



during the recent "Gifted to Serve" conference. The event, held in April at Guardian Angels Church in Henrietta, was attended by teens who wish to perform liturgical ministry.

In addition, Miller said, the diocese is offering a "Day of Singing and Ringing" — for vocalists in grades three through eight — this October.

"If we can get kids involved early in various musical groups, hopefully we're not going to lose them when they're older," Miller said.

Groups such as Morningstar allow teens to mesh their vocal talents with those of their peers. A similar opportunity led Tracy Gaskin, 18, to the teen music program at St. Christopher's Church in Chili.

Tracy is a five-year member of the St. Christopher's group. She lists such modern church tunes as "On Eagle's Wings," "Lord of the Dance" and "Here I Am, Lord" among her favorites. In addition, she said, tunes with upbeat paces seem to generate a greater vocal input from the congregation — particularly from younger parishioners.

"Faster music is more appealing to the youth," Tracy said.

The St. Christopher's group has also helped draw out the singing

abilities of Tracy's brother, Andy. He became a part of the ensemble two years ago.

"I didn't sing while I was sitting down (in the pews). I didn't like singing before," Andy, 14, said.

Andy originally joined the group as a trombonist. Now, he devotes nearly all of his efforts to singing.

Andy added that he became involved through the encouragement of his sister and the group's director, Ann Murphy.

Without a bit of coaxing, Tracy said, she isn't sure that many teens would dare to sing — either in a choir or in any other part of the church.

"The teenagers won't do it because it's not cool. They'll think, 'What if my friends see me singing? What if they know I believe in God?' It bothers me, but I know it's a part of growing up," Tracy said.

To trigger teen participation, Tracy added, all parishes should offer lively tunes along with the traditional songs.

"The youth are going to be what what keeps the parish alive. If the youth aren't interested at all, then the church is going to fail," Tracy stated. She now serves as choir director at Bucknell University, where she is beginning her sophomore year.

Andy pointed out that teenage boys, especially, might be hesitant about singing.

"Most guys my age know their voices crack," Andy said. "Instead of being humiliated, they would rather not sing — no matter where they are."

Tracy pointed out that boys may also feel more peer pressure than girls not to sing in church.

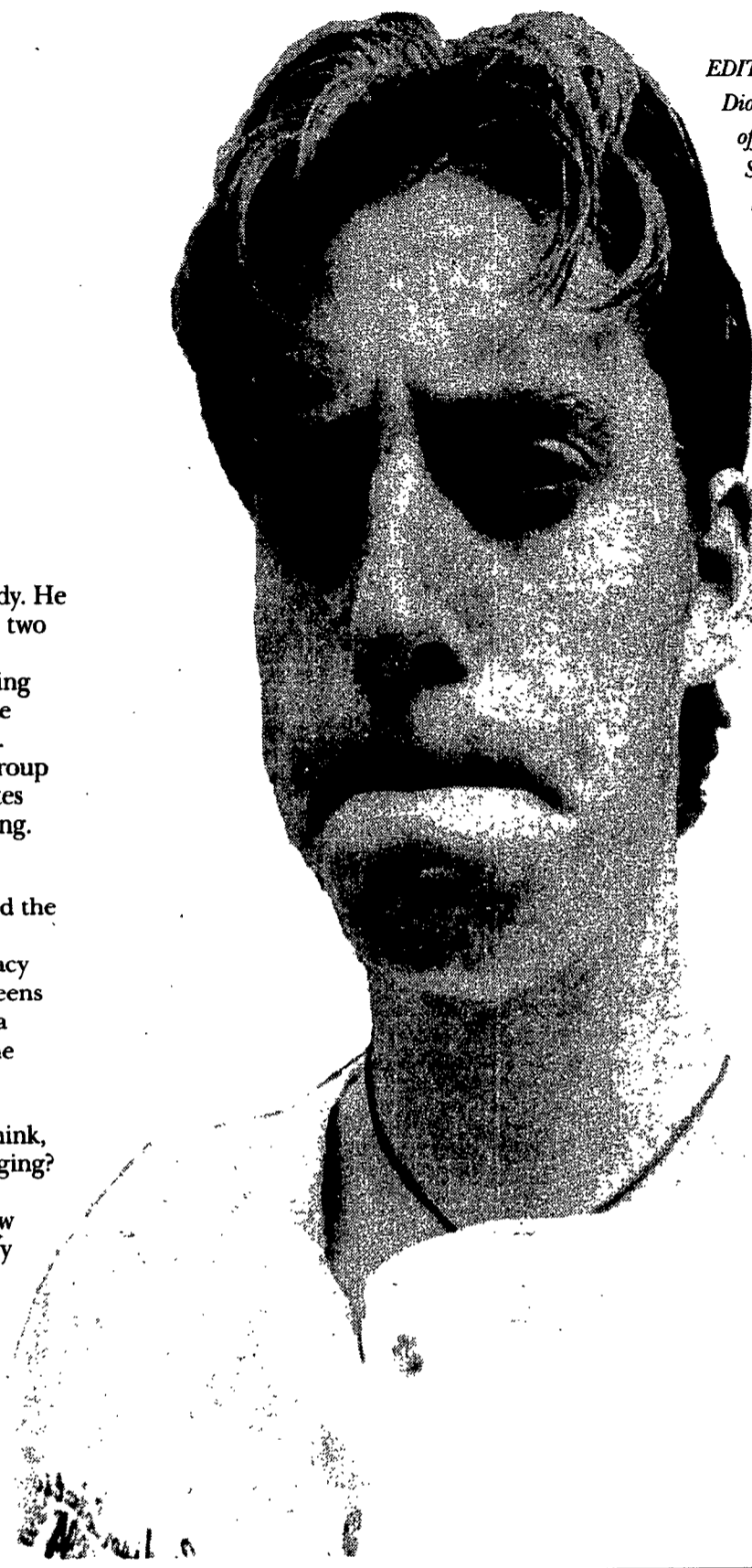
"Guys tend to be more into sports and less into the arts. At their church, they might be more into being a lector than singing," she remarked.

Matt Fields, 18, discovered this syndrome at McQuaid Jesuit High School. He graduated from the all-boys' school in June.

"I hardly ever sang at all at McQuaid," Matt said. "At the Masses, hardly anybody sang."

However, when Matt attends liturgies at Rochester's St. John the Evangelist Church (Humboldt Street), he said he "usually doesn't mind singing." This is mainly, he said, because most of the congregation sings.

"If everybody else is singing, I'll sing along," Matt said.



EDITORS' NOTE: The Diocese of Rochester is offering a "Day of Singing and Ringing" Saturday, Oct. 26. The event will be held from 9:15 a.m. to 3 p.m. at St. Theodore's Church, 168 Spencerport Road. It is open to children's vocal and handbell choirs, in grades three through eight, as well as children's choir directors. For details, call Ginny Miller at 716/328-3210, ext. 345.

Tracy agreed that singing at Mass is largely a chain-reaction matter.

"If people around us were not singing and I was thinking about getting involved, I probably wouldn't," Tracy remarked.

Adam wishes that worshipers of all ages would view singing as a joyful and spiritual experience.

"Mass, at times, can tend to get a little boring. But if everyone's singing, you get that sense of a parish community. You're not just there because you're supposed to be," Adam explained.

Though the Leszyks enjoy participating in Morningstar, Matt also said that he respects others people's unwillingness to lift their voices to the sky.

"I don't think you should publish in the news bulletin, 'More people should sing,'" Matt Leszyk remarked. "Most people are self-conscious."

On the other hand, Matt Fields' brother, Justin, says that people shouldn't hold back for fear of

being ridiculed.

"I'm not perfect, either," said Justin, 12. "But at least you're making the effort."

Matt Fields agreed that off-key voices are better than no voices at all.

"They're trying. So they're doing more than some people," he said.

And, according to Matt Leszyk, it's perfectly acceptable to try as hard as you like.

"Some people really let it out," Matt said. "But if that's their way of praising God, then there's nothing you can really criticize."

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