

YOUNG ADULTS

Future priest hopes to use untapped resource

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

Frank Fusare, a transitional deacon to be ordained to the priesthood in Rochester June 1, laid out a pretty good reason to be interested in ministry to young adults: He's one of them.

"I'd like to meet people my own age and work with them," said Deacon Fusare, 34, during a phone interview with the *Catholic Courier* from St. Mary's Seminary in Baltimore, Md., where he concluded his studies last week.

Not that Deacon Fusare undervalues any other age group in the church. It's just that he thinks every parish should actively encourage its young adults to participate in the church.

"In all the places where I have been ... all of the people who are the most active are the young adults," he said.

One such place was St. Anne's Parish in Rochester where he served from June 1993 to July 1994. There, he helped inaugurate a young adult group. Contrary to the popular perception that young adults are primarily interested in having a good time, he found a group of young adults at the parish eager to learn about

their faith and express it socially.

"They wanted to have some kind of prayer gatherings," Deacon Fusare recalled. "They were also looking for people to come in and speak on topics."

Among the activities the group held were young adult Masses and educational forums on such subjects as the New Age movement, he said.

"They were quite enthusiastic," Deacon Fusare said of the young adults. He also noted that many young adults were also interested in volunteer outreach projects that serve both the poor and their fellow parishioners.

"They were the ones that I saw were quite willing to help out in the parish," he observed of St. Anne's young adults.

Many of Deacon Fusare's insights are shared by young adult Catholic experts across the country working with the U.S. bishops to prepare a young adult pastoral letter to be published this fall.

As reported by Catholic News Service, last year a series of "town meetings" between bishops and young adults were held in at least three dozen U.S. dioceses. Information gathered at the town meetings will be used to draft the pastoral plan for young adults, to be voted on by

the U.S. bishops in November 1996.

"We are depriving the church of a great resource by not having enough creative (to attract young adults), and we're not working hard enough to involve young adults as productive Christians in the community," said Auxiliary Bishop William C. Newman of Baltimore at one town meeting.

"We live in a different world today, where young people are pulled in conflicting directions," said Auxiliary Bishop John H. Ricard at another of the five Baltimore sessions. "Some of those directions are contrary to their faith, so we feel that we need to be part of the counterculture that calls young adults back to the core Gospel values."

Several participants in a meeting in the Diocese of Youngstown, Ohio — along with others around the country — said the church seems to lose interest in its younger members once they are confirmed and graduate from high school.

Confirmation is "treated as a graduation from religious education," said Steven Nonkes of Christ Sun of Justice Parish in Troy, N.Y., a participant in a town meeting with Albany Bishop Howard J. Hubbard.

Bishop Hubbard said he considered young adults "the most neglected and under-served segment in our church."

Indeed, Deacon Fusare echoed Bishop Hubbard's comments, calling young adults "an untapped resource."

"It's a group that's just waiting to be used," he said.

The diocese is organizing a delegation of young adults to attend the World Youth Day conference in Paris, France, which runs Aug. 17-25, 1997. World Youth Day is sponsored, in part, by the Vatican's Pontifical Council for the Laity.

The diocesan delegation is open to Catholics between the ages of 18 and 35, and also to a limited number of teenagers who will be at least 17 by Dec. 1, 1997. The cost is approximately \$2,000 per person, and includes air and ground transportation, hotel, breakfasts and an additional day of sightseeing in Paris.

Applications and an initial deposit of \$250 are due by July 1, 1996. Additional installments of approximately \$600 each are due on Sept. 1 and Dec. 1, 1996, and on April 1, 1997.

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