



Lucas Abalo colors with his dad, David Abalo, during a holiday party for individuals with autism and their families.

— **Teresa Fasanello photo**



Riley Flynn, five, of Kearny gets her face painted by her mom at the Saint Peter's Healthcare System's Christmas party for pediatric cancer patients held Dec. 7. Riley is not a patient but her mom, a nurse, works at Saint Peter's. Several hundred patients, their brothers and sisters, and parents attended. — **photos courtesy of Phil Hartman**



Eugene Dande jumps on a trampoline during the holiday party to celebrate progress in dealing with autism in daily life. — **Teresa Fasanello photo**

# SHARING the JOY

*Saint Peter's hosts holiday party for families with autistic children*

**By Teresa Fasanello**  
Correspondent

NEW BRUNSWICK — On Dec. 12, about 75 people gathered for a holiday party at Saint Peter's Hospital to celebrate progress in dealing with autism in daily life.

The party was sponsored by MyGOAL (My Gateway to Overcoming Autism in Life), an organization that provides family support groups, marriage and family counseling, educational seminars and mentoring programs.

"We're here to celebrate," Genevieve Kumapley, founder of MyGOAL, said to parents. "No matter how difficult it may seem that your child has a diagnosis, the important thing is your child is healthy and they love you. You just need to be

Eugene Dande jumps on a trampoline during the holiday party to celebrate progress in dealing with autism in daily life. — **Teresa Fasanello photo**

able to express that love to them in a way that they can express it back to you."

Kumapley, who works as a pharmacist at Saint Peter's, said her nine-year-old son Nicholas has autism. "He's the reason we are all here," she said. "Thank God you're here and that your child is healthy."

"Sometimes when things happen in your life we think that it is bad," she added. "The Resurrection of Christ is the reason that I have hope."

MyGOAL hosts a family support group at Saint Peter's on the second Sunday of each month. Dr. Barbie Zimmerman-Bier, director of Developmental Pediatrics at St. Peter's, said she often refers patients to MyGOAL.

"I think sometimes parents don't always recognize the value of talking to other parents," she said. "It gives them a time to ... not feel so isolated."

For Linda Ahland, a parishioner of Our Lady of Lourdes Church, Milltown, the holiday party was the second time she

participated in a MyGOAL event with her four-year-old daughter, Faith.

"It's very helpful to be able to be involved with other people who are going through this," she said. "Some days are still hard."

While children played board games and made snowmen, reindeer and Santa crafts, Nancy Nanguang of Edison watched her four-year-old son Khalid and nieces Nigeria, nine, and Rahilah, eight, talk with other kids and munch cookies and brownies.

"It gives you encouragement to know that there are other people going through the same thing," Nanguang said. "Sometimes your situation might not be as bad as other people's so it gives you a little more hope."

"When I leave here, I always feel better than when I came," said Jennifer Abalo of South Plainfield, mother of six-year-old Matteo and three-year-old Lucas, who colored a picture with dad David Abalo.

David said he is planning to join the "Men's Domain" support group for fathers, coordinated by Kumapley's husband Robert.

For information and an event schedule, visit [mygoalautism.org](http://mygoalautism.org) or call 877-88-MYGOAL.

Saint Peter's also hosted a Christmas party for pediatric cancer patients on Dec. 7. Several hundred patients, their siblings and parents attended.

# Image of the Week

What does this image depict and where in the diocese can it be found?



## Last week's image...



The image, which was featured on page 3 of the Dec. 9 issue of *The Catholic Spirit*, can be found at Our Lady of Victories Parish, Sayreville.

## The winner is...

Ed Puchalski of St. Stanislaus Kostka Parish, Sayreville.

To be a winner, you must call (732) 562-1990, ext. 1404, after 3 p.m. Friday. The first caller to correctly identify the image and its location will receive a one year subscription, renewal or gift subscription to *The Catholic Spirit*. Those who correctly identify an image are not eligible to take another guess for 30 days.