

Religious Ed, the Biggest Bargain on the East Coast

By Mary Donovan,

School is out but school is in. Once the parochial school kids go home, religious ed kids stream into St. Mary's School and hall. These students learn about their faith in a thriving, professional enterprise. From grades one through nine, in various configurations, 1,087 of them are given the tools to help them grow into responsible, Catholic adults.

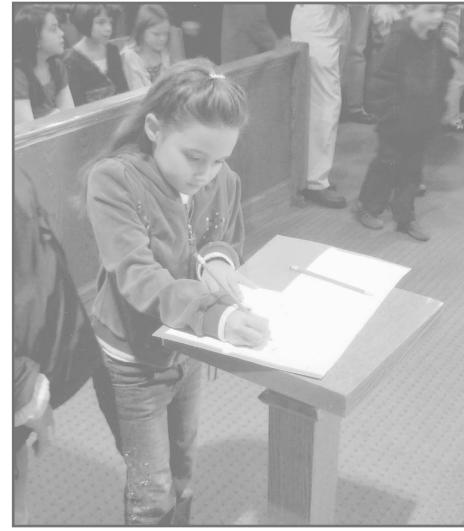
The actual cost of managing this ongoing effort is \$160 per student, according to Fr. Mike. That adds up to \$173,920 per year. . Some of this is recovered in the fees charged for participation. Here is the schedule: \$70 for one child, \$60 for two children and \$50 each for three in a family. There is a cap of \$180 per family. At the very best, if all 1,087 were the only child in the family, the fees would bring in a yearly \$75, 890. You do the math.

Religious education classes use every available space in the church, school and hall. Confirmation preparation, R.C.I.A., Eucharistic and Reconciliation programs and the general program are managed in spite of limited space.

Efforts are made to accommodate family needs. For families who cannot attend weekly classes from Grades K-9, the pro-



At the enrollment ceremony for grade 2, parents and children signed up for the Eucharistic program. This year 127 children will receive their First Holy Communion.



gram offers Households of Faith. Households of Faith, the family program, is held on the first and third Sunday of each month from 12:30 - 2:30 p.m. in the church hall. At this time, experiences of our faith are shared with the whole family. The other three weeks of the month, par-

ents teach their children at home. Books are supplied for the parents and for each child. Parents will be taught how to teach the program. Only second graders in the Reconciliation and Eucharist programs attend classes weekly on Saturday mornings.

St. Mary's School – a Source of Enrichment for Parish.

BY MICHAEL LOVELACE,
PARISH COUNCIL MEMBER

St. Mary's Catholic School is a vital ministry of St. Mary's Parish. Our school encourages the formation of self-confident, motivated and caring students and hopes to instill in them a lifelong love of God and learning. The school community counts on the spiritual and financial support of all parishioners. The generosity of time, talent, and treasure from loving people has created, supported, and has helped to maintain a thriving, faith-filled Catholic school here at St. Mary's for almost 50 years.

In addition to education, there are other school ministries that further pursue our efforts to provide service to our entire community. These include the School Advisory Board, the Parents Association, the Family Festival, a multitude of classroom volunteers, the school choir and more.

SCHOOL ADVISORY BOARD

The School Advisory Board is a group of elected parent and appointment volunteers

that review evaluate and submit recommendations to the pastor and the principal concerning those aspects of the school that affect enrollment, staffing, finance, plant and facilities, as well as other issues the pastor or principal may bring to the board.

PARENTS' ASSOCIATION

In addition to conducting fundraisers for the benefit of the school, the Parents' Association performs service and social events. A popular service event is the senior luncheon. Our entire parish seniors are invited to lunch served in the parish hall. Beautiful table settings set the mood for a delicious catered lunch. The school children provide entertainment while parish volunteers serve food and drink. This well attended event is an annual favorite. In addition, social events are held to bring our community together. The Ice Cream Social and Sunday Coffee are big hits with many parish families.

FAMILY FESTIVAL

This event celebrates community and

family traditions. An entire weekend of games, inflatable rides, raffle and prizes, food and goodies provides fun for people of all ages. This well loved event raises money for our parish and brings our entire community together for a good cause.

CLASSROOM VOLUNTEERS

Parent volunteers assist the teachers in the classroom with learning centers, art, and other activities. This endeavor assists the teachers and provides an opportunity for the students and parents to have a shared learning experience.

CHILDREN'S CHOIR

This ministry provides the opportunity for students to learn and develop choir skills. The Children's Choir sings at the school Masses and other functions.

Additional activities include recycling, altar servers, outreach programs, book sales, music and play performances, etc. Parish life is enriched for all by the school and all of its ministries.

Becoming a ``Beatitude'' People-the Goals and Focus of Youth Ministry

BY GINA KURUVILLA,
COORDINATOR OF YOUTH MINISTRY

Not long after the movie "Hotel Rwanda" was released, we held a screening in our parish hall for interested teenagers and their parents. We darkened the hall, pulled down the blinds, and held several microphones up to the DVD player to make up for the poor sound quality in the hall.

About forty people showed up – more students than adults. Among them, was a surprise guest - a Rwandan survivor of the massacre who had been sheltered in the basement of a Catholic church in his village. He sat quietly, weeping silent tears, sometimes not looking at the screen. At the end of the movie, everyone was visibly moved. When I introduced our special guest, and the young man rose to speak, there was pin-drop silence.

Afterwards, students wrote about the impact of what they had seen and heard. They asked the question we repeat over and over again in the face of horrific violence – "Why?" I believe that one small step was taken that afternoon by a bunch of teenagers, towards developing an understanding of our shared humanity.

I am often asked about what youth ministry encompasses. What is our main thrust? What do we hope to achieve? How are we different from the secular tradition which also encourages community service?

Indeed, community service is an essential part of youth ministry but does not represent all of it. In the Christian tradition, love of God cannot be separated from love of neighbor. When we pray the "Our Father", we say, "...your will be done on earth as it is in heaven..." Working towards establishing that reign of God translates into being in right relationship with God and our fellow human beings. Sowing the seeds of that "right relationship" is one of the goals of Youth ministry.

As the name suggests, youth ministry is about "ministering" to our youth – nurturing their hunger for God. Jesus said, "Let the children come to me, and do not prevent them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these" (Mt 19:14). It is a humbling thought and yet one that Christ calls us to, time after time: to find Him in the people we



Here's the group that traveled to Louisiana last summer to work for Habitat for Humanity. The names are not in particular order. Amanda Card, Brendan Teebagy, Nicholas Stevenson, Joseph Aube, Brianna Sacco, Jessica Hyman, Kevin Thompson, Joe Aulenbach, Beau Talbot, Dan O'Keefe, Liam McAllister, Briana Esteves, Tommy O'Brien, Mark Lambert, Alex Marshall, Josh Anthony and Fr. Manny, Also on the trip but not included in the picture are: Mrs. LuAnn O'Brien, Ms. Mary Cote, Mr. Don McAllister and Mr. Laurence Aube.

serve and to help them in turn to see God in themselves and others.

At St. Mary's we have a vibrant youth ministry program that goes back many years. Every summer we send groups of teenagers and their chaperones to three, week-long service immersion programs. Here, our teenagers are directly exposed to the people of the beatitudes – the poor, the unfairly treated, the meek, and the underserved. Our youth go to Camp Sunshine, Young Neighbors in Action and Habitat for Humanity. Students who participate in these programs speak about a "life changing experience" – one in which they develop a true understanding of Christian charity and justice.

Our students are also required to go on a retreat prior to Confirmation. Teenagers used to a different pace of life, are compelled to slow down and come together for a weekend, to talk about God, their faith and their

relationship with Him. Our retreats are enormously successful and this is borne out by the fact that we have a large number of students return post-Confirmation, to ask if they can be part of the retreat peer ministry team.

Youth ministry, and indeed all catechesis, is also about evangelization. Catechesis begins in the family. Parents pass their faith on to their children and grandchildren. But often, I also see the reverse of that – children drawing their families back to their faith. We have a very active and inspiring post-confirmation group of students who meet on a regular basis to share their faith and remain involved in service and parish life.

To be Christ-centric in all of our actions is the aim of youth ministry. If Christ is at the core of all we set out to accomplish, be it in community service projects or daily living, we will proclaim louder than words ever could, what we are about as Christians.

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