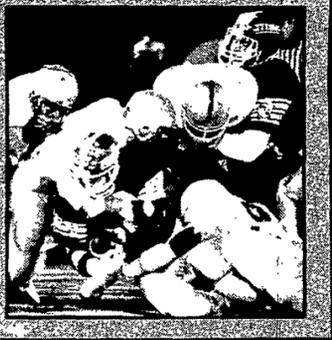


Pigskin preview

This weekend marks the beginning of the high school football season around the state. For a look at your favorite diocesan high school grid team, see page 9.



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Groups give teens a foothold on church

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

Nora Bradbury-Haehl summed up the importance of parish youth ministry bluntly. "(Teenagers) all have as much a fascination with God as they do with sex and drugs," remarked Haehl, youth minister at St. Joseph's Parish, Penfield.

Haehl made her comments at a youth ministry/catechesis teleconference sponsored by the Catholic Telecommunications Network of America. The teleconference was broadcast on Tuesday, Aug. 29, at the diocesan Pastoral Center in Gates and at St. Mary's Parish in Bath.

Fourteen youth ministers and parish religion educators attended the teleconference. Like Haehl, they noted that young people are looking for God and shared their experiences of trying to help teenagers in this spiritual search.

Participants learned some techniques on how to pique young people's interest in their Catholic faith from Dr. Cynthia Thero, former assistant vicar of education for the Archdiocese of Denver.

Beyond confirmation

Thero's hour-and-a-half presentation stressed that while adolescence is a crucial phase in a person's development, too many young Catholics lose their interest in the church after they receive the sacrament of confirmation.

Many youngsters attend confirmation classes only because of family pressure, Thero said, and once these students have been confirmed, they see no need for religion in their lives.

Thero's observations were confirmed by Sister Marie Clare Stoe, SSND, religious-education coordinator at St. Joseph's Parish in Penfield. She noted that her high-school level programs suffer a decline in enrollment after the students are confirmed.

"It's a real reality," she said. "They get into jobs and that kind of stuff ... Our culture kind of militates against (religious activity)."

Part of the problem is that the church may send teenagers signals indicating that they do not need to remain involved in parish life after confirmation, remarked Patrick Fox, director of the diocesan Department of Youth Ministry.

"Young people are good listeners," said Fox, who hosted the teleconference in Bath. "We say, 'You have to stay until you're confirmed,' but then there's no other reason to stay."

Teenagers need to stay, Thero noted, because they live in a "Godless society," and they should be encouraged to explore how their Catholic faith can help them to make decisions based on the values of the Gospel, as opposed to the values of the world.

"We have got to take some risks," Thero said. "We have to make (teenagers) alive to their faith." Youth ministers and catechists throughout the diocese have long noted that if the church is to reach young people and give them a solid faith, it must make the message of Christ relevant to their lives — an insight that Thero explored in her presentation.

"How would (Jesus) deal with AIDS, pre-marital sex?" Thero asked, asserting that these are the type of questions youth ministers and catechists need to discuss with students.

Thero's presentation provided an accurate assessment of Catholic young people, commented Barb Legere, who along with her husband, Steve, administers the youth-ministry program at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Church in Hamlin. "You have to meet students where they are," Legere said. "You have to show them that faith is exciting and is challenging and is something that will help you in forming how to think, how to figure out answers."

Students in Legere's youth group meet in confidential sessions twice a month to pray about and discuss their lives, Legere said, noting that each fall she asks students to list their concerns, which then form the basis for group discussions. Once a year, for example, the students examine sexuality in the light of the church's teachings.

"They ask all kinds of questions," Legere said. "The only thing off-limits is our private lives ... We want them to know that the church is a place you can go and ask questions."

Incorporating catechesis

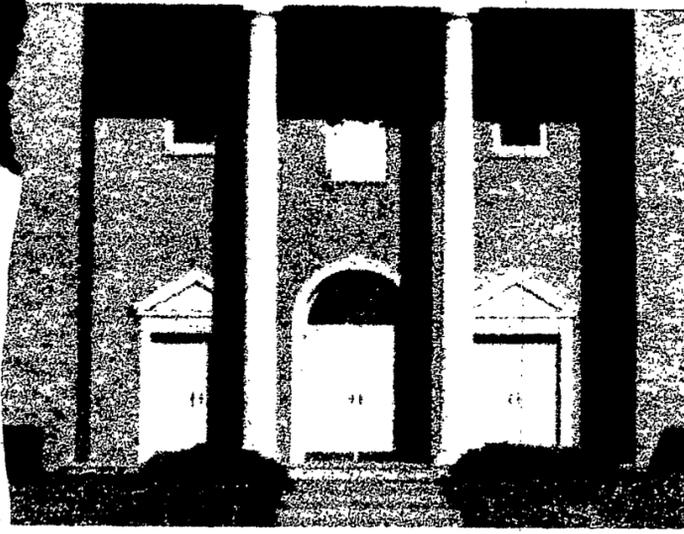
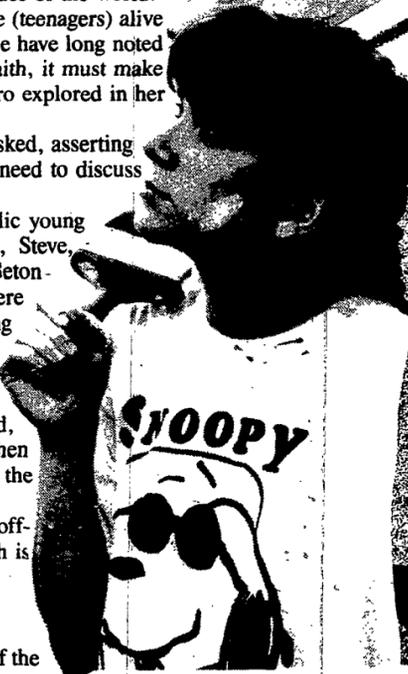
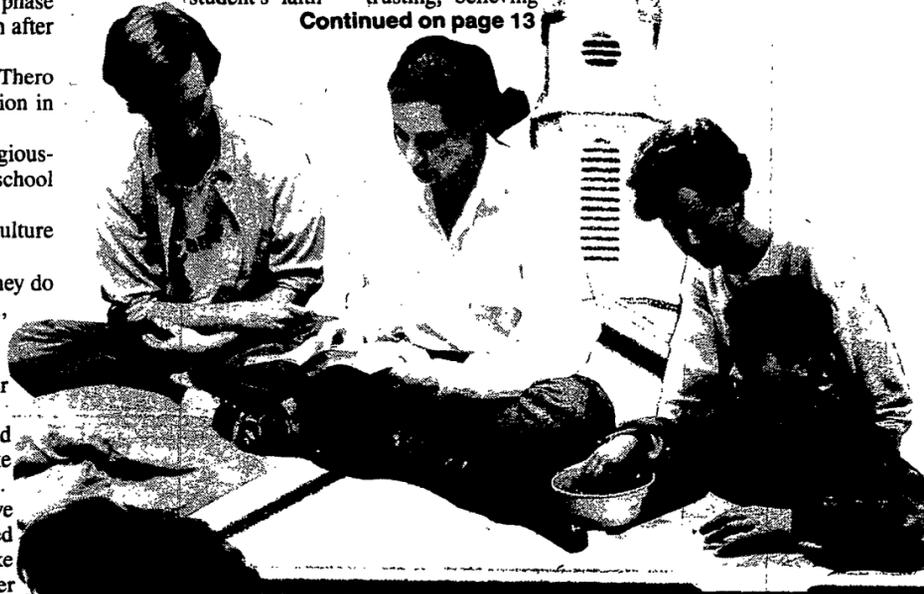
Answering students' questions from a Catholic viewpoint is one of the

tasks that challenge youth group leaders. Fox noted that youth groups throughout the diocese are attempting to integrate Catholic education with regular youth-group activities. Whereas in the past, many parish youth groups centered on providing a social life for their members, today's youth groups are a forum to which students come not only to learn about each other, but to learn about the church as well.

Fox's remarks echo the thesis of *The Challenge of Adolescent Catechesis: Maturing in Faith*, a document developed by the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry and released in 1986. Fox cited the document as a blueprint for youth ministry and catechesis.

In the section "Foundations of Adolescent Catechesis," the document states that adolescent catechesis must promote three dimensions of a student's faith — trusting, believing

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Youth minister will work with black teens

In a move to better meet the needs of black Catholic youths in the diocese, the diocesan Office of Black Ministries named Samuel C. Murrell to the new position of youth minister last month.

Murrell holds a master's of divinity degree from Covenant College Seminary in St. Louis, Mo., from which he graduated in 1985. Raised in the Presbyterian faith, he is a member of an independent Christian church and teaches mission work at the Rochester Institute of Christian Education, 388 Tremont St., an inner-city school for urban pastors.

Although he is a Protestant, Murrell noted that he accepted the diocesan job because it will enable him to work with

black teenagers in a spiritual manner. He also noted that he is not charged with teaching Catholic doctrine; rather, he will serve as a resource coordinator for urban parishes that want to establish or expand programs to minister to large numbers of black teenagers.

Murrell will also be working with guidance counselors in Catholic high schools throughout the diocese. He commented that many black students at these schools are not made aware of black colleges and scholarship programs because guidance counselors are already overburdened with meeting the needs of the general student population.

"It's the kind of thing that most people

don't stop and think about," he said of black students' needs.

Murrell has already begun working with the youth ministry program at St. Bridget's Parish in an effort to design a program that will encourage religious vocations among black youths, said Linda Rosier, parish outreach worker.

"We have a child here interested in being a Jesuit priest," Rosier said, noting that black Catholic teens need more role models in the church. Murrell will also help the parish youth group sharpen its organizational skills, she said.

— Rob Cullivan



Samuel C. Murrell