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Brian Gillis of Rochester's St. Anne Church believes that penance is the sacrament "you need the most."

sion more often. (Adults might find this worth reading, also!)

Brian Gillis, 14, a parishioner at St. Anne Church in Rochester, feels that the necessity for God's forgiveness is so important, penance is the sacrament "you need the most."

Brian Fesetch made his first confession at a diocesan teen retreat. He found he was able to

freely discuss many past problems in his life, and by the time he returned home, he felt as if a huge burden had been lifted.

"It was almost like I had a new life. Your past is behind you, and you're looking into the future," remarked Brian, a parishioner at Elmira's East-side Catholic Parish.

Brian is one of many teenagers who exemplify

the Catholic Church's increasing emphasis on readiness, rather than a particular age, for sacramental preparation.

Nicole Pachla, 16, from Church of the Good Shepherd in Henrietta, said she made her first confession at the age of 9 but "felt like I had to find something" to list as sins to confess. She also contended that she was too young at the time to fully understand the meaning of penance.

However, as she grew older, Nicole felt the sacrament took on deeper meaning.

"When I went last year, I felt really cleansed when I came out," she said.

Ryan Johnston, 18, from St. John of Rochester Church in Perinton, noted that teens often make their first confession during reconciliation services at diocesan retreats. After group prayer and discussion, they are encouraged — but not forced — to receive the sacrament.

"A majority of the people are very hesitant at first, but they feel they have a lot to get off their shoulders," Ryan said.

Because telling your sins is not always a comfortable experience, Nicole Pachla noted that a compassionate priest is vital to the process.

If a priest were stern in the confessional, Nicole felt, "Nobody would come back."

Brian Gillis of St. Anne says the priests who have heard his confessions are "real nice." A compassionate approach, he feels, enables the confessor to discuss acts of wrongdoing that may not be easily voiced anywhere else.

"It's kind of easier than if you had to admit things to your family members," Brian said.

Peri Eilers, 16, from Good Shepherd, said she wasn't even required to meet one-on-one with a priest when she made her first confession in sixth grade. She attended a group penance service for children during which they wrote down their sins and then threw the pieces of paper into a large container of water. At that point, their sins were declared forgiven.

St. John of Rochester's Margaret Parisi, 15, noted that this approach is much different from her father's childhood experience surrounding sin and penance.

"He felt that almost anything he did was a sin," Margaret commented.

Although this sentiment may be a little extreme, Margaret did agree that the sacrament is not meaningful unless you feel badly about your sins and wish to turn away from them.

"The only way you'll feel forgiven is if you truly feel you're sorry," she stated.

Obviously, opinions vary widely regarding the practice of confession. However, Ryan pointed out that the *act* of penance shouldn't be dwelt upon as much as its *purpose*.

"I've always learned it's so God can forgive your sins," he stated.

Are you still a little uncertain about the sacrament? Sure, it's a tough subject — but it's also something you don't have to go through alone, youth minister Johnson pointed out.

"If you haven't tried it, try it. Or, if you're unsure, talk to somebody who has been through it," she said.

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When you've perfected your design, send it to OTM Tees, Catholic Courier, 1150 Buffalo Road, Rochester, NY 14624-1899. With your awesome design, be sure to include your name, address, age, and school (and your phone number if you want us to call you, should you win!).

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