

Play dares youths to find balance

By Barbara Ann Homick
Staff writer

GENEVA — Ever since Kathy Fuchs wrote her first play, entitled "Make that Change," in 1989, members of her youth group have been asking her to write another piece.

Fuchs finally gave in to the barrage of requests.

"I didn't know what to write about, but I was getting irritated by all the negative things about kids in the news," explained Fuchs, youth coordinator at St. Stephen's Parish. "Kids understand spirituality is an important part of their lives, and I wanted people to know there are kids who do good things. They are so loving."

The youth coordinator's second play, "Dare to Care," deals with modern-day Gospel values, conflict resolution, love and unity. The work also explores teens' relationships with their parents, with God and with each other.

Through the play, Fuchs said she tried to show that the generation gap between youths and their parents is not as big as it may seem. In fact, Fuchs observed, most parents and their children often share a lot of the same interests.

"I know parents who have gone to Vanilla Ice, Billy Joel and Grateful Dead

concerts with their kids," Fuchs noted.

More than 30 youths from four schools — DeSales High School, St. Francis/St. Stephen's School, Geneva Middle School and Geneva High School — and from other youth groups performed in the two-hour musical at DeSales on March 21, 22 and 24.

The play begins with a conversation between three angels — played by Melissa DeSio, Ken Juskow and Sean O'Donnell — concerning the current state of the world. The discussion centers around how technology has gotten out of control.

"It's time for intervention," the angels agree.

After Angel # 2 (Juskow) draws the longest "angel hair," he must make the trek.

"This time I'm headed straight for the teenagers," he says.

Disguised as a teenager, the angel joins other youths discussing feelings and conflicts common among them. For instance, some youths think that material things — such as a sports car and expensive clothes — are all that matters. They note that "religion today is just a big corporation" and "religion is all lies and fairy tales."

"God is not up there playing a chess match with our lives," another character

interjects. "We have the tools to change our world — faith, hope and love."

The play's characters appear to hold differing opinions about the importance of religion in their lives, mirroring a very real conflict among youths today; according to Fuchs.

One common belief among many youths is that "Parents Just Don't Understand," as evidenced by a rap song in the play with the same title. The song was performed by Joe Fello, an eighth-grader at St. Francis/St. Stephen's School, and Kira Longo, a sophomore at Geneva High.

Another skit in the play, entitled "The Beatitude Show," is a comical look at modern-day beatitudes. Contestants on the "Beatitude Game Show" come up with such new virtues as "Blessed are the non-worriers, for they shall be ulcer free," and "Blessed are the peacemakers, maybe for them the world won't be destroyed." The prize for the winning contestant is "grace unlimited."

Students also performed musical numbers expressing a message of concern for others. Included in the repertoire was "The Living Years" by Mike and the Mechanics, and Bette Midler's "From a Distance."

By the end of the play, it appears as if the



Waterloo High School sophomore Jody Asbrand (right) reprimands her 'son,' portrayed by Matt Summerville, during the rock concert scene in 'Dare To Care.' The youth group performed the original two-hour play, which was written by Kathy Fuchs, at Geneva DeSales High School on March 21, 21 and 24.



Joe Fello, an eighth-grader at St. Francis/St. Stephen's School in Geneva, performs the rap song, "Parents Just Don't Understand," during a rehearsal of the musical production 'Dare To Care,' which was presented by the youth group at St. Stephen's Church.

"Some kids who don't fit in at school have really blossomed here," the 37-year-old Spanish teacher said.

Fuchs said she is taking the group to Virginia Beach with a portion of the proceeds from the show. The troupe will perform the play for residents of a nursing home as part of the trip.

Although the Virginia Beach trip served as an incentive for many of the group members, most said they enjoyed the play experience because of the lessons they learned.

Jodie Asbrand, a sophomore at Waterloo High School, said she learned that one person can make a difference in life.

"If one person starts out listening then everyone will start listening, like the city, the state, the country and maybe even the whole world," said Asbrand.

Rosemary Guerri said she thinks it would be beneficial for parents to see Fuchs' play.

"We understand a lot more than they think," said the eighth-grader at St. Francis/St. Stephen's.

Kathryn Friday, who performed in the show along with her older brother, Kris, said the play presented a real view of what youths think about today.

"I think it expressed all our feelings about what we think about God," said Kathryn Friday, a fifth-grade student at St. Francis/St. Stephen's.

Joe Fello thought the play expressed many messages that are appropriate today.

"Everyone is not how they appear to be, and people shouldn't worship false gods like money, greed or power," he said.

Ken Juskow added, "She (Fuchs) is trying to get the point across that kids and parents and everybody need to get along with what they have and not depend on material things as much. They need to have God in their lives more and just carry on with what they have."

Martina Reale, an eighth-grader at Geneva Middle School, said she thought the message of the play was "anybody can change because you can always change something to make yourself better."

Reale added, "You have to start with yourself and then people will follow you. You have to be a leader, not a follower."

She concluded with an idea many students expressed.

"If people just listen to this message, then the world would be a better place," Reale said.

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characters have come to some sort of realization through the angel's guidance. They realize that they can enjoy the good things in life without abusing themselves, people around them or the environment. The key, says the angel, is learning to achieve a sense of balance.

"You need a balance because sin comes from a sense of imbalance," Juskow, as the angel, says. "We have to listen to the spirit's voice because the spirit connects us."

Another character adds, "We need to take that first small step and watch the chain reaction light up the world."

The production ends with a rendition of the rap song "We've Got to Pray," by M.C. Hammer.

While members of the play credited Fuchs and assistant producer John Oughterson for the show's scope and timeliness, the show's creator saluted the youths for their hard work.

Fuchs said the group practiced every Sunday evening from 7-9 p.m. since December, including extra practices the week of the performances. The coordinator said she was also pleased to see play members interact so well, despite ages ranging from 8 to 15.