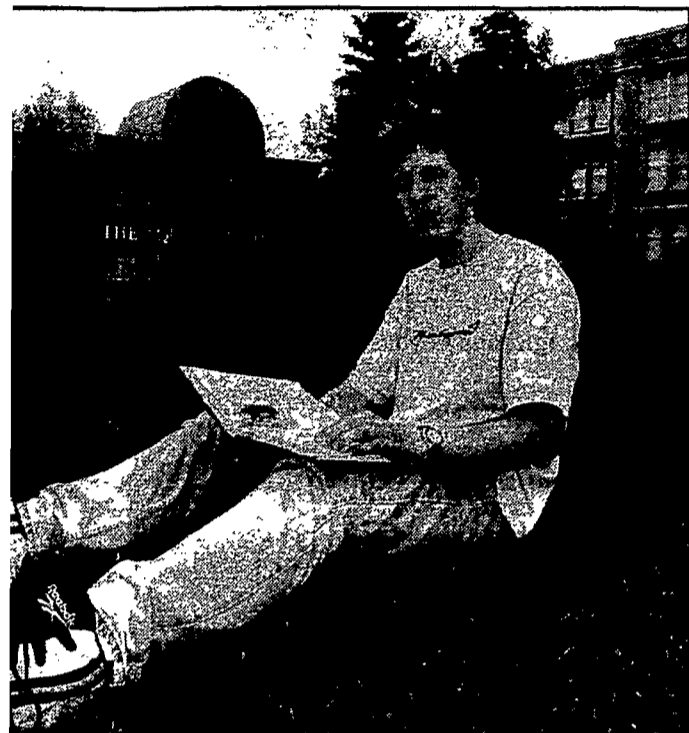


Together, better off we'll BE

Catholicism and other faiths



major difference that stands out to her, she said, "is that there's a woman minister (at Fairport United Methodist Church) and a male priest (at St. John of Rochester)."

Julie observed that the Fairport Methodists don't celebrate the Eucharist every week, and they also focus more heavily on long readings. And fellow Methodist Ryan pointed out that he wasn't aware that Catholics genuflect when they enter and exit a pew.

Deacon Brian McNulty, coordinator of the diocesan Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, said that the Neels are typical of many households who have what he called "mixed" marriages — parents of different faiths. He stressed that it's vital for parents to make clear to teens the differences in those faiths.

"How are parents taking the responsibility to teach?" Deacon McNulty remarked. He added that these teachings will enable their children to say, "How can I look at my life and make sense out of the differences?"

Deacon McNulty stated that in marriages combining two faiths; the Catholic parent is required by his or her faith to do everything possible to encourage the child toward becoming a Catholic.

"The promise is that they'll do their best, and we assume that they'll do that," he said.

However, Deacon McNulty added, this influence does not require the child to choose Catholicism.

"The stipulation is that the parent will try," he said. "If the child chooses not to (become Catholic), has the parent failed? If the kid chooses to become Roman Catholic, does that mean that the Methodist lost? If we approach this as a contest, I think we've missed the point."

The point for parents to get across, Deacon McNulty said, is to ask, "How do we see the grace of God in our lives regardless of tradition?"

In addition to parental influence, Deacon McNulty said that youth groups are also good environments for teens to

become more aware of other faiths. He added that ecumenical service projects in many towns — such as Crop Walks to raise funds for the hungry — give teens an opportunity to ask questions about each other's faith.

"The kids are walking and sometimes it comes up. Hopefully we can give intelligent answers," Deacon McNulty remarked.

Michelle Hill, from St. Joseph's Church in Wayland, enjoys her involvement in an annual ecumenical event. Each Good Friday, various churches in Wayland join up for a "cross walk." The walk leads up a steep hill with a cross at the top. Participants observe the Stations of the Cross along the way.

Michelle stated that the spirituality of the cross walk makes togetherness — rather than differences — among Catholics and Protestants the prevailing theme.

"There are quite a few different groups. But when you're on it, you don't really pay attention to what church you're from," Michelle, 16, said.

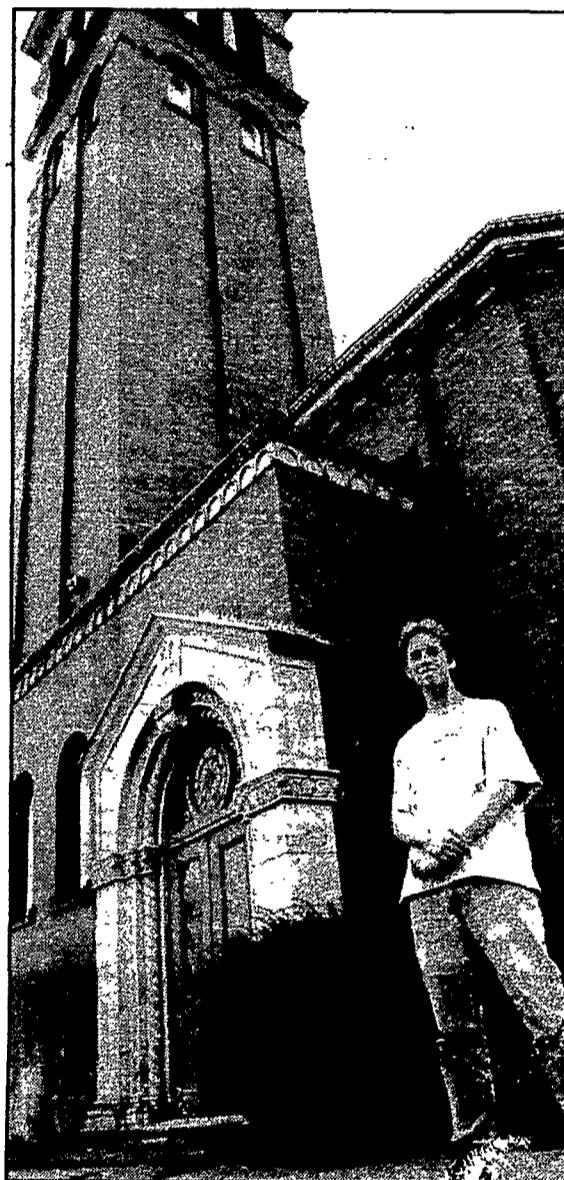
Gretchen and Jill from Ithaca feel that God would not favor a policy in which Catholics did not associate with Christians of other faiths.

"If you're not accepting of other Christians, then that's kind of going against what you're supposed to believe," Gretchen pointed out.

"I feel like everyone's the same, no matter what religion they are," Jill added. "I just go (to the Baptist church) to learn about God."

Ryan agreed that people should remember that the structure is not as important as the *intent* of that structure.

"If you go to Catholic Mass, it's different from 'Methodist Mass.' But the thing I remember is that the same thing gets across," Ryan added.



Ryan Lawlor, a parishioner at Grace Methodist Church (above), is also a student at Aquinas Institute (center) and is helping to organize a youth group combining teens from Grace Church and Holy Rosary Church (left).

Julie — who is one of the few Catholics in her junior class at Allendale-Columbia School in Pittsford — noted the potential social damage if people associated only with those who belonged to their faith.

"There wouldn't be a lot of people to talk to," she concluded.

job." That's the spirit of ecumenism, which is defined as the practice of promoting cooperation or better understanding among differing faiths.

Ryan also feels very much at home in the Sacred Heart youth group. He explained that such discussion themes as Bible interpretation and abortion are common among Christians.

Ryan added that youth group members asked his church affiliation only once.

"It wasn't a big deal. They're all my friends and I get along with them," he said.

Jill Barriere and Gretchen Kirchgessner have also experienced two faiths. They're parishioners at Immaculate Conception Church in Ithaca, where they attend Sunday Mass on a regular basis. However, they have also attended several services at their neighborhood church, First Baptist Church of Enfield.

Gretchen, 15, added that she enjoys the Baptist church because she sees many of her friends and neighbors there.

"We've been on trips and had a really good time," Gretchen said.

Julie and Abby Neel reside in a household with two faiths, due to the fact that their father is Catholic and their mother is Methodist. Julie is a parishioner at St. John of Rochester Church, whereas Abby has attended both Catholic and Methodist services but is not yet baptized in either faith.

Abby said she's noticed several similarities in the rituals at both churches. One

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