

## A Helping Hand Offers Ray Of Hope to the Discouraged

By REV. MSGR. WILLIAM HARMS

There comes a moment in everyone's family when there is a sense of pride triggered by the positive behavior of some family members. As the pastor of a parish with 3,500 families, fortunately, this pride happens often. My pride has grown significantly over the past seven months with the response of the people in the Community of St. Helen to the disaster as the result of Hurricane Katrina.

The response began by identifying a parish in Chalmette, La. that needed assistance. I called the pastor at St. Mark's in Chalmette. We had a number of conversations. I asked help from the people of St. Helen to assist in coordinating a relief effort.

Over 20 parishioners volunteered and the number keeps growing. At one of our first meetings of the volunteers, it was decided to invite the pastor from St. Mark's to come to Westfield, at our expense. Father Mark came in February, met with the committee to offer an overview of the devastation in his area and discussed the needs of his parish in Chalmette. Father Mark spoke at all of our six liturgies over that weekend in February. The response of St. Helen's parishioners was spectacular.

Father Mark was overwhelmed and appreciative. When he returned home he sent a letter of gratitude to us at St. Helen's. Shortly after Father Mark's visit, we became aware that the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of New Orleans was closing eight of the nine Catholic parishes in St. Bernard Civic Parish (County) due to structural damage and the lack of people living in the area as a result of Hurricane Katrina.

Among those closing was Father Mark's parish. Father Mark was disappointed, but as he pointed out to us, the decision was necessary given the conditions in the local area. As Father Mark said, some of the parishes may open if people return and buildings can be reclaimed. Almost every home in the area of St. Bernard Civic Parish (County) was damaged or destroyed by wind and water. There were 70,000 people in the Civic Parish (County). If there are 3,000 people there now, that's a lot.

At Father Mark's suggestion, we turned our attention to the one Catholic parish left in the Civic Parish (County), Our Lady of Prompt Succor (OLPS), Chalmette. OLPS has a parish church and a school that once educated over 1,200 elementary school children (K-8). The parish school reopened this past Ash Wednesday with 30 children; as of today, there are over 50 children, with a registration for the Fall of '06 at 150 plus. Before Hurricane Katrina there were over 2,000 (K-8) children being educated in the Civic Parish.

### First Baptist Women Announce 'HeartSpa'

WESTFIELD - The women of the First Baptist Church of Westfield has invited area residents to attend a women's "HeartSpa" retreat on Friday and Saturday, June 16 and 17, at the Fellowship Deacony in Liberty Corners.

Participants will have an opportunity to enjoy Bible study, sharing time, simple spa treatments and free time for swimming, miniature golf, tennis or walking.

The group will leave the First Baptist Church, located at 170 Elm Street, on June 16 after dinner and return the following day after dinner.

The cost is \$82 per person. Space is limited. For more information, please contact the church at (908) 233-2278 or firstbaptist.westfield@verizon.net.

The church reopened with Mass on March 1, 2006. The pastor of OLPS is Father Danal, who is tirelessly reaching out to everyone who knocks on the door. Father Danal tells me that the growing problem is discouragement among so many. There is an average of six funerals a week in the parish church, many of which are the result of suicide.

Hope is fading among many. Faith is essential. Seeing others reaching out in help assist the discouraged. The people of the Chalmette area are proud and are working hard to reclaim their property. For many, everything was destroyed. Many had never left the area and are now forced to live elsewhere. When they return they are confronted with a discouraging sight. Some people, unfortunately, give up.

The Parish Community of St. Helen has heard this message. We are getting in motion a "Family-to-Family Program" where we can reach out in a human fashion of support, care, prayer and communication. This past week, we ordered desks for the school, with funds contributed by the children of St. Helen. A parishioner had sent a box of stuffed animals to the school children of OLPS. The school principal wrote back thanking us for the stuffed animals, which she used in a prayer service for the children as they were distributed.

The funds collected in February are still with us. As needs are identified, the "Coordinating Committee" will reach out. There is a discussion of having some parishioners from Westfield go to Chalmette to help. As the days evolve, we in Westfield will continue to pray that the Spirit of God enable people, all people, to deal with life's situations, particularly in Chalmette, La.

Hope is such a vital aspect of life. People reaching out with an act of kindness can do so much to lift the spirit of another. I am proud and humbled to work with people in our parish community who are there with help in a moment's notice.

Our children learn at the feet of their parents, who learned from their parents and the caring nature of St. Helen. There is much to be done and I am confident "we" will roll up our sleeves to help in offering hope.

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Rev. Monsignor Harms is Pastor of St. Helen's Roman Catholic Church, located at 1600 Rahway Avenue in Westfield.

### Drama to Use Colors To Reflect Life Issues

SCOTCH PLAINS - The Scotch Plains Public Library will present a one-woman dance drama entitled "What color is your issue? It should be RED" on Saturday, June 10, at 2 p.m. Written and performed by Keve Renee Otunuya of Scotch Plains, it will be presented in the Community Room of the library, located at 1927 Bartle Avenue.

A member of St. John's Baptist Church in Scotch Plains, Ms. Otunuya is the owner of the Kingdom KeyMasters Computer Learning Center and the president of Love of Life Community Development Corporation, which will be offering performing arts, mentoring, tutoring and after-school classes and workshops to the church and public alike.

"What color is your issue?" was inspired through Love of Life Community Development Corporation. It highlights the struggles and triumphs of life through colors and offers people tools through the use of colors to deal with life issues. The program is appropriate for the entire family. For more details, please call the library at (908) 322-5007, extension no. 204.



RALLYING TOGETHER...Members of Temple Emanu-El in Westfield soak up the spirit of the rally in Washington D.C. to save the people of Darfur. Pictured, from left to right, are: Robert Imhoff, Mike Hamerman, Scott Lazar, Susan and Molly Knopf, Peter and Susan Klein, Melissa Baer, Andrea Gelber, Emily Carey and Jackie Master.

## Temple Emanu-El Members Join Rally To Save Darfur

WESTFIELD - Members of Temple Emanu-El of Westfield traveled to Washington, D.C. on April 30 to take part in the Save Darfur Rally to Stop Genocide, organized by the Save Darfur Coalition.

The coalition includes a spectrum of religious and secular organizations that have come together to demand an effective response to the genocide that has already taken hundreds of thousands of lives in the Darfur region of Sudan.

### Labyrinth Walk Slated Sunday at Area Church

CRANFORD - The First Presbyterian Church of Cranford will sponsor a series of open labyrinth walks, with the first one scheduled for Sunday, June 4. All walks will be held in Bates Hall at the church, located at 11 Springfield Avenue. Everyone is welcome.

Participants are invited to walk the labyrinth any time between 1 and 4 p.m., but are asked to begin their walk by 3:30 p.m. Subsequent walks will be held the first Sunday of every month unless otherwise specified.

Walking the labyrinth is an ancient spiritual practice of prayer and meditation that has experienced a revival. The 11-ringed pattern painted on canvas is modeled after the 13th century labyrinth at Chartres Cathedral in France. In Medieval times, walking the labyrinth symbolized the Christian pilgrimage to Jerusalem for those who could not personally make the journey. For further information on the labyrinth program or future walks, please call the church at (908) 276-8440.

### Visitors Invited Sunday To Cannonball House

SCOTCH PLAINS - The Osborn Cannonball House, located at 1840 Front Street in Scotch Plains, will be open to visitors on Sunday, June 4 from 2 to 4 p.m.

Built circa 1760, the farmhouse has been a museum since 1972 and is maintained by the Historical Society of Scotch Plains and Fanwood.

Costumed docents will be available to give tours of the museum and gardens. There is no admission fee.

## Torah Center Invites Public To Shavuot Lecture Tonight

WESTFIELD - A special Shavuot lecture entitled "The Talmud on the Ten Commandments" will be held at 10 p.m. tonight, Thursday, June 1, at the Union County Torah Center following the holiday prayer services and Kiddush at 9 p.m. This lecture is open to the public free of charge and reservations are not necessary.

Shavuot is a two-day festival commemorating the giving of the Ten Commandments and the Torah on Mount Sinai 3,319 years ago. It begins this evening and will continue through Friday and Saturday.

Studying from the actual texts of the Talmud, Rabbi Levi Block of the Torah Center will share what the sages taught about the revelations that took place at Mount Sinai and their commentaries on the Ten Commandments.

Rabbi Block said the reason for the late start time for the lecture was that,

"the Torah was given at daybreak. Our tradition relates that the Jewish people did not rise early to be prepared for that revelation, and that it was necessary for God Himself to awaken them. To compensate for their behavior, it is customary to stay up the entire first night of Shavuot studying Torah."

The Torah Center will celebrate Shavuot together with Jews around the world tomorrow, Friday, June 2. There will be a special reading of the Ten Commandments at 6:30 p.m., followed by an ice cream party for children and a dairy Kiddush with cheese blintzes and cheesecake for the adults. All are welcome and there is no charge.

For more information on either of these events, please call the Torah Center, located at 418 Central Avenue in Westfield, at (908) 789-5252 or e-mail info@torahcenter.org.



HIGH ACHIEVERS...The Westfield Area "Y" hosted its Eighth Annual Black Achievers Fundraising and Recognition Banquet May 5 at L'Affaire Fine Catering in Mountainside, which was attended by approximately 150 people. United States Senator Frank Lautenberg (New Jersey), pictured far left with banquet attendees, was the keynote speaker. Dr. Noah Tennant, assistant principal at Westfield High School, was the special honoree.

See it all on the Web! [www.goleader.com](http://www.goleader.com)

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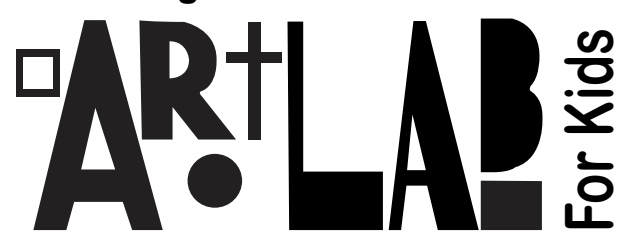
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