



Deanna Moroni, a parishioner at St. Cecilia's Church in Rochester, greets a fellow retreat-goer during the kiss of peace.

Kate McKee, from St. John the Evangelist Parish in Spencerport, and Dan Kwiecien, from St. Mary the Assumption Parish in Scottsville, lead their peers and their families in a prayerful hymn. Kwiecien, a veteran of 10 retreats, served as a teen leader during the May 3-5 "Awakening Faith" retreat.

I felt like I knew everybody already," said Maria, 16. With the cloak of awkwardness and uncertainty removed, Maria found she was able to launch headlong into discussions.

"I'm more open, and can express my feelings if I want to," she remarked. Dan Kwiecien, from St. Mary of the Assumption Church in Scottsville, is a

veteran of 10 diocesan retreats. As a teen leader at Awakening Faith this month, he stressed the importance of drawing people together — yet still accepting them as individuals.

"You tell people to be themselves, and not be afraid of who they are," said Dan, 18. "After my first couple retreats, I started to find who I really was. You find what gifts you have, and what you can do to build other people up."

Dan has further utilized his leadership skills by serving two years on the Diocesan Youth Committee. He also plans to assist the youth-ministry program at his parish even after he begins

college this fall.

"You just keep wanting to do more and more," he added. "When you know you've helped someone, you get that warm, fuzzy feeling inside."

Another person who was energized into leadership roles through retreats is Ann Murphy, youth minister at St. Christopher's Church in Chili. She attended several diocesan retreats in the mid-1980s that were coordinated by the late Father David Mura.

"I was, like, a retreat junkie. I loved just packing up and going away, knowing other people had feelings about God like I do. It totally impacted my life," Murphy remarked. She later planned campus ministry retreats while attending Nazareth College, and became involved in parish youth ministry shortly after she graduated.

Murphy said the level of sharing on retreat weekends is hard to describe in any textbook sense.

"It's like the spirit moves the whole thing. I really believe that," she stated.

However, don't get the impression that every moment of a retreat is dedicated to deep, thought-provoking exercises. At Stella Maris, participants also enjoyed fun-filled activities such as hackey sack, basketball games, impromptu singing and dancing, and LOTS of soda and snacks. (Not to mention a dynamite

Richard Simmons impression from Dan.)

The Awakening Faith gathering this month marked the final diocesan retreat for the 1995-96 school year. There have now been 13 Awakening Faith and seven Encountering Christ retreats — with a total of 1,041 participants — since Michael Theisen, diocesan youth coordinator, launched these programs in 1992.

Four Awakening Faith and two Encountering Christ retreats are on the slate for 1996-97. Though many teens hook into these retreats through their parish youth group or religious-education program, Theisen emphasized that anyone who wants to participate is welcome.

"These are open to any youth in the diocese," Theisen said.

EDITORS' NOTE: "Awakening Faith" and "Encountering Christ" retreats will begin in November 1996. To obtain a registration form, call Jeannie Raisbeck at 716/328-3210, ext. 279. Those living outside Monroe County may call 1-800/388-7177, ext. 279.

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