

# Parish youths see softball league as a big hit

By Barbara Ann Homick  
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Diocesan softball league coordinators may want to accomplish a few serious goals through the program, but the kids who play on the summer league have only one aim: to have fun.

July 9 was Opening Day for the 17 Monroe County parishes. After three weeks of practice, teams from St. Jude the Apostle and Holy Cross met on the diamond behind Charlotte Middle School in one of the season-opening games. Even though Holy Cross defeated St. Jude's 15-7, no one appeared concerned over the final result.

The coed softball program, which formed seven years ago, serves as a fun way for youths aged 13 to 18 to make new friends and to improve their athletic skills over the summer.

For the adults involved in diocesan youth ministry, however, the six-week softball program is a way for them to recruit potential youth-group members.

"The youth ministers wanted a way to gather kids, have some fun and re-energize their programs," said Pat Fox, director of the diocesan Department of Youth Ministry and coordinator of the softball league.

Youth ministers Bill Bolton and Kevin Foy are hoping that the league succeeds in getting youths involved in the church.

Bolton, the youth minister at St. Jude the Apostle Church, has been working on developing the youth program at his parish since January. Although the Gates parish once had a group, this marks the first year of formal youth ministry at St. Jude's in several years.

Bolton said the softball program serves as a great opportunity for kids and he encourages even more youths to get involved.

"The softball itself lends itself to some good interaction," said the St. Jude's parishioner, who also hopes to get his group involved in parish soccer and basketball later this year.

The 29-year-old Foy, a lifelong parishioner of Holy Cross, said his parish had a youth group that "died out" about three years ago. He's now trying to rekindle interest among the youths of his parish.

Foy said he realizes that many youths have jobs and school work that prevent them from attending a youth group.

When it comes to the fun programs, however, the kids find the time to get involved, Foy said.

"We have had no problem ever fielding a softball team," commented Foy, who has coached the Holy Cross summer team for six years. "The social events they come out to."

Judith Ann Russell, director of religious education at St. Jude's Church, agreed with Foy that softball is a way to interest youths in a parish program.

"We have to go in the back door," explained Russell, whose daughter, Tricia,



Babette G. Augustin/Staff photographer  
Bill Bolton (center), youth minister at St. Jude's Church in Gates, keeps a calm eye on the action as the rest of the parish's softball team cheers from the benches.



Matt Hoffman flies into home while cheering a fellow Holy Cross teammate running for second base.

plays for St. Jude's Church. "Because they think religion isn't 'cool,' we want to get them interested in the social events and then bring in some of the religious aspects."

Whatever the adults' reasons are for the league, youths from the two teams said they just enjoy getting together to play ball.

Although the league enforces some rules — such as an eight-run limit per inning and a maximum of 10 players on the field — the program's pretty flexible. The league allows teams to have unlimited rosters. Every player must hit at least once and play at least two innings each game, however.

Holy Cross parishioner Chris Palermo has been impressed with the organization of the league this year. He also said he enjoys the chance to play softball with his friends.

"There's a lot of team spirit," explained the 14-year-old Palermo. "It can be competitive, but it's not all serious. We don't want to lose, but we don't want to rub it into the other team if we win."

Dean Monteleone of St. Jude's viewed things differently.

"It is real competitive because you have different ages and different types of people," said Monteleone, who will be a freshman at Aquinas Institute this fall.

Holy Cross player Mark Havens said he enjoys the league so much that he plans to play the next few summers.

"Since I played ball for the school (Holy Cross) for two years, I always knew Holy Cross sports were special," remarked 14-year-old Havens.

Tricia Russell, a sophomore at Our Lady of Mercy and a member of the St. Jude's team, would like to see more female players.

"We are doing good and we work together," noted Russell, one of only two girls on the squad. "But if we don't have a

certain amount of girls it jeopardizes how many people we can have in the field."

Foy said Holy Cross has never had a problem recruiting girls for its squad. In fact, two of his key players are female softball standouts from Aquinas.

Seniors Patti Held and Sheila Maloney, who both play for AQ's varsity team, agreed that playing for the parish league is much more relaxing.

"It is more casual than playing for Aquinas because AQ is more competitive," noted Held.

Although Maloney said the pitching in the summer league is much slower and harder to time, she noted that parish softball can be lots of fun.

The girls noted that despite the light spirit during the games, this season began on an extremely tragic note. Dan Jerzak, a Holy Cross parishioner who had been helping coach the team during practices, died in a car accident on July 4.

In light of the tragedy, the team has decided to dedicate its entire season to the late 28-year-old, Held said.

"He really wanted to be involved with youth," she remarked.

According to Foy, concern for youths is what the summer softball league is all about. Whether it is designed to increase involvement in the youth group or just provide some wholesome fun, summer softball is for the kids.

"They have fun," noted Foy, "and that's the only thing that matters."



Peter Reynders of Holy Cross takes aim before throwing out a runner during his team's 15-7 win over St. Jude's on July 9.



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