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Family Mass gets children involved with church

By: Richie Rathsack, Record-Journal staff

WALLINGFORD - In the middle of Mass Sunday, the Rev. Gary Simeone looked out into the congregation at Most Holy Trinity Church and asked for young volunteers to help with a homily about Thanksgiving.

Getting the church community's children more involved with the church is part of a new effort through a monthly family Mass.

"I think it's good for children to take part in the Mass," said Sabrina Schiano, 13, an eighth grader at Holy Trinity School who participated by reading aloud.

Organizer Christine Mansfield said Sunday's family Mass was the church's second. She said the response from the congregation and the children has been positive.



Richie Rathsack / Record-Journal

The family Mass includes having children do readings, bring up the gifts for communion, join the priest at the pulpit to bless the gifts and to form a choir to sing in the balcony.

"In this economy I think our community could use another uplifting support message," Mansfield said. "It lights a little fire for the children and it is something a little different for adults."

When Simeone asked for volunteers, a few hands shot up immediately. As he looked out at the crowd, several other small hands slowly went up, from children who at first were a little shy.

Nearly a dozen children joined him at the front of the church as he asked, "Why is it that we celebrate Thanksgiving?" and went from child to child for answers.

The children gave responses such as "to be thankful for our families," "to be thankful for everything we have" and "to be thankful for everyone who loves us." As the younger, more bashful children gave answers, the congregation applauded.

After the communion, gifts were brought to the altar, Simeone again looked for volunteers to help in the blessing of the gifts. Within seconds, he was joined by nearly 100 children, who surrounded the altar as the choir sang in the balcony.

"It's preparing them for being future leaders in the church," said Holy Trinity School Principal Sister Katie Kelly. "I think it makes an impact with them and so far it is successful."

The idea for the family Mass came from discussions of the school board, Mansfield said. She and Simeone liked the idea and ran with it.

Many children involved in the Mass mentioned things like getting together and community as reasons why they like the family Mass.

"I think it's good because it will make families get together more and have a better time," Robert Larese, 10, said.

"It makes us come together more as a family and as our church community," Olivia Collette, another youngster, said.

Kelly said she is happy with the support of the congregation and the response of her students. Some of the students came to church as

a group.

"It's nice because if they can't make it out to church with their families, they can with the school," Schiano said after the service as she joked around with other girls from her school.

The family Mass is celebrated during the 9 a.m. service and is scheduled next for Dec. 13. Subsequent Masses are set for Jan. 31, Feb. 14, March 21, April 11, May 2, June 6, July 18 and Aug. 15.

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