

Parishioners turn actors for Christmas

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Faith & Family

Catholic Courier | Diocese of Rochester, NY | December 2004

Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier

GATES — Maria LeClair's baby girl, Grace, who was born on July 18, is already a star of the stage. Grace is playing the baby Jesus in Holy Ghost Parish's production of Lloyd Larson's "How Great Our Joy" on Sunday, Dec. 19, at 7 p.m. The parish is located at 250 Coldwater Road.

Maria and her husband, R.J., will be playing Mary and Joseph, respectively, in the Christmas musical.

"I think it's a huge honor to be asked to be Mary and to have our baby be Jesus," Maria said. She added that Grace has no speaking parts. "But I think she's going to make up her own!" Maria said jokingly.

R.J. noted that playing the parents of Jesus has given him and his wife a greater appreciation of what Mary and Joseph endured. The couple said that it was hard enough having a baby with medical care available, and that they believed Mary must have been a strong woman to have borne Jesus in a stable after being turned away from an inn.

The couple noted that Maria's father, Tom Basset, a parish council member and an extraordinary minister of holy Communion, is playing one of the kings who visited the infant Jesus. Basset said he is one of six members of the same family participating in the play, and added that he is enjoying his first dabbling in theater.

"I'm surrounded by a lot of good people," he said.

R.J. also said that he is a first-time theater performer, and Maria acknowledged she didn't like being in the spotlight. Still, the couple said they are enjoying their roles and hope to perform well.

The LeClairs and Basset were among the dozens of parishioners rehearsing "How Great Our Joy" on a Sunday afternoon in the church. Parishioners of all ages practiced such scenes as the gathering of people around the infant Jesus after his



Mike Crup/Catholic Courier

During a Nov. 14 rehearsal for the upcoming musical "How Great Our Joy," Holy Ghost parishioners Sean O'Donnell, a 16-year-old who plays the role of the angel Gabriel, and Shannon Pilato, a 14-year-old who plays an angel, practice one of the opening songs.

birth in a stable.

"How Great Our Joy" will combine music, scripturally based narration and acting to highlight the difficult times preceding the coming of the Messiah, and the realization that Jesus came to save people of all backgrounds and social standings, according to Lori Osgood, Holy Ghost's director of music and coordinator of liturgy.

Sixty-five costumed parishioners will perform in the play, Osgood said, and about 35 other parishioners will perform with the choir or orchestra. Additionally, another dozen or so parishioners will work as stage crew members or lighting and sound technicians.

"I think it's really important to celebrate our faith as a family, and we have generations of families doing this thing together," Osgood said. "They're going to celebrate the Christmas holiday and Advent in a more communal nature."

Bob Beck, a production assistant, is playing Simeon, the elderly righteous man of Jerusalem who, it was prophesied, would not die until he saw the Messiah. Beck — who pointed out he is growing a goatee beard for the role — noted that he agrees

with Osgood's take on the play.

"I think it'll just promote the sense of family and community that Holy Ghost is known for," he said.

Anne Gunn, the play's art director, added that the production serves as an antidote to the commercialism that accompanies the Christmas season.

"I think it gives the children more of a feeling of what Christmas is really about," Gunn said.

On that note, Osgood said that many preschool children are playing the roles of sheep in the production, with older children playing angels or town children. Gunn said that children of today respond to visual presentations of the faith, and Osgood added that children learn more about their faith when they can act it out, as they are doing by participating in the play.

As for working with so many different groups of parishioners, Gunn acknowledged that "it gets a little hectic." Osgood added that she has designated some family members as shepherds so they can watch over their little relatives playing sheep.

"We tell them they have to herd their own sheep," she said with a smile.

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