

Veggies pack 'em in

By BETH STEIGERWALT
Correspondent

NORTHFIELD — Producing valleys and giggles, giant vegetables sprouted in Northfield not just once, but twice, this week.

Delighting nearly 200 children at two local vacation Bible schools, Bob the Tomato and Larry the Cucumber created Veggie Town fun, while encouraging attendees to forgive, love their neighbor and make good choices. Bob and Larry are characters featured in Veggie Tales, a popular children's video series.

At New Covenant Church in Northfield, where 8-foot paper purple houses and smiling cukes and carrots lined the walls, more than 100 children decked out in Veggie Tales shirts strolled through Veggie Town stations which included a grocery store, school, home, construction site and park.

After donning hard hats at the construction area, children cut cardboard and decorated walls with hand prints to build a church, complete with paper shingles and steeple. At the home site, while squirting water to make rain and blinking flashlights for lightning, children stepped into a 10-foot metal trough boat and reenacted a Bible story, when Jesus' disciples experienced stormy seas, and Jesus calmed the storm.

"Veggie Tales is very popular. It attracted the kids," said Amy Steuck, New Covenant's secretary and one of the VBS coordinators.

"Vacation Bible school is a great way to invite neighborhood kids and friends to church. We're telling them about the Lord and at the same time, they're having fun."

Besides trekking through Veggie Town and picking up values, the children from 3 to 11 years old created crafts each day. Last year, New



Julia Holm, 10, of Northfield, works on a craft project while attending the "Veggie Tales" themed vacation Bible school at Evangelical Free Church in Northfield. (Hans Madson/Daily News)

Covenant hosted about 50 children in their vacation Bible school. This year, when that number doubled, more work was needed to prepare the craft area.

Amy's mother, Sharla Steuck, and her helpers spent many hours making project samples for children to view.

"It takes lots and lots of glue," Sharla said, laughing. "It takes a lot of preparation and hours of work. We were surprised to have as many kids as we did. The main reason I had to stay after is to make sure we had enough... It was rewarding working with the kids. Seeing their enthusiasm and interacting together was fun."

Over at Northfield's Evangelical Free Church, children clapped their hands to the Veggie Tale theme song, which tells of talking with tomatoes, squash that makes you smile, and waltzing with potatoes in the produce aisle. Through the videos and Bible verses, were similar, many aspects of the second VBS had a different twist.

Decorated with three-foot yellow and pink flowers in a colorful garden, the front entrance ushered children into the sanctuary, where a smiling eight-foot, bright-green cucumber and five-foot red tomato greeted everyone. Using black, red, white, gold and green foam squares and beads, students created a wordless book and pins that symbolized sin, Jesus' death for forgiveness of sins, and heaven.

Children also donated money to help with Northfield's Operation Backpack project, which gathers school supplies for students who can't afford the cost. Celebrating the end of VBS, children and parents spooned up ice cream sundies at a block party at the church.

"We chose Veggie Tales because it's out there in the secular world," said Karin Rein, co-director. "We thought it would get kids exposed to the love of Jesus, and get them into church, if they haven't been baptized before."

Priest's mission: Stop the war

By LUKE C. MARQUARD
Staff Writer

FARIBAUT — While many Americans have only read or seen on television the horror people endure living in war-torn countries, the Rev. Edwin Savundra has lived it.

Savundra was the substitute priest at Immaculate Conception Church during the church's search for a permanent pastor, and taught courses in philosophy at the University of St. Thomas last year. What makes Savundra's life so different is that his past full of pain and suffering.

His country of origin is Sri Lanka, an island south of India. There, two groups have been fighting for 15 years. Sri Lanka, called Ceylon until 1972, has a busy history. The Portuguese colonized the island in 1505; it became a Dutch colony in 1658; the British took control of the island after a war with the Dutch in the 18th century; its independence came in 1948.

Sri Lanka is occupied by two groups of people separated by different languages, among other things, Savundra said. The Tamil are the minority group, making up 3.5 million of the 18 million inhabiting the island. The other 14.5 million are Sinhalese.

Savundra, a Tamil, says he does not take sides in the war. He does not call himself a politician or a rebel, but rather a humanitarian who wants to see an end to the suffering.

"As a priest, I look at the suffering and pain of these people," Savundra said. Savundra said the Tamil felt their identity was being lost in four areas, which he calls pillars of life: language, land, economy and education. The Sinhalese became more powerful than the Tamil by smothering out the Tamil's pillars.

One example was a governmental move made in 1960 to make Sri Lanka a one-language country. That language was Sinhala. The act divided the country.

"With two languages there is one country, with one language there are two countries," Savundra said.

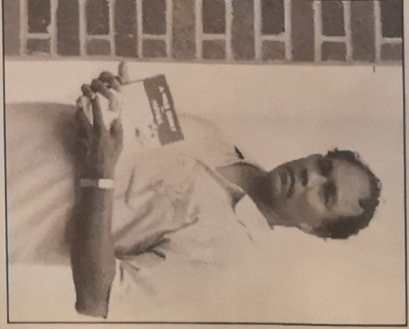
It was in 1983 that the Tamil Military came into existence, with a focus on achieving independence of the land called Tamil Eelam. The Tamil Military was made up of Tamil youth who had been denied employment and education because of their race.

And in 1983, the civil war that is still fought today began.

"In this war many innocent Tamils and rebels and Sri Lankan troops have been killed," Savundra said. "Almost 75,000 lives have been lost in this civil strife."

Savundra said Sinhala politicians are aware that the war is a political rebellion that has to be solved politically, but ever since the appearance of the Tamil Military, the politicians have taken recourse to a military solution.

"They are being inconsistent with their political perceptions," Savundra said. Savundra said the Tamil were nonvo-



Father Edwin Savundra

lent, trying to settle the situation politically, until 1983 when they felt violence was the only way to be heard.

Like many others, Savundra was forced to flee the country. Savundra had lived in Jaffna, a land that became a safe-haven for the Tamil people. Its security didn't last forever, though, as in 1995 the Sinhalese invaded the city, causing 700,000 people to flee their homeland. Savundra didn't leave then, but stayed behind with a few others to care for children and the elderly.

During his stay, Savundra wrote a book, "A War Diary from Jaffna," which describes his stay.

"I didn't make comment on the war, but only wrote what happened," Savundra said. Savundra said he wanted to tell the story of the pain and suffering happening in Sri Lanka so others could learn what is happening.

"I wanted to come to the limelight about the situation," Savundra said. In his book's introduction, Savundra wrote a bit about his experience, his purpose in writing the book and his wishes for readers.

He wrote, "This is a narration of incidents for you, but it was life and death for me. I escaped death three times. No shell, no bullet touched me, they had great respect for my body."

"The purpose of publishing this war diary is to bring to the attention of the world the enormity of the suffering of a large segment of people in the war-torn part of the island state of Sri Lanka.

"As a humanist, I appeal to all concerned to halt the war on the ground of the enormity of the suffering that our people undergo. For the reason of halting the sufferings, if not for any other reason, I plead for peace. May this cry be heard to all who need to hear!"

Savundra will be spreading his plea with his planned re-publication of "A War Diary from Jaffna," and his return to another semester of teaching philosophy.

Gospel concert on the schedule at Bethel Lutheran

Bethel Lutheran Church, 1132 NW Sixth St., is planning to host a gospel concert at 7 p.m. Sunday, Aug. 1, in Lincoln Park, just across from the church and next to Lincoln Elementary School.

The concert features Vern Baardson.

Lives & Times

This performance is in conjunction with a block party.

VBS at 50th Anniversary Day church

Vacation Bible School at Parkhill's 50th Anniversary Day church, 21670 Albers Park, will be held Aug. 2 through Aug. 6 from 8:45 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.