

# Woman eagerly answers call to serve youth

By Amy Feol  
Freelance writer

GENEVA — Kathy Fuchs, the youth minister at St. Stephen's Church, says that her call to ministry came from God 10 years ago.

"A family friend told me about the job opening at St. Stephen's so I went there just to find out more," Fuchs recalled. "When I arrived, the priests told me that they prayed for my return for six years because they had always wanted me to become the youth minister. Then they hired me on the spot. Now that's how God works."

Since her return to the parish, Fuchs' enthusiasm has rubbed off on the youth of the parish. Last April, she organized the parish's first-ever youth group for junior-high students from St. Francis DeSales/Stephen's School.

Although the group has only been meeting weekly for three months, students have already taken several trips together, performed community service and started lasting friendships.

"People don't realize that junior-high kids can do great things too," Fuchs said. "Kids today are not getting worse. If anything, they're getting better. That's my belief because they have so much energy."

Fuchs plays a dual role with her students, something that can also be a source of conflict. In addition to her role as the parish's youth minister, she also teaches spanish in school.

"We have a lot of fun in youth group, but the kids complain when spring fever hits — sometimes I have to give them detention," Fuchs said.

Seventh-grader Joe Fello, who is also involved with the parish youth group, said he notices that Fuchs walks a fine line inside and outside of school.

"There's a different side to Kathy at school, but she makes things a lot easier for kids not only at youth group but at home also," Fello said.

When Fuchs' teaching duties are finished, she is busy planning the schedule for her youth group. Meetings take place in the homes of youth group members once a month to accommodate parents and speakers. Topics for previous lectures have included drugs, conflicts and relationships.

Fuchs believes that "there should be a wholistic approach" to meeting the spiritual and social needs of today's youth.

Earlier this month, members of the youth group displayed their dedication to the community and the environment when they ventured to Seneca Lake to help the local Boy Scouts troop clean up around the lake.

Previous activities have included a trip to Darien Lake; the sponsorship of a young Mexican girl; and seminars led by Patrick Fox, director of the diocesan Department of Youth Ministry. In addition to organizing several fundraisers such as car washes, youth group members wrote and produced a musical entitled

"Make That Change." Last year the show raised more than \$1,000.

In addition to "making a change," the 35 youth group members also attempt to make a difference for people in the Geneva area. Since attending a clown workshop given by Father David Mura, parochial vicar of St. Michael's Church in Penn Yan, students have ventured to nursing homes dressed like clowns.

"(The students') effect on these people has been wonderful," Fuchs said with pride.

Although leading a youth group requires much time and effort, Fuchs refuses to take all the credit. She said the ministerial staff at St. Stephen's supports the parish youth in all of their endeavors.

Fuchs said that she receives special help from the chairman of the parish youth committee, John Outhlerson. The youth minister said that Outhlerson "attends every event," and has been a strong advocate to the parish council on behalf of the youth group.

Although many activities provide lots of enjoyment for students, youth group isn't all fun and games. Weekend retreats at Camp Stella Maris teach students lessons that last a lifetime.

"You don't have to be afraid to cry in front of other people because they're just like you," youth group member Rosemary Guerri said. "At the retreats, you also learn about other people and their backgrounds."

Fuchs' success story has been built on faith. Her message to others who want to follow in her footsteps is simple:

"Whatever their vision is, they shouldn't give up because anything is possible with God."



Bobbie G. Augustin/Staff photographer

Kathy Fuchs, center, the youth minister at St. Stephen's Church, is surrounded by some of the 35 youth group members. Clockwise from bottom, Steven Mahoney, Joe Fello, Colleen Tracey, Rosemary Guerri, Angie Acquilano & Ellie Lewis.

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