

# Cumberland gift shop helps Catholics grow in faith

CUMBERLAND - Surrounded by colorful dangling rosaries, intricate crucifixes, scapulars, prayer books and all manner of saintly figurines, Betty Dyer rested a hand on a glass countertop and surveyed her diverse inventory.

"It's a lovely space," said Ms. Dyer, one of the volunteer coordinators of the Catholic gift shop at Ss. Peter and Paul in Cumberland.

"People feel cozy in here," she said. "It's an intimate space and we see so many nice people who come here."

Founded nearly 11 years ago, the gift shop is located in the parish center and is open every Wednesday and Saturday from 9:30 a.m. - 2 p.m. As the only Catholic gift shop in the area, it attracts visitors from Western Maryland, West Virginia, Pennsylvania and beyond.

Money raised from the sale of religious items goes to support the parish, Ms. Dyer said, but the shop really isn't about making money.

"We want to get these things into people's hands to help them with their faith," said explained. "It's a reminder to them to ask Jesus for help."

The informal atmosphere encourages visitors to take their time browsing the items. Some people come just to share their faith with others.

"We had one man come in here and just read the Bible for 30 minutes," Ms. Dyer remembered.

In recent years, Ms. Dyer has noticed an upsurge in interest in the Blessed Virgin Mary, even among non-Catholics. People of several Protestant denominations, especially Lutherans, have visited the store to buy rosaries and books about Marian devotion, she said.

Five years ago, the shop did brisk business in angel-themed items but their

popularity has waned, according to Ms. Dyer. Today, Bibles, rosaries and crucifixes are big sellers. In the spring, many people purchase small St. Joseph statues to bury in their yards - a longstanding tradition among some Catholic families meant to ensure success in selling their homes.

St. Christopher medals, visors and key chains, which feature the patron saint of travelers, are also very popular.

"If we don't have it, we'll order it," said Joan Lancaster, another shop volunteer.

The shop also accepts donations of gently-used religious items which are sold at a discount on the clearance table, Ms. Lancaster said.