



Shannon Von Hagn, a parishioner at Elmira's Our Lady of Lourdes Church and member of the Diocesan Youth Committee, listens intently during a workshop at a National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministries leadership meeting. The April convocation was held at St. Mary Our Mother School in Horseheads.

S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

Elmira teen embraces her extra involvement

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

ELMIRA — It started with a simple phone call last September.

That night, Shannon Von Hagn recalls, her parish's new youth minister, Lisa Johnson, asked if she'd be interested in serving on the Diocesan Youth Committee.

Although Shannon complied, she admitted "I had really no idea what was going on."

Indeed, it was difficult to fathom how immensely her involvement with Catholic youths would grow in the next few months.

Certainly Shannon had not been idle up to that point. She had been an altar server at Our Lady of Lourdes Church for several years; sung in the church choir; and been actively involved in youth group as well.

Yet through a new concept in parish youth ministry and her duties with the Diocesan Youth Committee, Shannon's world has expanded quickly.

She noted that youth-group activities have become more plentiful since Johnson was hired last year as full-time youth minister for Our Lady of Lourdes and Eastside Catholic Parish.

"We're more into whole diocesan things. Before, we'd do a lot of things within our youth group and now we're doing things to help the community," said Shannon, 17. "People (in youth group) were a little iffy if they wanted to go the whole nine yards, but we've had pretty good success."

As far as social events go, Our Lady of Lourdes teens have occasionally linked up with Eastside Catholic Parish youths for get-togethers such as lock-ins and picnics. More recently, Shannon and friends from several Southern Tier parishes went on a white-water rafting excursion in Pennsylvania over Memorial Day weekend.

As a NYC member, Shannon has served on an "icebreaker committee" for the diocesan Junior High Youth Rally being held June 4 at the State University of New York College at Geneseo. NYC

members are also responsible for planning and staffing much of the Diocesan Youth Convention in early August. That gathering for high-schoolers will also take place at the Geneseo campus.

Shannon noted that she's already working hard on encouraging her Our Lady of Lourdes peers to become fellow participants in the second annual diocesan convention.

"We didn't go (last year). We knew about it, but we didn't have an adult who had that kind of time to take us," Shannon explained. "Now I'm recruiting people, saying, 'You have to go; you'll have fun, trust me!'"

Although Shannon is one of the few Southern Tier members on the NYC, she said she's grown close to other diocesan representatives through committee meetings held each month.

"It's awesome. They're just, like, the greatest people I've ever met," Shannon said. "This kind of stuff is important to me — being involved and talking with people who understand where I'm coming from. They have the same general conclusions."

Johnson noted that Shannon has embraced her added responsibilities with great enthusiasm.

"She does the best of all kids in either parish (Lourdes or Eastside) as far as fundraising," Johnson said. "She's a very all-around, active and caring community member."

"I guess the best way to put it is, she's living out her Christian faith."

At Elmira Free Academy, where Shannon is nearing the end of her junior year, she is an honor student and also performs with drama club and choir.

This jam-packed schedule, however, doesn't leave much time for her part-time job. Shannon admitted that she got into "a bit of a disagreement" at work about the amount of time she was taking off for upcoming parish and diocesan events, but her supervisor eventually relented after Shannon explained how important it was for her to attend.

"She just kind of sighed and said, 'All right, Shannon,'" the Elmira teenager laughed.

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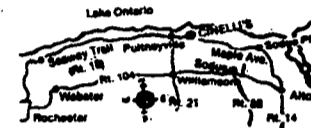
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