

ON THE MOVE

Bless me Father for I have sinned (I think)

Story by staff writer Mike Latona

Photograph by staff photographer S. John Wilkin

Do you believe that making your confession once or twice a year is sufficient? Do you think those confessionals at your church are strictly reserved for adults on Saturday afternoons?

Perhaps you're a regular churchgoer, but have either forgotten — or never been taught — the Catholic Church's position on the sacrament of reconciliation (penance). Therefore, you might be a little surprised at the following:

In "Reconciliation" — a manual used by the Rochester diocese for middle-school students making their first confession — there is no clear-cut number for how often one should make his or her confession. However, the manual states that "regular, frequent confession" will help you "overcome bad habits and bring you closer to God." Confession is emphasized especially at Lent and Advent.

On the other hand, this doesn't seem to be a procedure that very many teenagers are following these days.

Most of those interviewed for this story say they receive the sacrament of reconciliation twice a year at the most. Some were genuinely surprised to hear that confession can be practiced on a weekly basis. Others had barely even heard of the Act of Contrition — a prayer, expressing sorrow for one's sins, which the penitents sometimes recite to the priest before receiving absolution during the sacrament of penance.

Lisa Johnson, youth minister at Elmira's Eastside Catholic Parish and Our Lady of Lourdes Church, says these are not uncommon perceptions about the sacrament among today's teens.

Reconciliation, she said, "is not at the forefront of living out our faith anymore."

A couple of teens told us their parents didn't push confession because of their own negative experiences as children, such as when priests severely chastised them. In the case of 18-year-old Brian Fesetch, he didn't make his first confession until three years ago "because I had never really gotten around to it or been forced to."

Many of you also said that fear and unfamiliarity with the procedures have held you up from receiving the sacrament. If that's the case, then you might want to discuss these issues with your youth minister, religious-education coordinator or parish pastor.

Youth minister Johnson said that Southern Tier parishes encourage confession by offering group penance services for teens at Lent and Advent. Reconciliation is also a major part of diocesan retreats, she added.

After all, this is one of only two sacraments — along with Eucharist — which are offered on a frequent basis. And if you read a little further, these positive testaments to the power of the sacrament may even inspire you to make confes-

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