

Synod discussions get head start at youth day

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

AUBURN — It's a shame that this gathering couldn't have been witnessed by every adult about to take part in next week's diocesan Synod sessions.

That's because an outpouring of thoughts and feelings emerged in regard to a key portion of the upcoming synod theme ("how parishes can better meet the special needs of youth and young adults").

And these concerns came right from the heart, since they were mostly voiced by young people themselves.

Approximately 130 teenagers and 20 adults from Cayuga and Seneca counties gathered for the first-ever Finger Lakes Youth Day this past Saturday, Feb. 20. The event took place in the former school building of St. Hyacinth's Church, 59 Pulaski St.

This eight-hour event featured social activities such as game-playing, music, dinner and an evening dance. An early-evening Mass also provided a nice touch.

Some of the day's most memorable moments — both humorous and serious — occurred during a mid-afternoon panel discussion. Deacon John D. Tomandl, chaplain at Auburn Memorial Hospital, evoked considerable laughter by donning nun's attire for his role as "Sister Mary Synod," the panel-discussion moderator.

Yet the panel, consisting of two youths and three adults, remained quite solemn as members discussed their feelings regarding youths' input in diocesan parishes.

Katie Dillon, a parishioner at St. Patrick's Church in Cato, implored her fellow teenagers to continue voicing



Panelist Katie Dillon (left), a parishioner at St. Patrick Church in Cato, responds to questions about the importance of youth-related activities.

the significance of youth-related activities to older parishioners.

"People need to know how wonderful it is (for youths) to get together," she said.

Dillon later acknowledged to the *Catholic Courier* that she had experienced some personal frustration while participating in her parish's fall synod.

"I brought up things about youth, but (the synod's adult participants) didn't seem to listen. I don't think they understand that we're going to be the church someday," remarked Dillon, a sophomore at Cato-Meridian High School.

Another panelist, St. Mary's of Auburn parishioner Sarah Flanigan, concurred with Dillon's contention that youths should be made more welcome at parish activities in general.

"What we need to do is get more involved in our churches and fight for



Deacon John D. Tomandl, chaplain at Auburn Memorial Hospital, donned nun's attire for his role as panel-discussion moderator 'Sister Mary Synod' at the first-ever Finger Lakes Youth Day Feb. 20 at St. Hyacinth Church in Auburn.

our rights," commented Flanigan, a junior at Auburn High School. "Teenagers are people, too."

The panel session included a question-and-answer segment during which audience members also had opportunities to raise their concerns. Many female participants wondered why the church, historically, has offered women fewer opportunities for involvement than men.

Father David N. Gramkee, pastor at St. Patrick's Church in Seneca Falls, noted that events such as Finger Lakes Youth Day help spark interest for an age group frequently perceived as apathetic toward its Catholic faith.

"It's wonderful for teens to get together who think it's not 'uncool' to do this on a Saturday afternoon — who aren't afraid of the fact that

they're Catholic," said Father Gramkee, who also served as a panelist.

In addition to communicating better with adults, teenagers must focus on their relationships with each other, Father Gramkee said. While meeting with three teens who gave the homily at that day's Mass, he told them that several of their peers, "even if they're involved in a youth group, still feel that they don't quite fit in. We need to recognize the value of reaching out."

Michael Theisen, diocesan youth coordinator, noted that this particular event was especially vital for the Cayuga-Seneca region, in which there are very few structured parish youth groups. He added that a similar youth day is being planned for later this year in the diocese's Livingston County and Steuben County regions.

McQuaid students place at One-Act Play Fest

FAIRPORT — Two McQuaid Jesuit High School students received awards at the Monroe County One-Act Play Festival. The fifth annual event, which comprised 10 schools, was held Feb. 4-6 at Fairport High School.

McQuaid's Christian Zwahlen was named Best Supporting Actor for his portrayal of "Leper" in "A Separate Peace." In addition, McQuaid's Dan

Bachmann took second place in the supporting actor category for his characterization of "Brinker."

Serving as director of the McQuaid production was Bob Smyth, theater arts director at Our Lady of Mercy High School. Smyth also directed Mercy's "I Saved A Winter Just for You" as well as Bishop Kearney's "The Prophet" at the festival.

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