

Synod discussions provide hope for York teen

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

YORK — When she agreed to attend some parish Synod meetings last fall, Peggy Galbraith didn't know what to expect.

Originally, Galbraith's primary goal was to use these sessions for certification credit as a religious-education instructor. But the focus changed quickly from observer to active participant at her very first meeting.

"I was just awe-struck by the power in that room. After that, there was nothing that could keep me away," said Galbraith, a parishioner of the St. Thomas Aquinas/St. Lucy Community. She attends St. Thomas Aquinas Church, 175 Main St., Leicester.

During the fall portion of the diocesan Synod, Galbraith took part in two parish meetings along with the Livingston County Regional Synod.

Then, in early March, she was a perfect fit for the theme at the parish's initial spring Synod gathering: "How can we meet the special needs of youth and young adults, as well as the elderly and those who care for them?"

Although Galbraith's age was well linked to the theme, there was a decided discrepancy when comparing her 16 years against the ages of other St. Thomas Aquinas/St. Lucy synod participants.

"There were about 30 people at the (March) meeting, and the next-youngest was probably 35," Galbraith acknowledged.

Her mere presence, however, turned the meeting into a productive one.

"The adults were really surprised to see a younger person, but they took that into account and made that a focus," she said.

That day's recommendations regarding parish youths were eventually put forth at her area's most recent Regional Synod, held this past Saturday, May 22, at St. Mary Church, 13 North St., Geneseo.

During the early-March parish meeting, Galbraith emphasized a crying need for adult parishioners to find more ways to regularly involve teenagers in parish life.

"Once you get confirmed, then there's nothing, unless you serve on a board. Kids don't feel ownership of the parish," said Galbraith. "I know three people who haven't even been to church since their confirmation. Another confirmation group just got con-



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

Peggy Galbraith, a junior at York Central High School, stands outside her Leicester home. A parishioner at Leicester's St. Thomas Aquinas Church, Galbraith has been active in the Livingston County Regional Synods.

firmed (last week), and now they'll be lost — they'll just drift off."

Galbraith noted that the Roman Catholic faith must be repeatedly reinforced long before one's teen years.

"At the (March) Synod I was asked, 'When do you think a kid is lost?' I said that my third-grade (religious-education) kids still enjoy reading the Bible, but by the fifth or sixth grade, it can be like pulling teeth," Galbraith commented.

By the time one is a teenager, apathy can run rampant, she said. "It's hard to get kids to change something that they don't feel a connection with in the first place," she said.

Galbraith pointed out that this trend is reflective of the Catholic Church's perceived inability to adapt some of its traditional regulations for present-day living.

"A lot of kids don't see much point in showing up to a church that doesn't seem to be in touch with modern problems," she said. "I wish the Catholic Church would say, 'We love you (youths) even though we disagree with some of your ideas.'"

Galbraith is hopeful that parish officials will take decisive action on Synod

talks regarding the possibility of launching a parish youth program, or an arrangement where St. Thomas Aquinas/St. Lucy would form a youth group with other Livingston County parishes.

"I do think they're going to follow through on that," she said.

Vehicles such as youth-group dialogue, she said, are a vital supplement to the ritual of Sunday Mass.

"Kids in 11th and 12th grade don't need to quote from the Bible as much as they need to have a feeling for what Christ was about, what the church is about and what kind of life Christ would want us to live," she observed.

Galbraith ranks in the top five of her junior class at York Central High School. She is a three-sport athlete at York and also serves as a volunteer for her local Protect a Clean Environment

(PACE) chapter.

The 16-year-old aspires for a career as a doctor specializing in cancer research and treatment. Not surprisingly, Galbraith also plans to continue her extensive church activities once college begins, either with campus ministry or by teaching religious education.

Asked what makes her so devoted to her faith, Galbraith offered three reasons:

"It gives me a sense of security," she said. "I also do it because there are a lot of things wrong in the world, and the church is one of the most powerful institutions for change."

"And, I've been real lucky. I've been given good health and so has my family, and I think I'm grateful to some force a lot more powerful than me."

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