

Blessed Sacrament Parish broadens Exceptional People Program

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For the past three decades Blessed Sacrament Parish in Springfield has been hosting School of Religion for Exceptional People on Wednesday evenings during the school year. Now, however, program coordinators will be offering new special lessons for those who are candidates for first Eucharist.

"Loyola University (a Jesuit ministry) has developed a program called the Adapted First Eucharist Preparation Kit for developmentally disabled children and adults," says Juleann Randles, program coordinator. "We have purchased the kits to use with our students."

The kits include family and student guides, a pictorial Mass guide and pictorial manipulatives that reinforce the basic principals of the Holy Eucharist. Each student will receive a kit to use and take home.

"We have several students who we believe will be candidates for the sessions," says Randles. "One of the basic things we'll consider is this: Does the student appreciate the difference between plain bread and the host, which has become the body of Christ?"

Father Jeff Grant, pastor of Blessed Sacrament Parish, will give a special presentation on the Eucharist to the class in October, Randles says. "When we start the Eucharist preparation, we will not be covering it every week, but when we do, those specific students will be working separately from the others."

Randles says every regular class begins with special intentions, with each student having the opportunity to ask for prayers during the following week. The group then reviews elements of the Catholic Catechism and reads and discusses the Gospel lessons for the coming weekend Mass liturgy. Each class concludes with group songs of praise and by singing the Our Father.

"We have 12 teachers who come to class every week and last year we had about 15 students who came regularly," says Randles. "If one teacher is teaching, then the others are sitting and

working with the students. We have some very dedicated teachers and we are lucky to have Elsie Venvertloh who is in charge of the music."

Randles says that adult and teen volunteers are welcome to help facilitate the program, especially teens who are seeking service hours and musicians who want to help provide accompaniment for group song.

This year's session for exceptional people will begin with a welcoming picnic at the playground pavilion at Washington Park in Springfield on Wednesday, Sept. 19 beginning at 5:30 p.m. The first meeting will be a Mass of celebration at Blessed Sacrament Church on Wednesday, Sept. 26 at 6:30 p.m. Regular classes will be held at Blessed Sacrament School beginning Oct. 3 from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. and will continue weekly until May 1, 2013. All developmentally disabled individuals from age 7 through adult who live in the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois are welcome to attend.

PSR for Exceptional People is financially supported by the Springfield Knights of Columbus Council 364 and Chatham Knights of Columbus Council 4179. Father Grant and Deacon David Erdmann provide spiritual support.

For more information, call Juleann Randles at (217) 787-9966 or leave a message at the Blessed Sacrament office at (217) 528-7521. Advance registration is requested for the First Holy Communion program.