

# Bible schools offer divine vacations

Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier

School may soon be out for summer, but several parishes in the Diocese of Rochester are offering children the chance to keep up religious studies through vacation Bible schools.

Mary Kay Oberst, faith-formation director at St. Ambrose Parish in Rochester, noted that vacation Bible schools offer children a unique opportunity to learn about their faith.

"Our aim is not catechesis in the strict sense," Oberst said. "Our aim is to bring out in our children the understanding that it is great to be a follower of Jesus. ... I always say on the first day of camp that the most important lesson they need to learn this week is that Jesus loves them. And by the end of the week, they know it!"

Cathy Tucci, director of religious education at Church of the Assumption in Fairport, said that vacation Bible schools enable children to learn about Jesus in a different way than they do during the regular school year.

"It is an experience that includes

crafts, music, storytelling and drama, activities that we sometimes don't have time for in our hour-long religious-ed classes," she said.

Communities and parishes are offering a variety of educational experiences to youngsters, from Olympics-influenced classes inspired by the international games in Athens this August to classes on an imaginary volcanic island flowing with lava. Vacation Bible schools in the diocese include the following:

- **St. Mary's Parish, Geneseo**, will host the Geneseo Ecumenical Vacation Bible School from June 28-July 2.

- From July 12-15, **Our Lady of Lourdes Parish, Elmira**, will offer "Lava Lava Island: Where Jesus' Love Flows!" The program was created by the Loveland, Colo.-based company Group Publishing. The school runs from 6-8:30 p.m. the first three nights, and from 6-9 p.m. July 15, according to a parish bulletin. Among their many activities, children in grades kindergarten through fourth will "sing catchy songs, play teamwork-building games, nibble tropical treats" and experience

"electrifying Bible adventures," according to the bulletin.

- **Christ the King Parish, Irondequoit**, will host a vacation Bible school from July 12-16. The theme this year is "Jesus Helps Power You Up!" The school will be staffed by more than 30 volunteers serving about 100 students, according to Mary Ellen Cancilla, the parish's faith-formation coordinator.

- **St. Ambrose Parish, Rochester**, will sponsor "Miracles of Jesus" summer camp for preschool children no younger than 4, as well as school-age children from kindergarten up to and including those about to enter fourth grade. The camp runs from July 12-16, from 9:30 a.m. to noon, and concludes with a concert by the children who will sing songs they learned at camp.

"The bulk of our teachers ... and helpers are in junior and senior high school," Oberst said. "We think this is a great witness for these younger children to see big kids giving a week of their summer to help them know Jesus better."

- From July 19-23, **St. Vincent DePaul Parish, Churchville**, will offer

"Lava Lava Island," the same program offered by St. Mary's in Geneseo.

- **St. James the Apostle Church, Trumansburg**, will hold a vacation Bible school from July 19-23 for students in grades 1-4. Two sisters who are members of the Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary will teach children about the Christian faith, using songs, crafts and activities, according to Barbara Willers, St. James' director of religious education.

- In Fairport, **Church of the Assumption** is one of several Christian communities that will participate in an Aug. 2-6 ecumenical Bible school called "SonGames 2004." The Bible school is based on a program created by Gospel Light, a California-based curriculum company. SonGames 2004 teaches children they can be part of "God's team," according to Gospel Light's Web site, and introduces them to St. Paul, "one of God's most valuable players."

Assumption is a member of Ecumenical Ministries of Perinton Inc., an ecumenical organization of more than 10 Christian churches that have been offering vacation Bible schools in the Fairport area for several years, according to Kelly Petrucci, the Bible school's director. This year's school will be held at four different churches, and its closing ceremony will take place at Assumption, she said.

"Participants will be able to learn about Paul and his adventures as a

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