

# Summit inspires pair to fight world hunger

By Barbara Ann Homick  
Staff writer

WATKINS GLEN — Mary Meier was apprehensive when she left Watkins Glen Aug. 8 to attend the Youth Ending Hunger Summit in Buffalo.

By the end of the weekend conference, however, Meier had experienced a total change of heart.

"I was really scared when I went up there. I didn't know anybody and I wasn't talking to anyone," said the 15-year-old Meier. "Everyone was so nice, though, and I started loosening up. I changed so much while I was there."

Both Meier and Nancy Roy, youth minister at St. Mary of the Lake in Watkins Glen and St. Benedict in Odessa, said the conference changed their attitudes about world hunger. The only Rochester diocesan representatives to attend the North American Youth Ending Hunger Summit, the pair said they found the conference a real eye-opener.

"Someone needs to walk on the ice first to make sure it is OK, and since we were there I hope others will join us next time," Roy said of the Aug. 8-12 summit at the University of Buffalo.

YEH is an international organization made up of more than 25,000 young people in 15 countries and on five continents. Through such activities as bike tours, vigils and petitions, youths try to educate their communities about the importance of ending world hunger.

The Hunger Project — the parent organization of YEH — is an international not-for-profit organization founded in 1977 to put an end to chronic world hunger by the end of the century.

"Some of the things we do are wonderful things, but we tend to put bandages on the situation," Roy observed. "But the Hunger Project actually goes and looks at the situation and finds the missing link to it."

The conference opened with an information session about the Hunger Project. It was followed by a video that documented the trip YEH global director Steve Bloomenthal took to Ethiopia in 1987.

Meier said another video, entitled "341," had a dramatic impact on her. She said the presentation focused on the fact that 341 children would die during the video's 13-minute running time.

"In the corner of the video throughout the whole thing, they had a child's face which went from color to black (and white) and then it would just show a number," explained the junior at Watkins Glen High School.

During other sessions, Meier said the YEH staff touched on various topics, including the need for world leaders to keep their promise to fight world hunger. That promise was made in 1990 at the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the

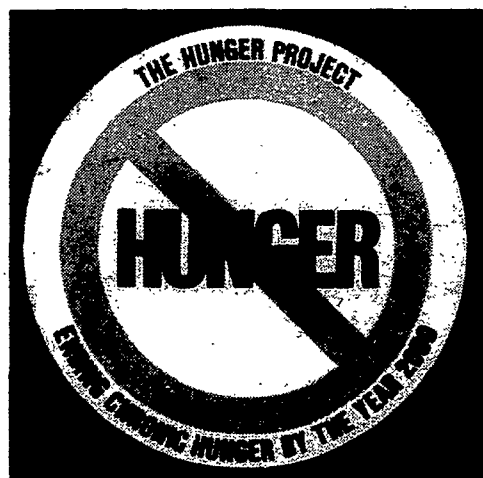
Child, she said.

"They (YEH) want to make sure that people realize that these world leaders made these promises and to make sure that they go through with them," remarked Meier.

Roy said another video depicted a trip to Ethiopia taken by youths from Connecticut in 1987. One of the most interesting points brought home in the presentation was that people from the United States don't understand the basic needs of those who suffer from hunger, she observed.

Roy said many Americans have the wrong perceptions about the roots of chronic hunger. According to the youth minister, a lack of food is not the only cause of the problem.

Instead, such problems as unclean water



and malnutrition can cause chronic ailments — including diarrhea, tetanus, measles, whooping cough and pneumonia — that often are fatal. In fact, about 35,000 people — including 26,000 children — die of those diseases each day, Roy said.

Because of the realizations she made at the summit, Meier said she has already begun making plans to help end world hunger. For instance, the youth hopes to swim across Seneca Lake to raise money for the cause, speak at area churches to educate her community, and start a YEH program at her high school.

"I was so psyched to come back and tell Watkins that this is a problem and we can end it by the year 2000. All we need is a little help," Meier remarked.

Noting that the conference also touched on problems of domestic hunger, Roy said she has been thinking of ways to stop hunger right in her own community.

"I'd like to work something with the confirmation program with hunger, and I'd like to learn the statistics for this area and find out what our kids could do around here," she commented.

Both Roy and Meier said they feel that the problem of world hunger can no longer be ignored.

"God wants this world to be right, and hunger is really not the right way," concluded Meier.



Babette G. Augustin/Staff photographer  
Mary Meier (right) a parishioner at St. Mary of the Lake, and her youth minister, Nancy Roy, represented the Diocese of Rochester at the Youth Ending Hunger Summit in Buffalo Aug. 8.

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