



The Mustard Seed Award

Presented to

*Church of St. Clare
Staten Island, New York*

*For Fostering
Parental Leadership
In Religious Education*

Given this 27th day of March, 2008

Jeanette M. Maher

*President
National Association of
Parish Catechetical Directors*

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National Catechetical, School Honorees Named in Archdiocese

By **JULIANN DosSANTOS**

Two parish religious education programs in the archdiocese—St. Clare's on Staten Island and Assumption in Peekskill—will be honored with Mustard Seed Awards, the top honor of the National Association of Parish Catechetical Directors (NPCD).

The awards, which recognize parishes "that exemplify active parent participation in their religious education programs," will be presented March 26 in Indianapolis, during the annual convention of the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA).

St. Clare's School also will be honored at the convention by Today's Catholic Teacher magazine as one of 12

recipients of its 2008 Catholic Schools for Tomorrow Award.

Both parishes gave credit to Cardinal Egan's mandate for five additional hours of family catechesis as a major reason they're receiving the Mustard Seed Award. The parish programs are among four nationally to be honored with the award.

The cardinal, in a letter to the religious education officials at the parishes, congratulated them "on having been recognized for your involvement with the parents and families of your parish programs of formation and catechesis" and thanking them for their committed service.

Msgr. Joseph Murphy, pastor of St. Clare's, told CNY, "We are honored that we were selected and we want to

continue to promote the message to the parents that our religious education programs are of assistance to them in the religious formation of their children."

"We try to involve the parents into different aspects of our religious education program," he said.

Fred Herron, director of adult faith formation at St. Clare's, said, "Our pastor is absolutely committed to helping families be involved in their faith and also meeting people with the challenges of everyday life." To meet both needs, the catechetical program allows people to choose when, where and what activities they want to be involved with. "Every family has to do five hours of Mustard

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Seed activities during the year," he explained. Those activities could include family retreats, workshops, lectures, or even a family film night.

The coordinator for religious education at St. Clare's, Jessica Heap, told CNY, "We tried to think outside the box and came up with a variety of activities that parents can pick." Both she and Herron credited Msgr. Murphy for his vision of parish life as one of the main reasons for the program's success.

"Msgr. Murphy's vision was to be able to meet the cardinal's hope by finding ways for everybody in the parish to be involved in faith formation in the place where they could be. His argument is, 'Every aspect of parish life should help to preach the Gospel message,' so we set out to do that," Herron said.

Catherine Bischoff, the coordinator of religious education at Assumption, said that the parish was in a pilot program for the cardinal's family catechesis mandate last year. At Assumption, there are two family events each year

with separate sessions for children and for parents and a session for families together. "We try to keep them motivated," she said.

She added, "Families take part in the planning sessions for the events and if they can't take part in the planning, they come that day and help out in one of the sessions."

She also credited Assumption's pastor, Father John Higgins. "We have a pastor who is very involved in the religious education program and is very visible here every Wednesday when we have classes," she said. "That has made a big difference."

Father Higgins said that the religious education program, under Ms. Bischoff's leadership, "has energized countless parents to become involved."

"These family catechesis sessions were smash successes because they involved the parents not only in the receiving of catechesis, but in giving it as well," he said.

For the 2008 Catholic Schools of To-

morrow award, St. Clare's School will be honored for its environmental and technology programs—particularly the LEGO Robotics program in which students build and program robots using plastic blocks, and also undertake other community service and environmental projects.

Among the projects, the students designed a special needs baseball field that was adopted by the Great Kills Little League, and they maintain sites for the city Department of Environmental Protection Agency's Adopt-a-Bluebelt program for which they conduct clean-ups and water tests at a local wetland site.

Science teacher Mary Lee, who coordinates the programs, told CNY, "We are meant to take care of each other and all of God's creation."

She said that the main reason the school was selected for this award was

because of the community involvement. "A lot of people appreciate what these kids are doing and it inspires other people to come and help. It ignites something in the public when they see things like this," she said.

The programs help students see the relationship between science and faith, the teacher said. "It's a perfect tie-in. Taking care of the environment is part of our religion. It leaves kids with a good sense of community and being stewards to the environment."

Principal Jo Rossicone told CNY, "It's very validating to see that we are recognized for all the wonderful things that happen each and every day at St. Clare's school."

Four members of the parish staff at St. Clare's will also be presenters at the NCEA convention on the topic, "Cyber-faith and Catholic Faith: Information Technology and Evangelization."