

On the MOVE

Story by Mike Latona • Photograph by Kurt B

She had lived in Rochester for less than a week. She knew nobody in her neighborhood. She was nervously awaiting her first day at a new school. Her thoughts often drifted back to the friends she had left behind in Maryland.

Then, a turning point occurred for Kathryn Rulison when she attended her first Sunday Mass at St. Monica's Church last September.

After Mass another teen, Ben Eberlein, approached her. Ben introduced himself, asked Kathryn her name, and invited her to attend a youth-group meeting that night at St. Augustine's Church.

Kathryn, 14, recalled that her initial reaction was one of surprise. "Normally, people don't come up to you and start talking if they don't know you," Kathryn said.

She admitted that she was also leery about attending a gathering with a bunch of strangers.

"But my mom said, 'You got a personal invitation — so you should go,'" Kathryn said.

The rest, as they say, is history.

Kathryn mustered up her courage and attended that evening's youth-group meeting for the Roman Catholic Community of the 19th Ward. The cluster includes St. Monica's, St. Augustine's and Our Lady of Good Counsel churches.

Kathryn said that other group members shared Ben's spirit of welcoming.

"I was shocked. We started talking, and we just got along great," Kathryn said. "I was just absolutely amazed when these people wanted to be my friends. It was like they'd been my friends forever."

After only a month, Kathryn recalled, she was able to open up to these people about some personal struggles she was going through.

"I was really bummed and they were saying, 'What's wrong?' They just cared so much. They said, 'We'll be there for you,'" Kathryn recalled.

Kathryn keeps in touch with these teens on a regular basis, even though they do not all attend the same school. For instance, Kathryn often attends 9:30 a.m. Sunday Mass at St. Monica's with her family — and then she goes to 11:30 a.m. Mass at Our Lady of Good Counsel so she can be with her youth-group friends.

Yet Kathryn recognizes that she fell into a fortunate situation — one that may not occur for every teen who moves to a new town. In fact, she pointed out, peers often *exclude* a newcomer rather than make that person a part of their group.

"A lot of times, people tend to make fun of whoever's new," Kathryn said. "It gives them something to talk about." She added that if she had felt unwelcome at her first youth-group meeting, she probably never would have returned.

Jodi Gardner, youth minister for the 19th Ward cluster, noted that her youth group goes out of its way to promote inclusiveness.

"The kids are just all accepting. They're fairly good about not putting anybody down, or putting somebody on the outside," Gardner commented.

Gardner pointed out that some simple gestures of kindness have led to deep, meaningful friendships for Kathryn.

"You never know what you're going to do for one person by reaching out and saying, 'Why don't you come?' And also, you never

know what's going to happen by accepting the invitation," Gardner remarked.

Ben, the teen who extended the original offer to Kathryn, said his actions were only a natural extension of what our Christianity tells us to promote.

"We really enjoy our social time at St. Monica's," said Ben, 16. "We really want to be a family. This is what Christ has taught us — to be brothers and sisters."

Ben added that he could relate to Kathryn's situation because he had gone through a similar adjustment when he began attending St. Monica's two years ago.

"I know how it is to be new," Ben said. "I wanted her to feel welcome."

Margaret and Kate Rickard know almost too well what it's like to be a newcomer. When Margaret goes away to college next fall, she noted, it will be the fifth different place where she's lived over a six-year period.

Margaret and Kate are parishioners at St. Louis Church in Pittsford. Because of their father's job, they moved from their native Long Island to Pittsford five years ago. They stayed for 2½ years before moving to Michigan for one year. The family then returned to Pittsford in 1995.

Margaret, 17, said her church involvement has helped her adjust to her new environment in Pittsford. She is active in the St. Louis youth group, and also serves on the Diocesan Youth Committee.

"I think it's just a matter of finding people like yourself. That's the whole key," Margaret remarked. "In Michigan I thought I'd try to be part of the popular group, and I got burned big-time."

Kate, 15, has found similar contentment through her Catholic activities.

"The youth group and retreats — they helped so much," Kate remarked.

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Upcoming Supplements

RETIREMENT

Publication Date: March 20 — Deadline: March 6

The approach of the "golden years" is of special interest to Courier subscribers. This special supplement will offer retirement information from the unique perspective provided by Catholic teaching and values. Areas to be covered include financial planning and money management, volunteering as a way of keeping active, travel and health-related issues for seniors.

MILESTONES

Publication Date: April 17 — Deadline: April 3

This third-annual supplement will honor the significant achievements of priests and religious celebrating jubilees of their vocations, and of those who are retiring from active ministry. It will provide biographical sketches of those in the diocese celebrating such milestones, and will focus on their lives as models for others considering vocations.

TRAVEL & PILGRIMAGES

Publication Date: May 15 — Deadline: May 1

As readers look ahead to summer plans, this supplement will tempt them with choice locations while serving as a planning guide for domestic and foreign journeys. In addition to offering tips for choosing sites and making arrangements, this supplement will highlight shrines and other religious sites of special interest to Catholic travelers.

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