

Retreat helps students deal with peer pressure

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Peer pressure is so bad in Buffalo that Bryon Duncan and Pedro Diaz traveled 75 miles down the Thruway to learn how to deal with it.

The two teenagers from Our Lady of Loretto Parish in Buffalo heard about a retreat on peer pressure sponsored by the Diocese of Rochester Office of Black Ministries. Duncan's mother, Brenda Easley, told the boys about the retreat after reading an announcement mailed to the Buffalo diocese's Office of Black Ministries, which she directs.

The program took place at the Cenacle Center for Spiritual Renewal, Sunday, Nov. 5, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Discussions and small group activities focused on the retreat's theme — "Faith is the strength to say no when the crowd is wrong" — which resonated with the daily experiences of Diaz and Duncan.

Both students agreed with the retreat leaders' assertion that peer pressure can serve positive and negative ends. Duncan, a sophomore at the Buffalo Academy for the Visual and Performing Arts, recalled several incidents that illustrated the good and bad effects of peer pressure.

"I'm into bikes," he said. "One of my friends saw a nice bike. He wanted to steal it. I said 'No. We all have nice bikes. That might be the only one that kid has.'"

In that case, peer pressure kept a friend on the straight and narrow, Duncan noted, adding that peer pressure can produce the opposite results. When a young drug dealer moved into his west-side neighborhood, Duncan remembered a friend trying to persuade him to hang around the new kid on the block.

"He hangs with him and I don't," Duncan said. "Now, he's addicted to drugs ... He knows it's not good, but he wants to be part of the crowd."

Both Duncan and Diaz noted that most teenagers aren't looking for trouble. But if fitting in means making trouble, then many



Robin Rosier (left) and James Hall, both of Rochester, have a lively discussion during a small group activity at the Cenacle Center on Sunday, Nov. 5.

otherwise good students will succumb to peer pressure.

"One of my friends, he's a good kid, (but) he can be suckered easy," Duncan said. "When (other students) skip class, I try to keep him away from it."

Diaz emphasized the importance of walking away from the crowd when the

peer pressure is on. "I have a couple of friends who do a lot of drugs," he said, "but I refused them. They're still my friends, but they understand I'm not that kind of person."

"That kind of person" may eventually respect the one who resists peer pressure to do bad things, Diaz added, recalling one tale from Hutch Technical High School, where he's a sophomore.

"I was in school one time and this kid asked me to smoke a cigarette, and I said, 'No,'" Diaz related. "A couple of kids who had heard about it came up to me and said, 'Yo, that was nice.'"

Both boys turn to their parents and other concerned adults when confronted with uncomfortable peer pressure situations. Diaz looked to his parents for encouragement after resisting the crowd. "(My parents) usually consult me and they tell me I did the right thing," he said.

Duncan spends time on the telephone with his sister, Cynthia, a freshman at Col-

gate University. "She was more involved with the church than I am," he said. "I ask her questions."

The students noted that their parish youth group helps keep them on track. Duncan claimed that it's just such peer support that he seeks by going to retreats whenever he can. "When you're a kid, you have to find other routes of happiness than video games," he said.

Diaz echoed his friend's comments, acknowledging the value of parish youth groups. His solution to the juvenile delinquency problem — "Have more kids in youth groups to keep them off the streets."

Ultimately, to resist peer pressure, one must know oneself, as Duncan learned by answering a questionnaire distributed at the retreat. Among other things, retreat-goers were asked to list what peer pressure was to them. For Duncan, the empty call of the crowd is an opportunity for growing closer to God.

"It's a test of your faith," he said, "to test how strong you can be."



Linda Dow Hayes/Catholic Courier

Annette Turner, director of the office of Black Catholic Ministry in Louisville, Ky., led the ice-breaker session of a peer pressure retreat which was sponsored by the Diocese of Rochester Office of Black Ministries.

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The Catholic Courier

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