

On the MOVE

Story by Mike Latona • Photographs by Matthew Scott

For Kristy Winks, hand-holding during the Lord's Prayer is a great way of bonding with worshipers of all ages.

"It makes it more friendly. You kind of feel like you're on other people's levels, not below them," said Kristy, 16, a parishioner in the Cayuga Team Ministry cluster.

Stephanie Muscato, 13, also places a high priority on adding the human touch to the Our Father. She recently expressed that viewpoint to Father John Firpo, pastor at St. Helen's Church in Gates.

"I suggested to Father John that even across the aisles, we join hands," Stephanie said. "I would want the whole church to connect with each other."

She raised her suggestion when Father Firpo met with St. Helen's youth-group members this past winter for their input on parish procedures. Since that time, Stephanie has observed an increasing number of people at St. Helen's who hold hands during the Our Father — yet there are still several who choose not to.

"Maybe they're nervous or self-conscious," she remarked.

Zachary Burns has noticed such resistance during both the Lord's Prayer and the sign of peace.

Zachary, from St. Margaret Mary Church in Irondequoit, noted that people who refrain from human contact tend to be those who sit alone, rather than with family members or friends. In those cases, Zachary said he attempts to extend his hand even if they're not willing to make the first move.

"They're always surprised, but not really uncomfortable. They always seem to appreciate it," said Zachary, 13.

On the other hand, no such holding back seems to occur at St. Bridget's Church in Rochester, where Zachary and his family have visited.

"The sign of peace lasts five or 10 minutes. They call it 'intermission,' Zachary said. "People walk around shaking hands with people they don't know, trying to get acquainted."

Although Zachary considers himself fairly outgoing, he was still taken aback the first few times strangers hugged him during the sign of peace at St. Bridget's.

"But then I got used to it," he said.

Joan Workmaster, diocesan director of the Office of Liturgy, added that many people who enjoy hand-holding and embracing during Mass were initially reluctant as well.

"The experience of it is so strong, so powerful. These are meant to be conversion experiences — they take us out of where we were, and into a new place," Workmaster said.

Kristy pointed out that worshipers often take their cue from the presiding priest. For instance, she said that Father Paul J. Ryan, pastor of Cayuga Team Ministry, holds hands with eucharistic ministers during the Our Father.

"When he does it, he makes it easier for us. He gets right out there," Kristy said.

According to Workmaster, the diocese does not have a policy regarding hand-holding during the Our Father. However, she added, many parishioners in the diocese have adopted this custom since it was introduced in the 1970s.

Around that same time, the diocese instituted the sign of peace as a standard part of Mass. This act can be in the form of hugging, kissing or a handshake — or

even a simple gr... ing wit... touch. In... stance, C... each oth... peace, W... Workm... were an a... possible... each oth... Workm... ing "sho... thing. We... and som... er course

Upcoming Supplements

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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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