

Teens find peer support in group

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Community outreach is the goal of many Catholic youth groups. In Rob Breen's organization, however, the members can be the ones most needing a helping hand in dealing with the tough urban environment surrounding them.

"At one meeting, 11 of the 12 kids had been jumped or beaten up at one time or another," Breen noted. "A lot of them are very scared. There's drug abuse, Satanism and teen pregnancy; the worst thing is the broken homes. There's a real absence of positive Christian role models here."

The 25-year-old Breen has spent the last two years as coordinator of the Southwest Catholic Youth Ministry, which encompasses two youth groups on the city's west side — one for students in grades 7-9 and another for grades 10-12.

Catholic parishes participating in the ministry are St. Augustine, 410 Chili Ave.; Our Lady of Good Counsel, 75 Ernestine St.; St. Monica, 831 Genesee St.; and Ss. Peter and Paul, 720 W. Main St.

Youths from St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, 350 Chili Ave., also take part in the group's activities.

"Basically it's one huge ministry that all the youths are plugged into. It's the only church youth group in the area, Catholic or non-Catholic," reported Breen, who resides at St. Augustine and also coordinates religious education for area parishes.

The senior-high group, which has about 15 members, meets twice a month in the Teen Room in the basement of St. Augustine's rectory. The 25-member junior-high contingent gathers three to four times per month in the Our Lady of Good Counsel gymnasium.

Given the difficult circumstances surrounding many of his youths, Breen keeps his objectives simple.

"The most important thing we can do is build relationships," he remarked. "It's very hard for these kids to find somewhere that they belong."

"Many of them say their biggest fear is their future, so we try to offer them a positive vision of the different things the future can hold," Breen continued.



Babette G. Augustin/Photo editor

Rob Breen, coordinator of the Southwest Catholic Ministry, helps youth-group member Denis Lepel carry a large, wooden cross during an ecumenical cross walk April 17.

"Most of these kids come not so much because there's a program, but because there's a friend who cares."

"It gives me the chance to relax and be myself," said 16-year-old Kate Braun, a junior at Aquinas Institute and parishioner at St. Augustine. Braun, who has been with the group for four years, sometimes takes on a counseling role. "I try to be there for those who need it," she said. "Some don't have many friends in school, or feel like they fit in. This is where they can come when they can't fit in at school or home."

Another enthusiastic group member is 14-year-old Denis Lepel, a ninth-

grader at School of the Arts and St. Augustine's parishioner.

"You get a lot out of it, and Rob (Breen) makes it fun," said Lepel, a third-year member who is active with both the junior and senior high meetings.

Breen acknowledged that it is a constant challenge to maintain membership but he said it's worth the struggle.

"For kids just to come to youth group is a major thing," he remarked. "But the ways they open up to each other is tremendous. The peer ministry they do is incredible. There's a high level of commitment among them that didn't exist before."

YOUTH BRIEFS



BK color guard reaches new peak in competition

The Bishop Kearney High School Color Guard recorded its highest national-competition finish ever April 11, earning a bronze medal at national championships held in Dayton, Ohio.

The guard, comprising 19 Kearney girls, placed third among 330 high schools.

Performing to Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven," the BK contingent scored 91.3 out of a possible 100 points. The third-place showing was another step up from Kearney's previous national high finish of fifth place set last year.

The accomplishment culminated a season in which BK turned in 13 first-place performances at various competitions.

McQuaid Jesuit to host annual BASH on May 1-2

BRIGHTON — "Go for the Gold" is the theme for the 1992 McQuaid BASH, set for Friday and Saturday, May 1-2, at McQuaid Jesuit High School, 1800 S. Clinton Ave.

BASH, which stands for Building A Scholastic Heritage, is an annual fundraiser at McQuaid. The gala will begin with Family Night on May 1 and culminate with a black-tie dinner and auction on May 2. This year's activities will center around the Olympics.

Information about the weekend's schedule of events can be obtained from Cheri Walsh at 716/472-9058.

Father Jenco to speak at Mercy High on May 1

Former American hostage Father Lawrence Jenco will speak at Our Lady of Mercy High School, 1437 Blossom Road, on Friday, May 1, at 7 p.m.

Father Jenco, a Catholic Relief Worker, was kidnapped by Middle East extremists in Beirut, Lebanon, in 1985. He spent 19 months in captivity along with other American hostages, including former Batavia resident Terry Anderson.

Tickets are \$10. Proceeds will benefit Cephas Attica's prisoner visitation and rehabilitation programs.

Information can be obtained from Dorothy Steele at 716/436-5653.

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