

FEATURE

Retreat-goers say Jesus can calm storms in life

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Is it really worth it for the church to reach out to young adults? The answer is a resounding "yes" if you ask Julie Pease, a 28-year-old resident of Lockport in the Buffalo diocese.

Pease stressed she's impressed with the way the Diocese of Rochester tries to reach young adults. She travels 45 minutes every Sunday to attend Mass at the Newman Oratory at the State University of New York College at Brockport.

"It's home to me," she said. "It's a great community. It's really made me grow a lot."

Pease traveled even farther March 23, to attend a retreat for diocesan young adults in the Dugan Center at St. Mary's Church in Rochester. Titled "Jesus, the Guiding Light in Our Lives," the retreat ran from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. and drew 41 participants.

Sponsored by the Young Adult Planning Committee, the retreat was based on the story of Jesus calming a sea storm as told in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark. Aided by recorded music, a video, small group discussions and readings, participants were encouraged to reflect on how Jesus helps them to navigate the stormy seas of their lives.

Pease pointed out that most church programming she's experienced is geared toward older Catholics or Catholics under 18. But the St. Mary's retreat spoke directly to the needs of Catholics her age, she said.

"It was nice to have people in similar situations get together so that we can bond together," she said.

That was a sentiment shared by many of the retreat participants, who also liked the fact that the retreat centered on how Jesus can calm the storms in a person's life.

"I think it struck home with a lot of people there," said Kate Stanford, 25, a parishioner at Newman Oratory. "I think this age group has a lot of things going on."

A 1993 graduate of SUNY Oswego, Stanford noted that she's had to weather a few storms in her own life.

"I worked for a company that went bankrupt, so I've been through a lot since I grad-



Mary Ellen Leahy (left) compares notes with Ellen Finewood during a game of "people bingo" at a retreat for young adults held March 23 at St. Mary's Church, Rochester.

Matthew Scott/Staff photographer

uated," she said.

Yet the fact that bankruptcy produced gave her spiritual benefits, she noted.

"I found myself going to church a lot more," she said, noting she's active in her parish's women's group and pastoral council.

Ellen Finewood, a 22-year-old parishioner from St. Francis Church in Phelps, said that she recently graduated from Rochester's Nazareth College and is looking far and wide for a job teaching elementary students.

"It's hard to continue to believe that I'll find a job," she said.

But Finewood said she realized at the young adults' retreat that other Catholics her age are experiencing the same struggles, and look to Jesus to help them.

"I believe in putting God in the driver's seat," Finewood said. "One of my friends who's religious told me that, but I wouldn't hear that from too many people."

Finewood was one of several retreat participants who pointed out that many young adults aren't particularly religious, so meet-



ing with those who take their faith seriously was uplifting.

"It was a good way for people to socialize in a relaxed setting without going to a bar," said Dan DeFord, 35, a parishioner at St. James Church in Irondequoit who serves on the Diocesan Young Adult Planning Committee.

"The one thing we found we had in common was our faith," he added. "We found Jesus was a very comforting thing in our life."

It's that belief that Jesus can help people in their 20s and 30s stay centered in the midst of bewildering changes that participants stressed the most.

"You have to have control in your life, but God has a part in it, too," said Lori G. Dolan, 26, a Newman Oratory parishioner. "My time is not necessarily his time."

That's a sentiment shared by DeFord's wife, Karen, 30, who also belongs to the diocesan planning committee. She recalled that while she was in college she thought about eventually getting married, but became concerned in her mid-20s that the op-

portunity had not arisen.

"In my heart, I knew I'd get married, but I was feeling that it was taking a long time to get married," she said, noting she met Dan four years ago. The couple married two years ago.

"I wouldn't have met Dan when I was in college," she said. "I might have met someone in college who wasn't the right person for me."

Waiting for the right man taught her a lesson about faith in God, she said.

"His plan is always better than your plan," she said. "But I think it's frustrating when you're going through it."

Yet, looking at one's life retrospectively can help you realize that God is guiding it, said Jane Ashlaw, 35, a Massena native who attends St. Anne's Church in Rochester. Ashlaw said she moved here seven years ago to work at a state job, but, feeling dissatisfied, left for nine months to work in Indiana. Then she moved back to Rochester and got a new job that was much better than her old state job, she said.

"For some reason, (God) led me in that way of going to Indiana," she said. "I think he was there through it."

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The Young Adult Planning Committee has scheduled two social events.

- On Friday, April 11, there will be a "swing dance" in Covenant United Methodist Church, 1124 Culver Road, Rochester. The evening will begin with a dance lesson at 7:15 p.m., followed by the dance itself from 8-11 p.m. Admission is \$7. For information, call Tracy McCabe at 716/473-5328, or Karen Rinefierd at 716/328-3228, ext. 255. Partners are not necessary.

- "An Evening of Fun, Food and Bowling" is slated for Friday, April 18. Happy Hour will take place from 5:30-6:30 p.m. at Hitchcock's, 881 Merchants Road, Rochester. A buffet dinner will follow at 6:30 p.m. at Ladd's, 873 Merchants Road, with bowling at 8 p.m.

Participants must pay for their own dinner, and it costs \$6 to rent bowling shoes and play three games. For information call Karen Rinefierd at 716/328-3228, ext. 255.

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