

Prayer ministry fulfills daughters dream *(Continued from page 1)*

tell me to start it," Mary said to God. "That's exactly what happened. I was in the backyard with my children just weeks after the funeral and one of the parishioners came to my backyard and said, 'Mary, you need to start a children's prayer group.' I immediately said yes; that was my sign."

Begun in November 2001 and named after the Blessed Mother as cited in the Litany to Loretto, Morning Star provides family prayer time before the Blessed Sacrament, with an emphasis on children, who lead everyone in prayer and song.

"We listen to the children and we support them in how they want to express themselves," said Mary Cygan. "We do have the traditional prayers, the litanies and rosaries and music. The prayers are beautiful. (The children) learn to love that and they express themselves. They have a chance to lead, not just sit and be unresponsive."

Families are encouraged to attend and bring all children regardless of age. Grandparents bring grandchildren. Older siblings model behavior for the younger ones.

"We make it a rule that parents need to be with their children, and that's a plus too because the parents can then model for their children," she said.

They keep the catechism simple and use themes set forth by the Vatican such as St. Paul and the Year for Priests. The guiding principle comes from Pope John Paul II's encyclical "Familiaris Consortio."

"We have little traditions," Mary points out. "When a child has first Holy Communion, they're the ones who

Father Marek Stybor, OFM Conv., celebrates Mass at the Morning Star Family Retreat.



Photos courtesy of Mary and Stan Cygan

get the chance to crown Mary during the year. If we have more than one child receiving first Holy Communion, then we'll have more than one crowning of Mary. So they can have those special moments and remember those little seeds of faith."

The Cygans, parishioners of St. Mary of the Angels Parish in Olean, received the blessing of Bishop Edward U. Kmiec after a meeting with him last February.

And for the Cygan family, which includes four sons ranging in age from 6 to 19, it has kept them close to Margaret.

"Every time we meet we have that special time with Margaret because the Eucharist brings us all together," Mary said. "We know she is there with us, praying. It's like a communion of saints. She's there and she's helping us. She's

our intercessor. Without her, we couldn't make this group happen."

Mary's husband, Stan, said that praying one hour a week in front of the Eucharist gives him the courage to go forward in life's stressful times.

"I think the beauty of the Morning Star is the family prayer and the fact that we can come and be in front of the Eucharist each week, not only with children, but with the whole family," said Stan Cygan. "That's very special. I think the family that prays together, stays together. That's very important to me."

Two other chapters of Morning Star have formed, one in Chicopee, Mass., and one in Bosnia. All chapters follow the same prayer, songs and education format.

This past August, the Morning Star group held a retreat at the Podhale

Campgrounds in Franklinville, uniting the Olean chapter with folks from Chicopee. Father Marek Stybor, OFM Conv., from the Diocese of Springfield, Mass., led the retreat, which included games, talks, an evening candlelight rosary, and the Clowns for Life, along with the traditional campfire songs and roasted marshmallows.

"The retreat reaffirmed families and the children all had smiles on their faces," Mary Cygan said. "One new dad commented that he noticed teens smiling and happy. I remember another friar telling me that we are the hands and feet of Jesus."

The retreat took place on the anniversary of Margaret's death. It combined the social and spiritual sides of the Church.

"What I feel was very special about this time. We have so many retreats or summer camps geared toward teenagers or adults, but very few for children," said Father Stybor, who serves as spiritual advisor for Morning Star. "I felt that this summer camp was very unique because all the games, prayers, sharing were really focused on the little ones. I felt there is really a lot we can learn from the little ones. Jesus said, 'Become like a little child; have an attitude of a child. So I feel often even an adult needs to find what the child in me wants to say, because I believe in all of us there is a little child, and we need to get in touch with this child. As adults, how do we respond to that call to be like a child?'"

Anyone interested in starting a Morning Star chapter may contact Mary Cygan at morningstar2001@wroadrunner.com.

Catholic Charities now serving 20,000 WIC participants

Catholic Charities of Buffalo is now serving up to 20,000 participants through the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children program across Erie and Niagara counties, as the State Department of Health last month officially awarded Catholic Charities a \$4.8 million annual grant, renewable for five years, to provide WIC services.

Catholic Charities opened two new sites for WIC services this month. One site opened in the completely renovated convent of the former St. Mary of Sorrows Parish, located at 930 Genesee St., and another opened at 211 East Eagle St., near downtown.

The Oct. 5 and 7 transition of all remaining WIC participants throughout Erie County to Catholic Charities represents the final phase of transition.

Kaleida Health moved its 1,250 participants to Catholic Charities at this time as well, which was sooner than

originally expected, at the end of 2009. WIC participants who utilized the Deaconess Center in Buffalo can access the Genesee site and those who were served at the Judge Joseph S. Mattina Community Health Center in Buffalo can access the East Eagle site.

Other sites now being operated by Catholic Charities WIC staff since Oct. 7 include Blasdell Community Center, 54 Madison Ave., Blasdell; Buffalo sites - Northwest Community Center, 155 Lawn Ave., Room 306; Concerned Ecumenical Ministry, 286 Lafayette Ave., and 3527 Harlem Road, Suite 8, Cheektowaga.

"Being a provider of WIC nutrition services is very consistent with the mission of Catholic Charities," said Dennis C. Walczyk, Catholic Charities chief executive officer. "Families who participate in WIC benefit from our 85-year history as an organization, 33 years collective experience with

WIC, and a wide array of services that add a comprehensive dimension to our program."

Tish Brady, Catholic Charities Metropolitan/District Services director, has led a team of supervisors in planning for the program expansion, and Walczyk praised their work.

"Tish Brady and two of her leadership team members, Sandy Smith and Kate Hacker, have been extremely dedicated to this critically important effort," Walczyk said. "Together they have provided the real time and talent that helped to develop the initial proposal which was fully funded. Sandy and Tish truly succeeded in launching the operations of WIC at Catholic Charities."

Brady recognized the efforts of the Erie County and New York State Departments of Health in the transition process.

"We truly appreciate the high level of cooperation and assistance from

the transition teams and staffs of the Departments of Health for Erie County and New York State in our efforts to be ready to serve the women and children in our community," she said. "We would not be where we are today without the State's strong support and hard work."

Elizabeth O'Connor has been named director of Catholic Charities' WIC services and Cheryl Lauth is assistant director.

For more than 23 years, Catholic Charities has provided participant-centered, quality nutrition education through the management of the State Department of Health contract for WIC services across Niagara County. For more than 10 years, the organization also has provided WIC services for northern Erie County at a site in Kenmore.

For more information call 362-0830 (Genesee St.) or 332-3304 (E. Eagle St.) for Erie County, and 285-0975 for Niagara County, or go to www.ccwny.org.