

## Working at soup kitchen benefits teens and guests

By Sean McNamara  
Freelance writer

ROCHESTER — Amy Courtwright didn't think homeless people lived in Rochester until she worked at St. Joseph's House of Hospitality.

While her friends spent last Saturday at sports events, watching television or talking on the phone, Courtwright and Ritch Schmitt — both from St. Margaret Mary Parish in Irondequoit — were working at St. Joseph's on South Avenue as part of a regular activity with their youth group.

"When you see homeless people on the



Courtwright and Ritch Schmitt, both 15, pause to figure out an efficient way to distribute food on their second visit to St. Joseph's House of Hospitality.

news, you don't know them. By working here, you do get to know them," Courtwright explained. "They're just normal people. It's hard for me to understand why many of them are here."

Twice each month, four or five teens from St. Margaret Mary help serve lunch at St. Joseph's. Once a month, approximately 20 teens help at the Open Door Mission on West Main Street.

Parish youth minister Anne Capone said teens from St. Margaret Mary began the project two years ago at Open Door Mission, and expanded to St. Joseph's as interest grew. "They (teens) would just come. They would show up and just want to volunteer," Capone said. "They recognize a problem in our community and they feel they can make a difference. They know they are making a contribution in some way."

The experience of working at the outreach programs benefits both the teens and the guests they serve.

"I count on their presence every weekend," said Sister Marilyn Pray, director of St. Joseph's, explaining that the Catholic Worker house of hospitality has always relied on volunteer help. "They have an effect. It's more than just tokenism," she added.

Working at the kitchen is important for the teens, according to Sister Pray, so that they can "become immersed into another cross-section of society. They experience other races and cultures.

"They need to understand that the economy — the whole system — needs to be challenged and changed. I think young people need to know that," she added.

Many of the teens at St. Margaret Mary are not accustomed to inner-city life, Capone said, although their town borders



Amy Courtwright and fellow youth group members from St. Margaret Mary Parish serve lunch to guests at St. Joseph's House of Hospitality and Open Door Mission twice a month.

some of the city's troubled neighborhoods.

Schmitt said he decided to help because, "I feel like I should come down here. I have seen that not everyone is as well off as we are.

"It's a new experience," he added. "There aren't people like this around in the neighborhood where I live."

"It makes me feel good that I can do something to help people, and it's fun," Courtwright said of her work at the kitchen.

At first, Capone said, some parents were apprehensive about letting their children work at the kitchens. Now they think it's "great," she said.

In addition to serving meals, St. Margaret Mary's youth group is also collecting socks, which Capone said are one of the items guests at the kitchens need most.



Between 3 and 4:30 p.m., volunteers distributed soup, sandwiches, baked goods and hot and cold drinks among more than 25 guests.

## Diocese collects funds for disaster relief

ROCHESTER — The Rochester diocese's Disaster Relief Fund has raised more than \$19,600 to aid both communities struck by Hurricane Hugo in September and areas devastated by the California earthquake in October.

According to Father Robert C. Bradler, \$19,672 had been collected diocesan-wide through the Office of the Propagation of

the Faith. Father Bradler, who directs the diocesan Missions Office, said that money will be split between relief efforts dealing with the devastation caused by the two natural disasters.

Contributions may still be sent to: Disaster Relief Fund, Office of the Propagation of the Faith, 1150 Buffalo Road, Rochester, N.Y., 14624.

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