

At first, the idea of being in a leadership role was downright frightening to Mande Mastin.

Mande was nominated in 1993 to serve on the newly formed Diocesan Youth Committee. At that time, she said, she was apprehensive about the thought of helping lead other Catholic teens in the diocese.

"I didn't really want to do it," recalled Mande, 18, a parishioner at St. Mary's Church in Honeoye. "I thought nobody would be cool. I felt really nervous and self-conscious, and I didn't want the responsibility of being a representative for the whole Genesee Valley."

From 1993 to 1995, Mande devoted much of her time on the DYC to creating and planning diocesan events, staffing retreats and conventions, and acting as a youth contact for her region of the diocese. This interaction with diocesan youths has caused Mande to view her leadership abilities in a new light.

"It's changed me so much, and made me who I am today," Mande said. "I enjoy leading people, and I feel confident getting up in front of people now."

Mande's experience shows that, in many instances, an opportunity is all that a young person needs to prove himself or herself as an effective leader. That's the opinion of Michael Theisen, youth coordinator for the Diocese of Rochester.

"I firmly believe that leaders are formed, not born," stated Theisen, who conceived the idea of forming the Diocesan Youth Committee.

Theisen admitted that some people adapt to leadership positions more readily than others. "It's like learning to ride a bike. Some people learn faster," he said.

Yet this fact, he emphasized, is not a good enough reason to exclude anyone as a potential leader.

"If you use the term 'born leader' or act out of that assumption," Theisen said, "then you're negating a majority of the population who may not seem to possess those natural abilities, but have the raw talent."

Theisen added that different situations require varying styles of leadership. However, he said, that's often not the way society views leadership.

"We tend to stereotype the leader as someone who can get up in front of a crowd and command attention," Theisen said.

Michelle Asiello, a current Diocesan Youth Committee member, is a leader who goes directly against that stereotype. Michelle noted that she has been described as a "quiet leader."

"I take roles that aren't really boisterous. I make sure everything's set up and ask if anything needs to be done," said Michelle, 18, from the Corn-ing-Painted Post Roman Catholic Community. "Quiet leaders are the ones who want to make sure everything is shipshape and ready to go."

The more outgoing leaders, she explained, "might be talking to a lot of people, so it's easy for them to overlook things."

Teen leaders not only vary in their approach, but also in age. Unlike 18-year-olds Mande and Michelle, Frank Archetko and Andreanna Iannettone are already veteran religious-education instructors at St. Ambrose Church in Irondequoit although both are just 15.

Frank taught second-graders this past year, and also led a group of first-graders at the parish's Vacation Bible School Aug. 5-9.

"I enjoy being a leader," Frank said. "People look up to you and give you respect."

Frank has discovered that he can command respect from his students and still have fun. He said he offers prizes to stu-



Frank Archetko (above) straightens Jordan Carbone's medal while Kevin Holahan and Eddie Deivre (left to right) look on at the Vacation Bible School at St. Ambrose Church, Irondequoit. At left, Andreanna Iannettone helps Amanda Carlile (immediate left) with her craft project while Giovanna LaPorta (far left) concentrates on her own project. Frank and Andreanna practice leadership by volunteering at the Bible school.

Theisen, are not self-centered. Instead, they are "other-centered."

"They go beyond themselves to think about how their actions might impact others," Theisen explained. "You have to ask yourself, 'Where am I going and where do I want to take them?'"

Mande believes that successful leaders are those who promote harmony, not anxiety.

"You don't want people to fear you. You want to have a good relationship," she said. "The better people get along, the better production you're going to have."

Frank at St. Ambrose echoed Mande's observations. He enjoyed the prestige of leadership roles, he said, but some leaders "think they're just on a giant platform and get carried away. People lose confidence in that person, and they go from being a friend to people not wanting to know that person. Then there's a lot of bickering and chaos."

The leadership workshop at the Diocesan Youth Convention, held Aug. 2-4 at SUNY College at Genesee, provided ample evidence to support this contention.

As part of the workshop, teens served in designated "leadership" roles by directing small groups to form artistic creations out of straws and pins.

In groups where the leader shouted out directions and made constant criticisms, the final designs appeared

unimaginative and disorderly. The most elaborate models came from groups whose leaders took an active part in the construction process and also exchanged helpful ideas.

Contrary to what some dictators may believe, Frank said effective leaders are those who empower the people they're leading.

"I want people to follow my example, not rely on me," Frank said.

Michelle, also, believes strongly in the idea of being a good example and role model.

"There's somebody out there who might be looking up to me, so I have to be the best I can be," she said.



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