

on the MOVE

Sharing creativity with your

Story by Mike Latona • Photographs by Matthew Sc...

Andrew Lazzaro believes it's never too soon for parishes to utilize the talents and ideas of young Catholics.

"We're not that far away from running the church; we're the next generation. If we start now, we've got a head start," said Andrew, 14, a parishioner at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Church in Hamlin.

The creativity of Andrew's youth group is evident at his parish. What began as a need for a meeting-room divider, for example, has evolved into an artistic project: Youth-group members have been painting a mural on the divider — an oversized bulletin board — for the past few months.

Megan Bush, 16, teaches first-grade religious education on Sunday mornings. She said the divider allows more than one class to be held in the community room, which is the only meeting space available at the church.

"It helps separate the classes. There's noise, and the kids are all over the place," she explained.

"Instead of just putting kids in the corner of the church, we can use an actual room," Andrew added.

Andrew, Megan and other youth-group members have begun to adorn the 4-by-8-foot piece of drywall with an image of Jesus surrounded by a flock of people. Eventually, Megan said, "There's going to be more little kids sitting down around him like he's telling a story."

The portable divider is also displayed occasionally in the church. Andrew

noted that parishioners of all ages are free to use the board's blank side for posting photographs and bulletin-board notices.

Teen creativity has also infiltrated the parish community at St. Mary of the Lake Church in Ontario. There, the youth group has constructed a Bible garden in the parish cemetery.

According to Fran Pucci, a parish youth-group coordinator, the idea took hold during a youth-group meeting last year when teens noticed the names of several herbs mentioned in Old Testament passages.

"I like plants. They have a lot of life and a lot of meaning, and I thought it might be a nice touch for people," remarked Kateri Spinelli, 16.

From there, the teens decided to obtain those herbs and plant them in a new garden. Kateri noted that she helped her father — who owns a rototiller — dig up the ground one evening last summer. The next day, several teens and adults pitched in to construct the garden.

Their creation features a set of bricks laid out in the shape of a cross, with a rosebush placed at the top to symbolize Christ's crown of thorns. The cross is surrounded by crocuses. Other plants in the garden include such herbs as mint, myrtle, cumin, thyme and lavender.

"I was impressed. It was truly a unique idea," said Christopher Bonino, 17.

Christopher added that the youth group will not only maintain the garden, but also hopes to sell some of the herbs they grow to raise money for charity.

"It wasn't just a thing we planted and left," Christopher commented.

Kateri said she's been told that after funeral services, mourners frequently stop at the garden for a moment of quiet reflection.

"It makes me feel good because that's not what it was meant for, but that's how it turned out," Kateri remarked.

"They really felt God-inspired to do this," said Pucci, whose daughter Allison, 18, also assisted in the project.

"It was really powerful," Kateri agreed. "It was like God was saying, 'Make this garden.'"

A deep faith connection also inspires the artwork of Maureen Carroll, a parishioner at St. John the Evangelist Church in Spencerport. When she draws religious images, Maureen said, "I can actually feel my heart tightening. I get very emotionally involved in my work."

Maureen put this spirituality to use last fall while working on a project with Tami Ziobrowski, a parishioner at St. Jude's Church in Gates who attends the St. John's youth group. The two 16-year-olds created a poster — measuring almost 4 feet across and nearly 3 feet high — that was hung in the church for several days and is now on display in the youth room.

The drawing, done in pastels, depicts the hands of God holding a cracked heart. A glow surrounds the hands, and clouds are shown in the background.

"The hands are cradling the heart, protecting it. When you're hurt, God takes care of you and God heals," Maureen explained.

Maureen said that she has received positive feedback from adult members at St. John the Evangelist. She added that she's pleased her efforts are recognized by the entire parish community.

"Adults don't always realize that teens have an opinion, something to say, something to give. Sometimes people need to be reminded," Maureen commented.

At the same time, Maureen — who has designed several posters for the church

in the past — doesn't con-

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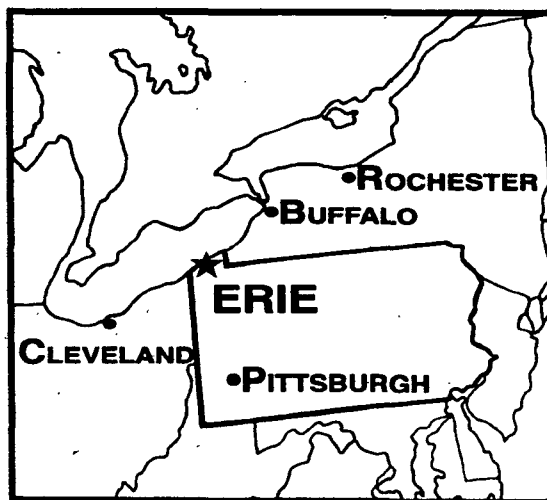
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