

How loud is your voice in your parish?

The guidelines were formulated over a one-year period by the diocesan Office of Youth Ministry and Office of Liturgy. They were approved by Bishop Clark and the diocesan Priests' Council this month.

Based on these directives, youths are permitted to be fully integrated into such roles as eucharistic ministers; lectors; ushers/hospitality ministers; cantors; instrumentalists; choir members; altar servers; church decoration committee members; and liturgical dancers.

This policy will offer teens a presence that, in many parishes, has been reserved for adults only. Yet Joan Workmaster, director of the Office of Liturgy, said there's no good reason why teens cannot thrive in the same roles. She pointed out that altar servers assume large responsibilities at an early age.

"We ask very young people, as altar servers, to do very complicated things with a whole host of directions," Workmaster said.

Michael Theisen, diocesan youth coordinator, said the new guidelines are designed to eliminate the "fears and stereotypes about what a child can or cannot do."

Youths, according to Nick, "have the capability to pick up on something really quickly."

The new diocesan directives do not specify age limits, meaning that liturgical involvement doesn't necessarily exclude grade-school students. However, Theisen said that adolescents are "the age group most likely to be encouraged."

Much of the policy's intent is already being carried out at Church of the Assumption in Fairport. According to youth-group member Chris Nadler, teens are allowed to become eucharistic ministers and lectors following their confirmation.

"Being confirmed means you're an adult in the church. You have the same say as anyone else," Chris, 18, stated.

Workmaster said, however, that the new guidelines open liturgical involvement to anyone by reasons of baptism. She noted that Chapter I of the

Second Vatican Council's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy calls for "the full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy, and to which Christian people... have a right and obligation by reasons of baptism."

"Nobody ever said you had to be confirmed," Workmaster said. "Everyone just assumed it."

Despite the stipulation regarding confirmation, Chris said his parish has been very receptive to teen involvement in "adult" roles. Not only is Chris a lector and folk-group member, but he's also serving a one-year term on Church of the Assumption's pastoral council.

"I'm obviously not 40 years old, but I try and act mature. And when I say things, I say them out of concern for the parish," Chris said.

Chris noted that he is participating in financial discussions surrounding roof repairs, a new organ and the acquisition of a new parish life center.

"I'm anything but quiet at these meetings," he remarked with a laugh.

Brian Vallimont said he strongly favors any policy that enables teens to have an active voice in their parish.

"It's something I feel is important — that we're recognized in the church, that we shouldn't be passive members," said

January 15, 1997



Dear Pastors and Pastoral Administrators:

In my recent pastoral letter on the Eucharist, "From East to West, A Perfect Offering," I touched upon five values that I have asked every person and every parish in this Diocese to reflect upon in light of our ongoing dialogue concerning the centrality of the Eucharist. The first sentence of that first value calls upon us to remember that "we are all participants in the risen life of Christ through the grace of baptism and our participation in the sacraments."

In light of this basic right of all the baptized to be full, conscious and active members of our Eucharistic celebrations, it is with great excitement and hope that I recommend strongly the enclosed guidelines calling for the full integration of young people into the liturgical life and ministries of the parish.

With the recommendation of these guidelines, it is my prayerful hope that the parishes in our Diocese will be blessed with the energy, lively spirit and zealous enthusiasm that our young people can contribute to our Eucharist celebrations through their active involvement. This can serve as a significant and intentional step toward the ongoing faith formation of our young people as we deliberately reach out and invite them to full participation at our common table.

It is my hope and expectation that you, your parish staff, liturgy committees and youth ministry groups read, discuss and begin implementing the enclosed guidelines immediately, beginning with the active recruitment and training of young people for the various liturgical ministries in your community.

I am pleased to offer the support and training services of both our Office of Liturgy and of Youth Ministry. Joan Workmaster, Ginny Miller and Michael Theisen are designing a program aimed at training parish staff and appointed volunteers on how to implement these guidelines and train young people for full integration in their parish's liturgical celebrations.

As always, I look forward to your cooperation as we call upon our young people and let them know that they are indeed gifted to serve.

With every good wish, I remain,
Your Brother in Christ,
Matthew H. Clark
+Bishop Matthew H. Clark

Brian, 18, from St. Mary's Church in Honeoye. He is a folk-group member in his parish.

"We're getting older and more mature," Nick added. "We should be treated like adults."

In order for this goal to succeed, Brian said that adults must display a welcoming attitude toward teens.

"I would say (teens) are given enough opportunity, but they need to be made aware of the opportunity," Brian said.

Theisen agreed, noting that "a bulletin announcement is not going to do it."

To help adults promote the new liturgical directives, Theisen said the diocese is planning training workshops for parish staff members, liturgy committees and youth ministers.

Olivia Breese pointed out teens, also, play a pivotal role in the success or failure of this policy.

"The kids just have reservations," said Olivia, 17, a cantor at St. Dominic's Church in Shortsville. "They've been really reluctant to step up and try something."

Olivia stated that some teens are self-

conscious about being in the public eye. Others, she said, could be victims of "that peer pressure garbage."

However, Theisen said that if a few teens are willing to get the ball rolling, others will follow suit.

"Once the young person is in that role, he or she becomes a model in that parish," Theisen said.

A true sign of success, Chris remarked, would be if a parish stopped distinguishing its ministries by age group.

"I don't even think of it as 'Chris Nadler, teenager.' I think of it as 'Chris Nadler, lector,'" he said of his liturgical duties. "There's no asterisk next to my name on the schedule saying 'youth.'"

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