

# Tier teens advocate abstinence

By Mike Latona  
Staff writer

**ELMIRA** — Because premarital sex is no longer taboo subject matter in the media, a group of Southern Tier youths claims that it's more vital than ever to reaffirm Catholic principles on maintaining chastity until marriage.

"I'm sure a lot of people would rather not talk about it, but today you kind of have an obligation," said 17-year-old Jerry Gross.

"In our family we've already had discussions of sexuality," added Gross' 15-year-old brother Matt, 15. "Parents need to tell their kids."

Jill Prechtel, 15, noted that society's increasingly lax attitude toward sex among teenagers has forced the subject to be dealt with more openly.

"Whether you want to or not, you turn on MTV to find sex-oriented videos and talk shows," Prechtel noted.

Meanwhile, Janet Schwenkler noted that giving teens a proper perspective on premarital sex has always been a tricky task, but nowadays it's because the subject is too common — as opposed to previous generations' proclivity toward sweeping sex-related topics under the rug.

"Teenagers have lost their sense of modesty because (sex is) discussed so much," said Schwenkler, the former religious-education coordinator at St. Casimir's Church. "We've jumped from one extreme to the other. Now nobody seems to know what's right or wrong, and they don't know what to tell the kids."

Schwenkler is telling them to abstain, regardless of whether they hear otherwise. She played the lead role in encouraging Gross, Prechtel and 36 other members of the St. Casimir confirmation class to take an official pledge to remain chaste until marriage.

St. Casimir's efforts are part of a movement titled "True Love Waits." The ecumenical abstinence campaign was celebrated on a national level this past Friday, July 29, when pledge cards mailed in from around the country were placed on display in Washington, D.C.

Most of the St. Casimir youth members took their chastity vows in a ceremony conducted at the church this past May by Schwenkler and former pastor Father Eugene Weis, who is now pastor of St. Patrick's Church in Owego. During the ritual, youths were presented with sterling-silver rings they now wear as a reminder of their vow.

Both Prechtel and Michael Philpott, 14, pointed out that the vows occurred as they enter a period of their lives during which they're likely to encounter intense peer pressure about sex.

"It really is not a popular thing to wait to have sex until you're married," acknowledged Prechtel, who is about to enter her sophomore year at Notre Dame High School in Elmira.

"I thought (the ceremony) was a good idea. I knew it was something to help me hold on during these years," added Philpott, a homeschooler.

For Matt Gross, the challenge has already begun.

"There's a lot of pressure in my particular groups," said Gross, who — along with his brother — took their chastity vows in July. Matt is a sophomore-to-be at Corning East High School, and Jerry will soon be entering the Legionnaires of Christ Seminary in Connecticut.

Schwenkler remarked that the abstinence pledged "gives you that extra courage that you may not have had otherwise."

She added that those who took the vow are expected to fully adhere to their promise.

"If your word to God isn't any good,



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

(Clockwise from upper left) Michael Philpott, Matt Gross, Jill Prechtel and Jerry Gross of St. Casimir's Church in Elmira have all taken chastity vows as part of an abstinence program called 'True Love Waits.'

how is your word going to be to a future mate?," remarked Schwenkler, whose religious-education position at St. Casimir's was eliminated this past June when the parish clustered with St. Charles Borromeo Church in Elmira Heights.

Yet Schwenkler also pointed out that those who fail to maintain their chastity until marriage should still practice their vow as much as possible.

"If something happens where you do break this promise, it's not the end," she said.



Under the direction of Janet Schwenkler, Jerry Gross (left) and his brother, Matt, professed their chastity vows July 20 at Elmira's St. Casimir Church.

## EXTRA CREDIT

☉ **Danyl Gaiter**, a recent Our Lady of Mercy High School graduate, served as this year's May Day queen at the school's 62nd annual May Day celebration. She was selected by classmates and teachers for best exemplifying the Virgin Mary's virtues. Danyl is a parishioner at St. Joseph's Church in Penfield.



☉ Four students from diocesan high schools are this year's recipients of the Ralph Bunche Scholarship, which provides financial assistance during the first year of college. Those students are: **Cheryl Brennan** from Aquinas Institute; **Matasha Murrell** from Mercy; **Tamiya Powell** from Nazareth Academy; and **John Smart** from the Aquinas Institute.

☉ **Clark Jillson**, a parishioner of Weedsport's St. Joseph Church, part of the Northern Cayuga Cluster, recently graduated on the dean's honor list from the University of Wisconsin at Platteville.

☉ **Andrew M. Dollard**, who is entering the eighth grade at Johanna Perrin School in Fairport, was recently recognized for high achievement in three areas of the Scholastic Aptitude Test. Andrew scored markedly higher than the average college-bound high school senior in all areas, and was presented with an award by the Center for Advancement of Academically Talented Youth at Johns Hopkins University. He is a parishioner at Fairport's Assumption of Our Lady Church.



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Black Mountain Cloggers - 11am & Noon  
SageHeart Puppets - 1pm, 3pm & 5pm  
Soul Source-Upbeat Rhythm & Blues - 2pm & 4pm

SUNDAY

Jeff Peden-Stilt-Walking Juggler - 10am  
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