

Teens make a difference on council

By Barbara Ann Homick
Staff writer

Kristin Schoeberlein and Jill Miller believe that involvement in youth ministry means taking risks — risks that both girls said have strengthened their faith as well as their personal lives.

The two girls are this year's teen representatives on the Diocesan Pastoral Council, a 45-member advisory group to Bishop Matthew H. Clark. At its monthly meetings, the DPC discusses such key topics as the upcoming diocesan synod, formation programs and the diocesan budget, according to Patrick Fox, director of the diocesan Department for Youth Ministry and adviser to the two delegates.

Fox said teen representatives have sat on the DPC since its inception in 1975. Youths are chosen from the Diocesan Youth Ministry Commission — a group that allows young people to play an advisory role to the Department of Youth Ministry — by members of the DPC. The names of the nominees are then submitted to Bishop Clark, who makes the final appointments.

Youths are chosen for the DPC based on their leadership skills, public-speaking ability and willingness to deal with tough issues, Fox said.

"They also need a tolerance for tedium," joked the youth ministry director, who noted that the meetings often take the entire day.

Schoeberlein noted that sitting on the DPC gives her a chance to see how things work in the diocese. During her first meeting last September, the Elmira Free Academy senior realized that she really could have input into the issues being discussed.

"Everything was way over our heads at first, like the budget things which really blow my mind," Schoeberlein said. "But if I have something to say, I say it and participate."

Miller said her role is to keep the DPC updated on what is happening with diocesan youths. The Greece Olympia junior said she wants to let DPC members know that youths are involved in community service projects.

"I'm not real good with meetings, but it's good to know that we can input into the discussion whenever we want," said the Greece Olympia junior.

Since many topics of discussion are difficult for the girls to understand, Fox



Babette G. Augustin/Staff photographer
Kristin Schoeberlein, one of two teen representatives on the Diocesan Pastoral Council, noted that the position allows her to see how issues are dealt with in the diocese. The job of teen delegates to the DPC is to express youths' interest in relation to the agenda of the council.



According to DPC representative Jill Miller, her role is to keep the council updated on what is happening with diocesan youths.

meets with them prior to meetings to go over the agenda and answer any questions. Schoeberlein and Miller both agreed that Fox's help enables them to participate more intelligently in the meetings.

Both girls are active in their parishes and schools. Schoeberlein teaches third-grade religious education classes for Elmira's Eastside Catholic Churches Cluster — made up of St. Cecilia's, St. John the Baptist and Ss. Peter and Paul churches. She is also a member of EFA's Key Club — a community-service organization — and works part-time at First Big Step Daycare Center in Elmira.

Miller, who has attended both state and national youth ministry conventions and is a state youth representative, ran for the position of national youth delegate in 1989. Although she did not win, Miller said the experience strengthened her leadership skills.

Miller also cited the Catholic Youth Leadership Institute for helping her improve her communication skills and broaden her horizons.

Still, Miller said her greatest experiences have been on youth retreats. She noted that she helps increase the visibility of retreat weekends at her church — Holy Name of Jesus — and at Greece Olympia High School.

"Through retreats I have made a difference in a couple of people's lives," said the 17-year-old high school senior.

Miller recalled the time she encouraged several friends to attend a retreat with her last fall. "It was so incredible to see the effects it had on the 'studs' of the class, the cool people. They actually were asking me when they could go again," Miller said.

As youth representatives, the girls have to understand the needs and problems of their peers. Currently, Schoeberlein said, teens are terrified over what is happening in the Persian Gulf. Schoeberlein said she cannot support the just-war principle.

"I don't believe in a just war, and I don't believe that people should use others to do their thing, such as the president asking others to do the killing," the Elmira native said.

Schoeberlein said that many of today's youths leave the church in rebellion against their parents who sometimes force them to attend services. She said young people need to discover religion apart from their parents. Most of those who do leave the church, she said, will return when they are living on their own.

"A lot of people believe in God, but they don't show it. They are afraid to take the risk," Schoeberlein said.

The 16-year-old EFA student said she has never been afraid to take risks because she is not afraid to be different from other people. Schoeberlein thinks the Catholic Church should be more forgiving of young people who don't always agree with its stands on issues.

Miller said the major concerns facing teens today are stress and peer pressure related to dating, drinking and drugs.

"The most important thing is to try and get more teens involved in the church, as well as getting the community to accept the teens," she said.

Miller added that she would like to see the DPC address the issue of youths' involvement in the church more often.

"Young people need to talk about their faith and how it can grow," she said. "Being with teens who share my faith makes my faith stronger."

Kathleen Palmer, a DPC member and parishioner of Holy Name of Jesus Church, said that Miller is an excellent representative of her peers.

"It is wonderful that the teens are willing to come, and we are pleased with their input," Palmer said.

DPC member Donald Nurnberg of Elmira agreed with Palmer, adding that it is important that young people voice their ideas and concerns to the diocesan committee.

"The church is not always that active with teens," Nurnberg said. "We have to try and get them on track so they can stick with (the church) through the years that are the most difficult for young people."

Martha Jodoin, executive secretary to the DPC, said many members find it refreshing to hear the teens' views. "To see the future in the hands of these capable youth who have such a strong commitment to their faith is very reassuring," said Jodoin.

Although Miller will continue her position in 1991, Schoeberlein will relinquish her spot on the council to a new member in May. She offered the following advice to a future delegate:

"You have to be able to deal with meetings and understand that adults are going to look at you differently even though you are there for the same reason."

But Schoeberlein said she does not want to discourage youths from getting involved with the DPC. Young people can influence the church of today, she said.

"After the last meeting, Pat (Fox) called to tell me that the bishop thought we did a great job. I guess we are making a difference," Schoeberlein said.

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