

© The Catholic News & Herald, Feb. 20, 2009

For the love of literacy

Catholic recognized for volunteer service

by KATIE MOORE

staff writer

WILKESBORO — A parishioner of St. John the Baptist de la Salle Church in North Wilkesboro was recognized recently for her work with a Wilkes County literacy program for adults.

Helen Latour was one of 20 people in North Carolina to receive the Medallion Award for Outstanding Volunteer Service and the first ever from Wilkes County to receive the honor.

Implemented in 2006 by the North Carolina Commission on Volunteerism and Community Service, the Medallion Award recognizes the top volunteers in the state.

Latour founded Volunteers for Wilkes Literacy in 1989 because she was shocked by the number of adults in the area who could not read beyond a third-grade level.

As a teacher, starting a literacy program was a natural fit.

“There was no use complaining,” said Latour, who decided to “get down and do something about it.”

For the next 17 years she served as director of the program, which provides one-on-one tutoring for illiterate adults as well as after-school tutoring for elementary school students and a children’s summer enrichment program.

According to Latour, approximately 20 out of every 100 people in western North Carolina cannot read.

But the problem is not limited to the region.

“This is not a feature of the south or the backwoods; there are big cities where people cannot read,” she said.

“The ability to read is so critical,” said Latour, who encourages anyone who feels called to volunteer as a tutor to contact his or her local literacy association.

“I think it’s a call,” she said. “For me it was a call.”

When she started the program, Latour had one thing in mind.

“My goal was to help the individual,” she said. “To see the sparkle in a student’s eyes when they got a sentence all by themselves, that was the best thing.”

Contact Staff Writer Katie Moore by calling (704) 370-3354, or e-mail kmmoore@charlottediocese.org.