

Teen views inform, surprise youth ministers

By Barbara Ann Homick
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — "God created me, so if I believe in myself, I believe in God."

That's how Angela Tackney, a 17-year-old from the Diocese of Agana, Guam, summed up her faith during one of 15 workshops for youth ministers at the 23rd national conference on Catholic youth ministry.

The conference, sponsored by the Washington, D.C.-based National Federation on Catholic Youth Ministry, was held at the Riverside Convention Center from Nov. 28-Dec. 1.

activities they are involved with in their dioceses have helped them grow in faith. Tackney is a member of a youth group, a camp counselor, a retreat facilitator, a eucharistic minister and a member of Students Against Drunk Driving.

When panel moderator Colette Kennett, director of youth ministry in the Diocese of Belleville, asked Tackney what role she wanted to play in the future church, the Guam youth shocked the audience with her reply.

"I want to become a priest," she said.

Tackney proceeded to tell the audience that she thinks the church is behind the

their work with youths in the church.

Anne Deimel plans to enroll in college next year to pursue a career in youth ministry, and Margaret Foughner wants to help young people become full members of the church in whatever way she can.

Each teen representative agreed that the best way to make youths want to get involved in a church group is to make them feel welcome. Deimel, an active member of the Oblate Youth Mission and SADD, along with her high school's drama club and show choir, said that a group leader must learn to deal with people on a one-to-one basis.

"I feel privileged when adults approach me to do something," Tackney said. "I feel that if they see something in me, then maybe I can do something for them. But some adults are afraid of rejection so they never ask."

Foughner, who as a member of her parish youth group helped raise money for the homeless through face-painting, noted that if someone asks her to try something new she usually will.

"Then I get stuck doing it," she joked.

After touching on such issues as drugs and teen suicide, Kennett asked the three teens if "fitting in" was important to them, and all three agreed.

Deimel noted that when she was in high school, a student belonged in one of three groups. "The popular group, the nerd bunch or the middle population," she said, adding that she didn't want to be in "the popular group" because she didn't always agree with the group's activities.

After doubting her faith a few years ago, Deimel said that many youths today face extreme peer pressure in belonging to a church.

"I remember in school if someone said they liked going to church then everyone would laugh at them," she said.

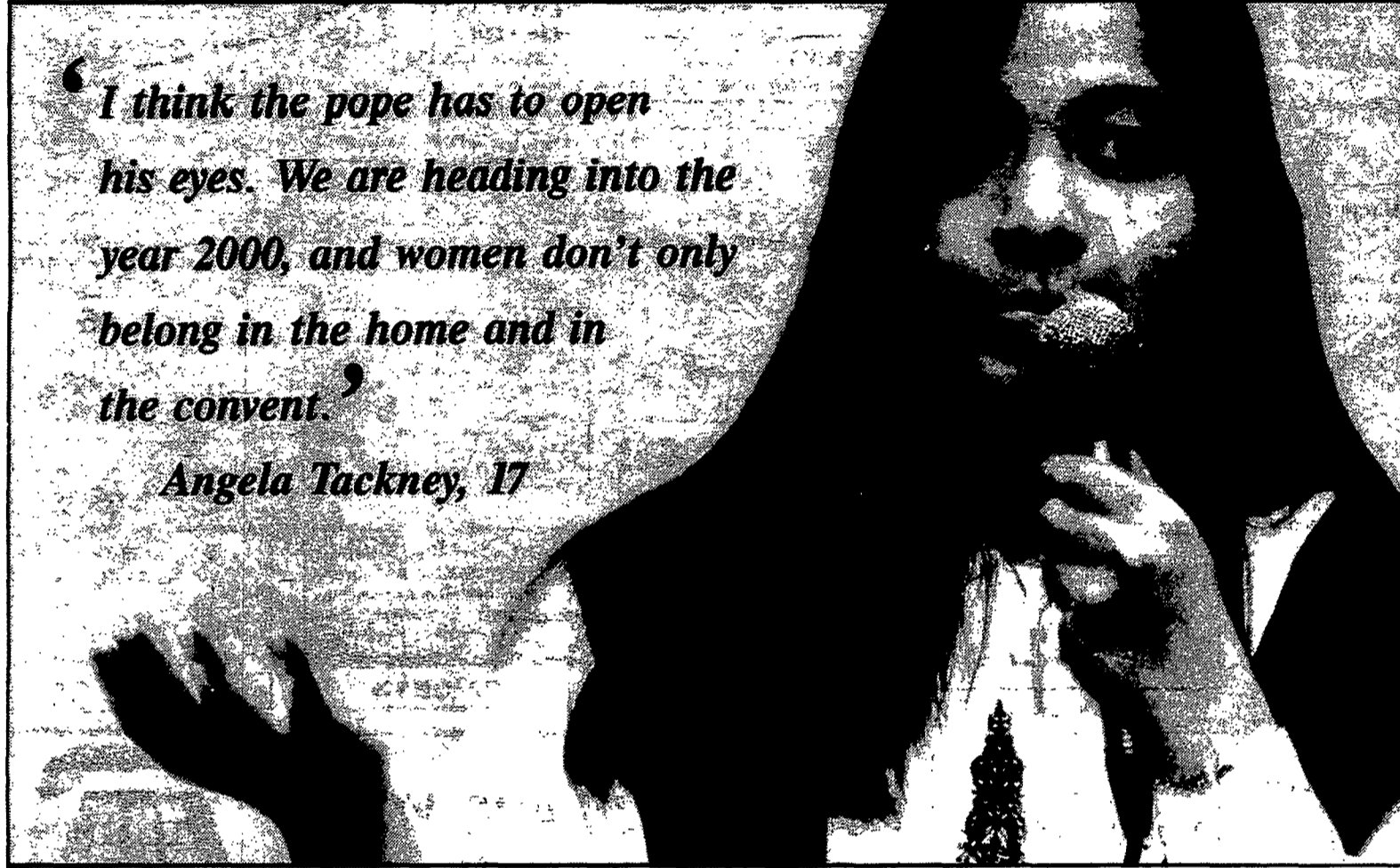
Foughner added that today's youths should realize that church is not only a place to go to worship God, but it can also provide a warm and caring environment.

"But sometimes youth feel as if they are being pushed out. They need to feel they belong or you will lose them," she told the youth ministers in the audience.

The girls told the audience that teenagers today have gotten a bad rap. They said that adults seem to focus on stories of teen drinking and drugs, but many don't recognize the good things that youths do.

Tackney said that many adults equate faith with works in the church, such as liturgical works. But she said that faith is not something that is seen on the surface, nor is it something that is shown by the work a person performs. It's something that is kept deep inside, she said.

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'I think the pope has to open his eyes. We are heading into the year 2000, and women don't only belong in the home and in the convent.'

Angela Tackney, 17

Babette G. Augustin/Staff photographer

Angela Tackney, 17, from the Diocese of Agana, Guam, was a panelist in a workshop entitled "Youth Speak Out: Growing Up in the Church in the '90s." The workshop was one of 15 events presented Nov. 28-Dec. 1 during the 23rd national conference on Catholic youth ministry.

Tackney was one of three teen panelists who spoke at a Nov. 29 workshop entitled "Youth Speak Out: Growing Up in the Church in the '90s." The workshop provided more than 100 youth ministers with the chance to learn how teens view themselves in relation to the church.

Tackney was joined on the panel by Anne Deimel, 18, from the Diocese of Belleville, Ill., and 15-year-old Margaret Foughner from the Diocese of Richmond, Va.

The teen representatives noted that the

times in its attitude toward women.

"I think the pope has to open his eyes," Tackney continued. "We are heading into the year 2000, and women don't only belong in the home and the convent."

The Guam youth said she wouldn't want to become a woman religious because it wouldn't satisfy her. She said she was "fascinated" at the idea that only men can celebrate Mass.

Although the other two speakers did not appear to share Tackney's view on vocations, they both said they want to continue



Babette G. Augustin/Staff photographer
YOUTHFUL WELCOME — Johan Engstrom (left) youth minister at Our Lady of Lourdes Parish, Brighton, and Rick Yeh of McQuaid Jesuit High School were among the 50 students and adults who welcomed participants arriving Nov. 28 at the Greater Rochester International Airport for the national conference on Catholic youth ministry.

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