

Presentation offers tips for creating a calmer home

By **Caroline B. Mooney**

The Catholic Moment

WESTFIELD — If you can raise a child into an adult who can control his emotions, you are doing a good job as a parent.

That was the message Kirk Martin delivered to more than 200 parents at St. Maria Goretti Church Sept. 29. He spoke about ways to create a calm home, help children with special needs, and build confidence, vision and internal motivation.

Martin, a behavioral consultant from Washington, D.C., has worked with more than 1,500 children through Celebrate!Calm, an educational organization for parents, kids and teachers. He is the author of four books and writes a weekly newsletter. His talk was co-sponsored by St. Maria Goretti, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Church, Carmel, and Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Church, Carmel.

Exercise before breakfast can calm children, Martin said.

"If you have a trampoline, challenge your child to go out and jump a number of times before you finish making breakfast," he said. "Ninety-nine percent of the time you control the mood of your child in the morning by your mood. Start the day with connectors — you can't get compliance until you connect. Either ask your child about something that is interesting to him or start the day with praise.

"Welcome kids into the day in a calm way," Martin said. "Use as

few words as possible in the morning. Your voice is as irritating to your kids as your spouse's voice is to you. Bedtime issues begin in the morning."

At the end of the day, give children peace and quiet. Questioning them about what happened at school as soon as they get off the bus is like having your boss follow you home and ask questions about the amount and quality of work that you did during the day, he said.

When children are doing homework, hovering and repeatedly asking if they are done only creates stress, Martin explained. Again, it is akin to having a boss coming into your work cubicle and standing over you until you finish a project.

"I came here because I have kids: ages 12, 9, 3 and one on the way," said Julie Mears, member of St. Maria Goretti. "Homework and morning routine are things we deal with on a daily basis. The talk has been very entertaining — he has a lot of great ideas and stories that I can really relate to. A lot of books I have read don't give specific advice and strategies, but he gave good practical advice."

When parents encounter defiance and disrespect, they should address their own behavior before addressing their child's, Martin said.



"Welcome kids into the day in a calm way," behavioral consultant Kirk Martin said. (Photo by Caroline Mooney)

"Don't try to change everything at once — change yourself first," Martin said. "Go home and say, 'I want to apologize for trying to control you.' ... When kids come and tell you something, tell them you appreciate them sharing that."

Parents often deal with their anxiety by yelling at their kids. "We worry that our kids won't be successful in life and all our anxiety clouds over them," Martin

said, "but as soon as they get control of their anxieties, they calm down.

"Your anxiety is rational, but you need to learn how to control it," he said. "Calm yourself down, and don't take things that an upset child is saying personally. You must ignore the initial bluster of an upset child. You can't demand respect because the situation isn't about you, it's about your child. You need to show self-respect by saying no sometimes. One thing kids need the most from us is consistency.

"Men are the climate change in the home," he told the fathers. "The greatest gift you can give your wife is to come home and be calm. If you walk in the door from work calm, it sets such a different tone for your family."

Jason De Pasquale, of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, said he came with his wife, Christina, because "we know trying times are coming with children ages 5 and 7. We are always looking for ways to calm down our house."

Christina De Pasquale said the talk was easy to relate to.

"Sometimes we feel like we are the only people going through some situations, and it's nice to see other parents here who feel the same way," she said. "I think Kirk has good ideas to create a calmer household and try to handle things different ways."

"An important step is to have a calm posture," Martin said. "In a tense situation, if you sit down you send a message that you don't want a confrontation, you want a conversation with your child. When I sit down and color with crayons, it freaks a child out. I will hold up another crayon, and invariably, the kid will grab it and start coloring and calm down. When kids do something wrong, they are upset and irrational. You should never try to reason with an irrational person. Calm down first.

"Kids will talk when they are ready. If you continue to ask questions, you deserve the meltdown that will follow," he said. "Our goal is to have a conversation, not a confrontation. Intimidation controls behavior and kids can't make real choices. They are just doing things out of fear. When kids make real choices, they face consequences. Give children choices and they can control their own consequences. If you say they can go out Friday if they do their chores; if they don't do it, then they can't go out Friday night."

"Anything you can do to promote peace within the family is great," said Cindy Bailey, of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Church. "With four children from 16 to age 6, my family has a lot of different ages, stages and emotions, so I really enjoyed what the speaker had to say."

For more information on Martin, go to his Web site at www.celebratecalm.com.