

On the MOVE

Priest & Pal

It was a typical group of golfing buddies: lots of laughs, some moments of frustration — and an unlimited supply of good-natured ribbing.

Following an unsatisfying nine holes at Victor Hills Golf Club in Victor, Father Brian Cool remarked that "there's a certain amount of frustration out there."

"For some more than others," Chris Hart shot back.

A short time later, Father Cool examined his score, which had been tabulated by the threesome's other member, Tim Jensen.

"Kids count funny these days," Father Cool muttered.

Over lunch, Chris recalled that he had worried about losing his temper in front of Father Cool when they played their first round together three years ago.

"Then I found out he was just the same as me, maybe worse," Chris, 17, said.

"He's the instigator," Tim, 18, agreed.

This kind of loose banter is commonplace among Chris, Tim and Father Cool, who have golfed together several times over the past few summers. Even so, Tim still finds it unusual that he can talk to a priest so freely.

"It gives you a totally different perception," Tim said. "When he's up there giving a homily, you think 'I was just playing golf with him.' It's weird."

Golf is one of many activities that has bonded Father Cool with young people during his three-year stint as priest intern at Perinton's St. John of Rochester Church. He has also been known to accompany youths to restaurants, ice cream parlors, Rochester Red Wing baseball games, rock concerts and even rock-climbing expeditions.

Father Cool believes that it's vital for priests to work closely with youths outside of the regular church setting.

"I think it makes the church more credible, going beyond the institutional things. This gets me out into the world. I understand (teens') lives a lot better by being out there with them,"

said Father Cool, who left St. John of Rochester June 25 to become parochial vicar at St. Mary's Church in Canandaigua.

Another advocate of active involvement with youths is Father Charlie Manning, pastor of St. Pius V Church in Cohocton and Sacred Heart Church in Perkinsville. Father Manning regularly attends youth-group events conducted by the two parishes.

"He likes to joke around a lot. He doesn't take things seriously all the time," said Amanda Adams, 13, from Sacred Heart.

However, Amanda added, Father Manning's show of friendship makes her feel comfortable approaching him on serious matters as well.

"You can talk to him about just about anything," Amanda stated.

Father Manning also conducted a "shadow" program this past year for boys at St. Pius V, Sacred Heart and St. Mary's Church in Dansville. The youths accompanied Father Manning as he pursued his duties, including an October weekend when they attended six Masses and also took on liturgical roles by serving as eucharistic ministers, altar servers and lectors. In addition, the shadow program included discussion and reflection sessions.

Ben Van Durme, 16, pointed out that Father Manning's commitment to this project was admirable because he is also the pastor of two churches.

"I wondered how he had the time to take us around. He was so busy," commented Ben, a St. Mary's parishioner and Diocesan Youth Committee member.

Another priest Ben holds in high esteem is Father Joe Catanise, the former pastor at St. Mary's. Ben recalls nights when he and his cousin, Elijah Cooper, would hang out with Father Catanise at the St. Mary's rectory, munching on pizza and wings and watching movies.

Along the way, Ben added, Father Catanise helped him develop a strong spiritual life through their discussions about the Catholic faith.

"One of the main reasons I'm on NYC is because of Father Joe," he said. Father Catanise was recently appointed as campus minister of

Rochester Institute of Technology's Catholic Campus Parish.

Father Cool, 30, had similar experiences as a teen with Father Catanise. At that time, Father Catanise was serving in Father Cool's home parish of St. Mary's in Auburn.

"We would go to concerts together. It was more than just seeing him on Sundays," Father Cool recalled.

The "buddy system," so to speak, is employed by priests of all ages. A good example is Father Gennaro Ventura, a retired priest who frequently staffs diocesan retreats.

Better known as "Ace" Ventura to the younger set, the 77-year-old priest makes a regular practice of living up retreats with his wit and enthusiasm. During a closing Mass at Camp Maris last month, he even performed a dance step resembling Michael Jackson moon walking, provoking roars of the young crowd.

"I thought he was hysterical," Karen Ernst, 16, from St. Cecilia Church in Irondequoit.

Karen also got a chance to meet Father Ventura earlier that week and some friends set out for a walk by Conesus Lake.

"We ended up talking for 15 minutes. He was just very friendly. How we were doing on the retreat was called."

In the Rochester Diocese, the tradition begins right at the top. H. Clark stayed for entire weeks at two Diocesan Youth Conventions. He journeyed to Denver with other youths for World Youth Day.

Ben noted that the bishop's relationship with some teens at last year's

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from the Catholic Courier

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