

'It's all about the children'

Special mass opens Catholic Schools Week

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It seemed appropriate that students were the ones who led the procession at a mass yesterday celebrating the beginning of Catholic Schools Week.

Ranging from kindergartners to teen-agers, they entered St. Paul's R.C. Church, New Brighton, dressed in their uniforms. Each of the 39 Catholic schools on Staten Island sent at least two representatives.

Also present were more than 200 students, teachers, administrators and parents.

"The 'family' has joined together to start the week off right," said Eileen Hayes, president of the Staten Island Federation of Catholic School Parents, which sponsored the mass.

"We want to recognize the children and recognize the teachers, and let everyone see what Catholic education is all about," she added.

The theme for the week — which is held nationally and sponsored by the National Catholic



ADVANCE PHOTO/MICHAEL MCWEEENEY

The Rev. Monsignor Joseph C. Ansaldi gives Holy Communion to Catholic school children at St. Paul's R.C. Church, New Brighton.

Educational Association (NCEA) — was "Catholic School: Schools You Can Believe In."

According to Sister Kathleen FitzSimons, superintendent of Island Catholic schools, enrollment is up to 15,000 and every school

reported an increase over the past year.

"It's all about the children," she explained. "Our purpose is to hand down the faith to each generation."

In his opening remarks, the

Rev. Monsignor Joseph C. Ansaldi, episcopal vicar for Staten Island, remarked on the youth of the audience.

"We thank God for the gifts of our children . . . and thank him for (See WEEK, Page A 4)

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the Catholic schools and the teachers and all they've done for our children," he said.

In celebrating the mass, he was assisted by the Rev. Vincent Bartley, pastor of St. Paul's; the Rev. Deogratias Lingao, also from the parish; the Rev. Peter Pilsner, parochial vicar at St. Joseph and St. Thomas parish, Pleasant Plains, and the Rev. Robert Moore, pastor of St. Mary of the Assumption R.C. Church, Port Richmond, and moderator of the parents' federation.

In his homily, Monsignor Ansaldi mentioned the picture of former President Richard Nixon that hung in his office.

"He represents all of us," he said. "He teaches a lesson that none of us can overlook . . . We all make mistakes."

Everyone has to pay for their mistakes, but no one has to pay forever, he continued. Despite the Watergate scandal that forced him out of office, Nixon went on to do things for the nation and for himself before he died last year, Monsignor Ansaldi said.

In an attempt to have the children involved in as many parts of the mass as possible, students did some of the readings and pre-



ADVANCE PHOTO/MICHAEL MCWEEENEY

Catholic school students attend a mass to mark the beginning of Catholic Schools week at St. Paul's R.C. Church, New Brighton. Celebrating the mass are the Rev. Vincent Bartley, left, and the Rev. Monsignor Joseph C. Ansaldi.

sented the gifts. Music was provided by Frank and Tammy Rella, Sister Minnette Welding and members of the chorus of St. Joseph-by-the-Sea High School.

Fran Jorin, principal of St. Paul's School, had each of her grades present a special gift that symbolized something they felt was important. For example, the first and eighth grades gave a

globe and called for world peace. The fifth grade gave a religion book, telling of their love of the knowledge Catholic school has given them, she said. Children chosen as "students of the month" were the ones who made the presentations on behalf of their classes.

"My final prayer for you is that if you slip and fall, you will get up

again. If you find yourself on the wrong path, you come home again. Never, never ever quit," Monsignor told the children at the conclusion of the mass.

A reception in the school followed. Individual schools have planned various events that will take place over the next few days to celebrate Catholic Schools Week.