

Program helps to BUOY parish youth groups

Workshops draw strong response

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Many times this page will feature a story on a parish's youth group.

And yet, a number of young people throughout the Diocese of Rochester may read these features without knowing what a youth group is, or how to get one started.

"What I have seen, through the synod process, is that we haven't done a good job as a whole. The youths' needs are not being met," said Michael Theisen, diocesan coordinator of youth ministry. "The majority of the parishes do not have a structured youth program."

In an effort to convert that majority into a minority, Theisen has designed a training program known as BUOY — Building Up Our Youth. According to Theisen, this project is designed to guide those parishes that "are beginning a youth program or refining their existing program."

BUOY's first phase was implemented this fall, when Theisen conducted four workshops for adults. He received a strong response, as approximately 75 adults from 25 parishes convened at St. Boniface Church, 330 Gregory St., Rochester; Immaculate Conception Church, 113 N. Geneva St., Ithaca; St. Rita's Church, 1008 Maple Drive, Webster; and St. Patrick's Church, 97 W. Bayard St., Seneca Falls.

"The neat thing is that people coming to the program are really committed to making something start to happen in youth ministry at their churches," Theisen noted. "The (fall) synod was one of the things creating the hunger where parishes are saying, 'We need this.'"

These opening sessions were divided into three parts: an overview of youth ministry; a reflection on teenage life; and the formation of a parish planning team and needs assessment.

The next step is for adults to distri-



Andrea Record (second row, far right), religious education and youth ministry coordinator at St. Dominic's Church in Shortsville, is finding BUOY's concepts quite useful. In the process of starting a youth group at the Shortsville church, she said that her task is being made easier with the step-by-step approach BUOY employs.

bute needs-assessment sheets to parish youths. These forms will ask for opinions on a variety of subjects such as why youths have not previously participated in youth-related programs; what types of activities might appeal to them; what type of service/outreach projects they'd like to perform; and what educational or faith topics they'd be interested in discussing.

The project's second phase will begin this coming spring, when a core group of three to six youths will join adult members at their parishes for additional workshops with Theisen.

When those sessions are completed, Theisen said, "The parishes should have come up with a calendar of events, and a model through which they will accomplish this."

Arriving at this "model" is the key

stage, Theisen emphasized.

"If a model is in place, then the group is going to continue," he said. "But if some adults are running a group year after year and nobody new is getting involved, and then those adults decide they don't want to do it anymore, the group falls apart."

Theisen said he chose to use the "buoy" concept because "a buoy is something that's out there to act as a guide. If we don't have a model, or buoy, for the parishes to use, they'll drift."

The youth ministry coordinator added that parish-wide support is a vital part of getting youth programs off the ground.

"I'm hoping, along with the adult volunteers, for staff involvement — catechetical leaders, pastors," he said.

"A buoy is anchored below the surface, just like the entire parish needs to be below the surface of its youth program."

One parish finding BUOY's concepts quite useful is St. Dominic's Church, 6 Canandaigua St., Shortsville.

Andrea Record, religious education and youth ministry coordinator at the Shortsville church, is in the process of starting a youth group there. She said that her task is being made much easier with the step-by-step approach BUOY employs.

"A couple of years ago we attended a training program (offered through the diocese)," Record recalled. "That one was kind of heavy on theory. So we all looked at each other and said, 'What do we do now,' and nothing ever happened. But Michael (Theisen) is giving us something practical to begin our needs assessment."

Fifteen-year-old Shannon Cooke plans on being part of St. Dominic's youth core team which meets with Theisen this spring for BUOY's second phase.

"I think (having a youth group) is a good idea. It gives you someplace to go and something to look forward to with your friends," said Cooke, a sophomore at DeSales High School in Geneva.

St. John Fisher to host Puerto Rican conference

PITTSFORD — The 13th annual Puerto Rican Youth Development Conference is set for Friday, Dec. 11, at St. John Fisher College, 3690 East Ave.

The event is scheduled to run from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. It will comprise mainly students from East, Franklin, Marshall, Edison Tech and Wilson Magnet high schools. Topics such as relationship building, conflict resolution and mediation, leadership, and careers will be addressed.

Transportation and lunch is available for those who attend. For details, call Antonia Munoz at 716/325-3570.

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