

## Are Youths Prepared To Be the Church?

# Office Of Youth Ministry

## Is the Church Prepared for Youths?

By Kevin Foy

The youths of today are the Church of tomorrow.

This phrase sounds nice, but are today's youths prepared to be the Church of tomorrow? Then again, are the Church and its leaders meeting the needs of today's youths?

Our diocese is working at it.

Three organizations in the diocese are youth-oriented. The best known is the Catholic Youth Organization, for people 4 to 18. The Office of Young Adult Ministry represents those over age 18 and the new Office of Youth Ministry is geared for those in the 13-18 bracket.

Why was the Office of Youth Ministry created?

The idea evolved from the input of Bishop Matthew H. Clark and the Diocesan Pastoral Council and finally became a reality on July 1, 1982.

There were many needs to be met.

"The total area of youth ministry needed to be added and the diocese had no way of doing it," said Patrick Fox, director of the Office of Youth Ministry.

Fox, 34, a former director of Religious Education at St. Louis in Pittsford, believes that young people are the Church of today instead of tomorrow. "They're alive today," he said.

But are they involved in their churches?

Some insights gleaned from Fox and from other youth ministers:

Many teenaged Catholics are confirmed after eighth or ninth grade and have little to do with the Church until they want to be married. They are somewhat superstitious and believe that the sacraments are magical. They need the sacraments and the whole idea of Church explained to them.

On the other hand, there are also many teen agers who want to become active in their parishes and deepen their spiritual lives. Some realize the importance of God in their lives and want to share their feelings with their friends and others within the parish community.

Others see a void in their lives. They, too, view religion as something important but want religion brought to a level where they can understand it and apply it to their lives. They attend church most of the time but only do so to continue the tradition of their parents and grandparents. In a sense, they want the Church to adapt to their style.

"I'm not sure the average teen knows that he or she can pray in ways other than attending Mass. — Patrick Fox, director, Office of Youth Ministry."



There are still other young people who want to be active in their parish but decide not to when they see so few of their peers involved.

How can these groups be brought together?

Fox believes the answer is to be found through his office. "We provide assistance to parishes, schools and institutions for planning, developing and evaluating programs of youth ministry."

This assistance involves conceiving ideas for youth-oriented activities, helping parishes form youth groups, and finding and training paid and volunteer youth ministers for the groups.

According to Fox, a youth group can bring the young people in a parish together, no matter factions. However, Fox does warn that the educational and social barriers can and should be broken down in order for the group to be effective.

"There are enough natural cliques," he said. "The most disastrous thing a youth program can do is only be open to certain cliques. We can't have a program intended just for one group, such as public school students. How could we expect the people from other groups to come?"

Fox emphasizes a holistic approach in forming a parish youth group.

"To be successful, the program itself has to involve the teens. The adults can't do everything," he said.

"If I were a teen and a friend said, 'Let's go to the youth group meeting Friday night,' it would have more impact on me than a notice in the bulletin."

According to Fox, another holistic approach is that a youth group should be more than a recreational outlet. An

effective youth group should combine social, spiritual, educational and community service.

Although the formation of strong parish youth groups is an integral purpose of his office, Fox hopes to accomplish much more, especially along the lines of spiritual development.

Fox supports the idea that parishes themselves have to form "Spiritual Development Programs" that include not only parish retreats but parish spiritual advisers as well. He feels that the spiritual on the diocesan level is fine but individual parish development is greatly needed.

"I'm not sure if the average Catholic teen knows that he or she can pray in ways other than attending Mass," Fox said.

He also hopes to make teenagers more "socially aware" of the world around them, especially on issues regarding social justice. He wants them to form opinions, adding that he does not want to get on a soapbox and push his own views down their throats.

"I'm tired of teaching teens about acts of charity. We're so busy defining what youth is, we forget what ministry is," he said. He defines ministry as "sharing my journey and search for the Lord with other people."

Ultimately, Fox hopes his office can meet the spiritual needs of youths (whether or not these needs are evident) to allow them to minister to others.

He expects his office to work cooperatively with other diocesan organizations, such as Family Life, Black Ministries and Religious Education, to help them better serve youngsters. He also wants to address the problem of teen sexuality and provide counseling and other services. He wants to plug the Rochester diocese into the state and national places of youth ministry. In this, he is well on his way as Rochester will be host to the State Youth Convention.

Fox has been promoting his office actively with the message to parishes, "If you call, I'll come."

He not only is a strong advocate of youths being involved at the parish level but in his office as well. He hopes someday to form a Diocesan Youth Council.

Still he is not overly idealistic.

"The thing that scares me about teens most is apathy. I want to be an advocate for their needs and allow them to do the same for themselves but I can't do this unless there is input," he said.

Sarah Child



All in the Family

### Just When Everything Looks Bad . . .

When you discover that you have . . .

- Absentmindedly put the sugar away in the broom closet and
- Tripped over the same pair of kid's shoes three times and
- Threw out the newspaper clipping you meant to save and
- Misplaced the birthstone ring (that sorta took the place of the diamond you lost) and
- Left the heat on under the pot after the coffee was gone and
- Caught your kissing cousin's virus and
- Snagged a department store lamp with your shoulder purse and it broke

- into smithereens . . .
- ... then you know you've had better days.
- And when . . .
- You wake up late and somebody else has breakfast started and
- The dog actually obeys for once and
- The kids clean their rooms without any prodding and
- The fire opal turns up in your jewelry box and
- You get a letter out to the mail box before the postman arrives and
- Two hardy petunias and one pink geranium persist on the back patio through frost and snow and
- This column gets written only two days late instead of three
- then you know things are looking up.

## USCC to Reagan: Act Fast on Tax Credit

Washington (NC) — Tuition tax credits could be a priority in President Reagan's legislative program for the first session of the new Congress in 1983 if the current Congress fails to act on the matter, a U.S. Catholic Conference spokesman said.

In a letter to the president, Msgr. Daniel F. Hoye, USCC general secretary, said he is gratified that the administration will press the issue during the special session of Congress later this month.

"We the Catholic school community were keenly disappointed that the Congress did not see fit to move the legislation further than committee consideration in the Senate," Msgr. Hoye wrote. "However, since we have a long history of involvement with this

legislation, we can appreciate the importance of incremental progress within Congress.

"Presently, we are most concerned about the status of the legislation with respect to the special session." In the event that Congress does not

act on the legislation this year, Msgr. Hoye said it is the expectation of the USCC that "tuition tax credit will be made a priority in your administration's legislative program for the first session of the 98th Congress.

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