

Young adults need varied menu

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Some members of the young adult group at St. Mary's Church are tuning their guitars and pounding their drums, as they get ready to rock at an upcoming young adult picnic.

A more seasoned country band resined up their bows and let loose last Saturday night, April 22, at a square dance sponsored by St. Boniface Parish's young adult ministry.

The following night, single adults brought dishes to pass for an evening meal at Corpus Christi rectory. Afterward, they swapped stories about the trials and tribulations of living in a world where God often takes a back seat to career, consumerism and climbing the corporate ladder.

Corpus Christi's dinner symbolizes the best approach to young adult ministry — lots of different dishes to meet lots of different tastes. That was the view espoused by a founding member of the National Catholic Young Adult Ministry Association, Father Ron Bagley, who spoke at a recent workshop on "Integrating Adults (18-35+) into the Parish Community," at the diocesan Pastoral Center.

Young adults, who make up the bulk of the Catholic Church's population, are often the most overlooked group in a parish, Father Bagley said. Many leave the church

in their teens or early 20s, then begin coming back in their mid-20s. When these young adults return, he said, it is essential that parishes find ways of formally welcoming and integrating them into parish life.

To successfully integrate young adults into their congregations, the priest suggested, parishes need to answer several questions. "Are young adults visible and active in parish liturgies?" he asked, or "does it look like you've got to be old, married or on your way to retirement?"

Because young adults are making choices that will define them for the rest of their lives, Father Bagley advocates a "smorgasbord" approach to young adult activities in parishes.

At St. Mary's, for instance, Deacon Michael Krupiarz encourages the 87 young adults on his mailing list to help him choose group activities. In the past, young adults have sponsored programs on issues ranging from relationships to sexuality. The parish's young adults have also camped and attended retreats together. More recently, several members attended a magic show and dinner at the parish.

The group has worked magic in the lives of Tom and Anne Ferland, who joined soon after registering at St. Mary's a year ago. The couple have met several parishioners through the group. Even though

they are married, Anne Ferland observed, she and her spouse feel welcome among the group's many singles. "They involve both of us," she said. "When they ask one, they ask the other."

Too many parishes equate the phrase "young adult" with the word "single," Father Bagley noted. Such an equation doesn't fit the reality of the young adult population, many of whom are married or divorced. Parishes should thus gear their young adult activities to include people with a variety of lifestyles, rather than focusing solely on singles, the priest remarked.

Young adults at St. Boniface follow Father Bagley's advice by attempting to include as much of the parish as possible in most activities, according to Mike Drexler, the parish's young adult coordinator. Drexler, along with Maureen Schnorr, co-chairs the Diocesan Commission on Young Adult Ministry, a volunteer group which supports young adult ministry in parishes and sponsors diocesan-wide liturgies and seminars.

Last Saturday's square dance at St. Boniface was one such attempt to integrate young adults with the rest of the parish population. Young adults at the Gregory Street parish have also sponsored bowling nights and pot-luck dinners aimed at bringing together parishioners of varied ages.

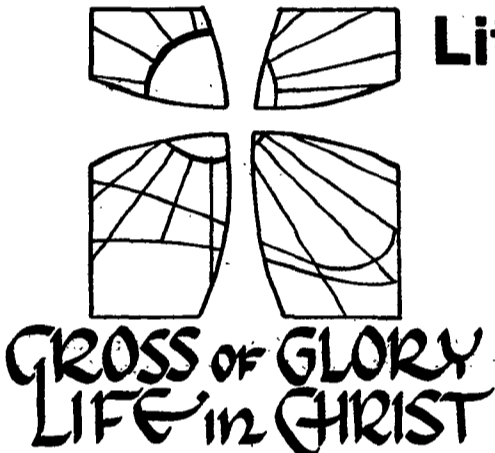


Some activities, such as prayer services in the parish chapel, have concentrated solely on young adults, Drexler said. The next parish activity geared specifically to young adults will be a picnic that coincides with Rochester's Lilac Festival in May, he said.

Life isn't always a picnic in what are often regarded as carefree young adult years. Discussions among the 55 people who attend Corpus Christ's weekly pass-a-dish suppers often manifest a general search for self-realization, noted John Nele, who coordinates single adult ministry at the parish. "We try to help each other grow in our spiritual walk," Nele said, though he noted that the participants are not obligated to discuss religious issues, or even to claim membership in the Catholic Church.

The issues discussed at the meetings are as varied as the participants. "We've had

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Liturgy demands active, life-giving commitment

By Father Robert J. Kennedy
Guest columnist

"Go in peace to love and serve the Lord."

These words are not just a convenient way of clearing the church in time for the next Mass, or a nice way of saying goodbye. They are an essential element of both the liturgy and Christian life because they send out the faithful to live the Eucharist in the world. By these words, the faithful are commissioned to bring the life celebrated in the liturgy into the life of the world. In short, our celebration of the liturgy commits us to continue the mission of Christ.

The eucharistic community which gathers on the Lord's Day is the central sacrament of God's presence in the world. Through the gathering of the baptized in faith, through the nourishment of God's word and the body and blood of Christ, the Eucharist represents the vision of God's order of things and rehearses us in the ways of life in God's full and final household. This vision and practice of the divine order of things is to be extended into the world.

The Christian people gather to hear God's word in Scripture. This is not only for the private comfort and instruction of the faithful alone. It is also wisdom for the world. Specifically, God's word is "good news," the words of everlasting life. This good news awakens hope in the poor, proclaims freedom to captives, new sight to the blind, full dignity to the oppressed and God's favor to all (see Isaiah 61:1-2, Luke 4:16-22). And it is good news entrusted to every believer so that all hearts might have the opportunity to be evangelized, that is, to be formed by the Gospel. Christians continue Christ's preaching by defending the rights of the poor, by speaking the challenging words of peace and compassion, by opening up lines of communication instead of putting up barricades, by encouraging the good and true.

The Christian people offer gifts at the altar: bread and wine, gifts for the poor and money to support the mission of Christ. These offerings represent all that we are and have and do; they are also to be offered by those who are reconciled to each other (see Matthew 5:23-24). The offering of these gifts speaks a reverence for all creation, both the natural world and the human world, and a commitment to join the Creator God by making the work of human hands life-giving. This reverence and commitment is extended in our wise stewardship of the earth, air and water, and in our respect and care for all living creatures. We cannot offer our gifts in worship if we are not living in unity with nature, ourselves and one another.

The Christian people then give thanks over these gifts and share communion with one another in Christ. The eucharistic prayer and the act of communion are most central to our understanding of our Christian life and mission. Our thanksgiving is to become thanks-living by the unity we build in the world.

We pray that "we, who are nourished by his body and blood, may be filled with his Holy Spirit, and become one body, one spirit in Christ" (Eucharistic Prayer No. 3). Such a eucharistic people go forth to break down the barriers of prejudice and

alienation which keep us apart, for "in Christ, there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female." We go forth to do the works of mercy and justice in the world, working to meet the needs of God's people — all on the face of the earth — and upholding their dignity, value and loveableness.

Our sharing in the one bread and one cup which is Christ commits us to welcome all men and women of "every race, language

and way of life" into the hospitality of God's heart and home.

One may act on this commitment by making a donation of food or working in a soup kitchen. Another may support groups that work for systemic change so that there will be no more hungry and homeless, as God intends. But however we act on communion with one another in Christ, we are to build up the Body of Christ. Otherwise we eat and drink unworthily.

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