



Katie Braun (second from left) and Mark Bunce (far right), guest homilists at 'Youth Sunday in the 19th Ward,' take part in the final doxology with Father Robert Werth (center) and Deacon Brian McNulty (far left) during the Feb. 28 Mass.

## Mass shines spotlight on youths in 19th Ward

### Guest homilists ask for stronger community spirit

By Mike Latona  
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Vibrancy ... fire ... excitement.

With this type of arresting vocabulary flowing from the principal speakers' mouths, it's safe to assume that there was no lack of spirituality at this particular Mass.

Enthusiasm ran rampant during the first-ever "Youth Sunday in the 19th Ward." The day was commemorated during the 10:30 a.m. Mass on Sunday, Feb. 28, at St. Augustine's Church, 410 Chili Ave.

Although people of all ages attended this service, the focus was clearly on young parishioners from the Roman Catholic Community of the 19th Ward. The three-parish cluster comprises St. Augustine Parish along with Our Lady of Good Counsel Church, 640 Brooks Ave., and St. Monica Church, 831 Genesee St.

Guest homilists for the Mass were Katie Braun, 17, a member of the cluster's newly formed high school youth group, and Mark Bunce, 25, who coordinates the 20- to 25-member junior high youth group.

Braun, a senior at the Aquinas Institute, encouraged her fellow teens to

step forward and form a larger youth community base.

"We'd like you to share your excitement and vibrancy — and to open up and share your fears with us, too," Braun implored.

Bunce emphasized the need for youths and adults to bridge their communication gap.

"We're different, but the same," he told the congregation.

Bunce then asked older parishioners to share their wisdom and experience with younger cluster members, and to "love the youth of the community and let them know what their strong points are."

Following the homily, Father Robert Werth, pastor, asked all junior-high and high-school youths to join him around the altar during the offertory. Fifteen young people came forward.

Father Werth also related to the congregation his desire to begin a monthly Youth Mass at St. Augustine as well as a monthly Children's Mass at Our Lady of Good Counsel.

"The sky's the limit," he said.

With all that transpired this past Sunday, the 19th Ward cluster seemed to have substantially addressed part of this week's diocesan Synod theme: "how to assist our youths and young adults." (Remaining topics in the current Synod theme include the elderly and those who care for them.)

Father Werth said original plans for the Mass evolved from a suggestion by the St. Augustine's liturgy committee to emphasize the Synod through an event such as this Mass.

Father Werth noted after the Mass that young people don't bask in the church spotlight nearly as often as they should.

"If youths are going to be important, they can't be pushed off to the side somewhere," he remarked.

The priest added that in order for such change to occur, adults must be willing to relinquish some of the traditional control they've held over youths.

"You can't empower people unless you give away your own power. This means we should give up our power, and get out of the way," Father Werth commented.

At the end of Mass, Father Werth encouraged everyone in the congregation to greet Braun and Bunce as they were leaving church. Judging from the long line which subsequently formed, it appeared that the homilists were receiving an abundance of support.

"We all have to realize that there has to be growth on everyone's part," Bunce told the *Catholic Courier*. "There's a spark here — actually, it's a fire. We want to make it a crackling flame."

Braun took Bunce's symbolism one step further. "It should be a bonfire, because everyone sits around a bonfire together," she concluded.

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