We want to make people aware of how other people are living," explained Karin Andersson, 13, as she staffed the "Guess the Price" game, which consisted of Karin posing questions to carnival-goers about wages or living conditions of people



Mike Crupi/Catholic Courier

Three-year-old Gabrielle Wilson plays the "Lost Sheep Shell Game" Feb. 22 during the Mardi Gras carnival at Ithaca's St. Catherine of Siena Church. The carnival, which was organized by the parish's middle-school youth group, benefited two charities.

in Third-World countries.

Many who played the game were surprised to learn the long hours children work for low wages, said Kuya Lokuruka, 13, who staffed the game table with Karin. The table also included containers for donations and posters explaining how those donations would be used to benefit the two charities.

Many other games were more lighthearted in nature. Art Sullivan, 12, and Jacob Morris-Knowler, 11,

were in charge of "Knock Down the Sins" bowling, in which each player rolled a ball toward plastic soda bottles placed in a formation. Each bottle was labeled with the name of a sin, such as greed or selfishness.

Daniel Sullivan, 14, and Zsombor Welker, 13, helped children "fish for disciples" by casting a makeshift fishing pole with a magnet at the end into a blue wading pool in an attempt to "catch" a metal paper clip with a picture of a disciple attached

to it.

"We wanted to do something for the church. I like being with the kids," Daniel said.

Children also had the chance to create their own Mardi Gras masks using paper plates and feathers, or try their hand at "Noah's Ark Ring Toss" or the "Loaves and Fishes Bean Bag Toss." Meanwhile, Michael Walsh, 11, Emmanuel Lopez, 12, and Joseph Buffone, 11, manned the bake sale.

At the "Creation Story Face Painting" table, Laken Keeney, 11, painstakingly decorated children's faces with suns, moons, clouds, waves, fish and flowers, but also had another job during the carnival — Laken was crowned Mardi Gras queen.

Applause and a few good-natured chuckles greeted the announcement of the surprise Mardi Gras king — Bishop Matthew H. Clark.

"Our Mardi Gras king is no stranger to leadership ... and he knows how to have fun. He's hip, he's cool, he's Bishop Matthew Clark," Bollenbach said as she announced the royal pair.

"I'm honored, especially since I can share royalty with Laken. It was a very unexpected and delightful surprise. I didn't know I was going to be the king of the Mardi Gras," Bishop Clark said.

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