

'Urban Plunge' Draws ND Collegians to City

For two days last week the heads of diocesan social service groups played host to three Rochester suburbanites under the University of Notre Dame's "Urban Plunge" program.

The three were, Sue Lubecki, a parishioner at Church of the Holy Name in Greece and a senior at Notre Dame; Teri Murphy, a parishioner at St. Louis in Pittsford and a sophomore at Notre Dame; and Ed Yohon, a parishioner at St. Thomas the Apostle and a Notre Dame senior.

Miss Murphy, who described her habitual digs as "out in the woods," said she signed on with the Urban Plunge program to expand her understanding of the city beyond that afforded in occasional forays in city shopping areas.

"There's a lot more to see," she said at the conclusion of her two days.

The three went to St. Bridget's Church, under the direction of Father Robert Werth; to an Urban Ministry meeting; to Corpus Christi Parish, under the guidance of James Rammerman; to St. Michael's Workshop and Sister Patricia Flynn; to the Jesuit Volunteers' house; to a shelter for the homeless and a visit with Eileen Earley; to a discussion with Father Larry Tracy; to St. Peter's Soup Kitchen, and to the Courier-Journal.

Yohon, a mechanical engineering major, said of the urban dwellers he met, "I learned that there's a lot of people who are 'troubled.' (Yet) their attitudes were not what I had expected. They are happy with their lives.

They seem to make the best of it — reasonably happy."

Miss Murphy said that diocesan staffers who serve in the city appeared "very satisfied and happy doing what they're doing. I was really impressed with what they did, with what they do."

Miss Lubecki observed that the mechanics of the Urban Plunge program limited the experience available to the participants. "It was hard," she said, "because we talked more to staff — and you can't really get the full story (of life in the city).

However, she said, "It gave me things to think about. Not a lot, but a little."

Yohon said the experience "made me more aware. I might look into social issues more carefully; But it didn't change my long-term career goals."

Miss Lubecki, a mathematics and computer science major, quoted Melissa Marquez, a Jesuit Volunteer here, as saying that it takes time to develop relationships with (urban dwellers). She said, "after you've worked with them they are more likely to be more open with you and you with them... And only then can you come to some big conclusions."

Miss Murphy, a business major, said, "The only thing I can judge on is the (diocesan staffers') own sense of success. That's the only thing that says they're doing good things."



Notre Dame students, from left, Ed Yohon, Sue Lubecki and Teri Murphy chat with Dominic Aquilá, program coordinator for the Office of Human Development, at a welcome breakfast.

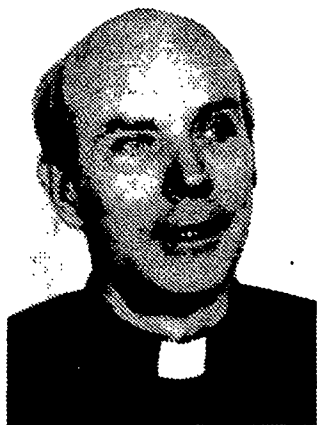


Teri Murphy lends a hand at St. Peter's Kitchen.



Ed Yohon, right, awaits duty as the women volunteers at St. Peter's Kitchen prepare lunch.

Father Bruce Ritter



A HAPPY ENDING

I'd better warn you in advance that this story has a happy ending — otherwise it would be too dreadful to take and you'd hate me at the end for turning your tears into a chuckle.

Billy was 16, a friendless, scared runaway from Michigan. He was a nice kid. Not the brightest kid in the world, but a nice kid. When Helene, a thirtyish, slightly overblown, slightly indignant prostitute, arrived at our door with Billy in tow (I ain't no cradle robber, she said), the boy was in tears. He had arrived in New York's cavernous Bus Terminal on Eighth Avenue less than an hour before. It took some thief less than ten minutes to separate him from his luggage. He still had about \$10, but he lost that, too, in the lavatory, at the point of a knife, to another predator. Too terrified to move, Billy sat on a bench for about 15 minutes and watched the thousands of New Yorkers and their visitors pour back and forth. Finally, even more scared, he wandered out onto the bus terminal's Eighth Avenue sidewalk to greet, dubiously, the Big Apple and Helene.

"Billy ran and ran and ran, got on the first bus to New York to get his Eighth Avenue welcome."

To Helene, Billy was just another customer, a little on the young side maybe. Wanna good time, kid? It was the last straw! Billy burst into tears and fled. Helene ran after him. Hey, kid, it's okay. I ain't gonna hurt ya. I'm sorry, okay? You got no place to stay, huh? Billy gulped, nodded and poured out his story, his mother sick and dying in a

Father Bruce Ritter, OFM Conv., is the founder and President of Covenant House/UNDER 21, which operates crisis centers for homeless and runaway youth.

Michigan hospital; his father angry and depressed. He and his father fought bitterly and his father threw him out. Billy went to the hospital to see his dying mother. Almost unconscious and in great pain after surgery, she implored him to go to his aunt's home in Kentucky until she was better. Your aunt doesn't want you either, screamed the distraught father. Billy ran, and ran, and ran, got on the first bus to New York to get his Eighth Avenue welcome.

"Helene, a thirtyish, slightly overblown, slightly indignant prostitute, arrived at our door with Billy in tow."

Helene took charge of young Billy. I know this great place, kid. It's for kids like you, and she marched him down to Covenant House. Having done her good deed for the day, Helene went back to the more serious business of earning \$250 a day for her pimp, her brief starring role as the "good-hearted prostitute" forgotten.

I talked to Billy right away and told him that his mother had to be worried to death about him and that he would never be able to forgive himself if she died and he was not there. Call the hospital in Michigan right away. I urged. He did, dropped the phone, screamed a long, anguished, mournful cry, and wept hysterically. His mother was dead, they told him. We comforted Billy as best we could and called his aunt in Kentucky to let her know that Billy was with us. She's not dead, his aunt yelled over the phone. They just moved my sister to another hospital for better care! I told Billy right away. He was afraid to believe me. I was afraid to believe me, too. We immediately called the other hospital, got his mother on the phone so that Billy could hear her voice. Billy cried again.

She was very weak, but okay, and the doctors were confident that she would make it. I talked to Billy's now relieved and repentant father, put an equally relieved Billy on the phone and listened to both of them cry. I put Billy on the next bus back to Michigan, and then grimly called the Ad-

ministrators of the first hospital. I won't tell you what I called... what I said to her. It would definitely ruin my reputation.

So, a happy ending—thank God. And thank you, for making it possible to help all the Billys and Marys that find us. Say a prayer for Helene, and for me and my staff and my kids. We pray for you every day and thank God for you every day.

I want to help provide a place for kids like Billy to turn to in times of need. Enclosed is my gift of \$_____

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