

On the MOVE

generation

Generation X. It's a short and snappy title. It is also not exactly music to Christine Iwanski's ears.

"I don't like that label. All it represents is, like, bad stuff," said Christine, 16, a parishioner at St. Ann's Church in Hornell.

Christine noted that the generation prior to hers is commonly referred to as the Baby Boomers. That title, she said, sounds much more upbeat.

"And then there's Generation X. What's that? It's harsh," Christine remarked.

Generation X generally applies to the segment of the American population born between 1965 and 1985, making today's teens among the last of the Gen X-ers. The term attempts to sum up a hard-to-define generation — hence, the "X" tag.

According to Michael Theisen, diocesan coordinator of youth

ministry, the vague nature of the title carries a certain amount of validity.

Theisen noted that high-school and college students in the Baby Boomer generation — those born between the mid-1940s and mid-1960s — became immersed in the civil rights movement and Vietnam War protests.

"In the 1960s, people made a difference. They picketed and brought about change," Theisen said. "They had a cause, if you will — whereas Generation X is searching for a cause."

And looking back at the 1950s and early 1960s as depicted in such television shows as "Leave it to Beaver" and "Happy Days," Christine observed that teens then seemed to have quieter, less complicated lifestyles than they do today.

"I guess it was realistic then. They knew what they were going to do when they grew up, because it was all set out for them. But this isn't the 1950s," she said. "I just

think things are so unstable now because things are changing so fast."

Nevertheless, Lou Ciarlo points out that there are positive aspects to living in the 1990s.

"We've got more technology than my parents did, so that makes things easier," said Lou, 15, from the St. Anthony's/St. Patrick's Cluster in Elmira.

Yet Theisen pointed out that Gen X-ers are also overwhelmed by these technological advances. He explained that computers and satellite television, while supplying us with a wealth of information, draw teens increasingly toward machines — and away from their family and friends.

"There are so many directions people can go in, and they do it from the comfort of their bedroom. That affects their social interaction," Theisen said.

Theisen added that Gen X-ers formulate their self-image based on what they see, rather than who they are.

"Generation X-ers have so many options, the tendency is not to look for the identity within," he said.

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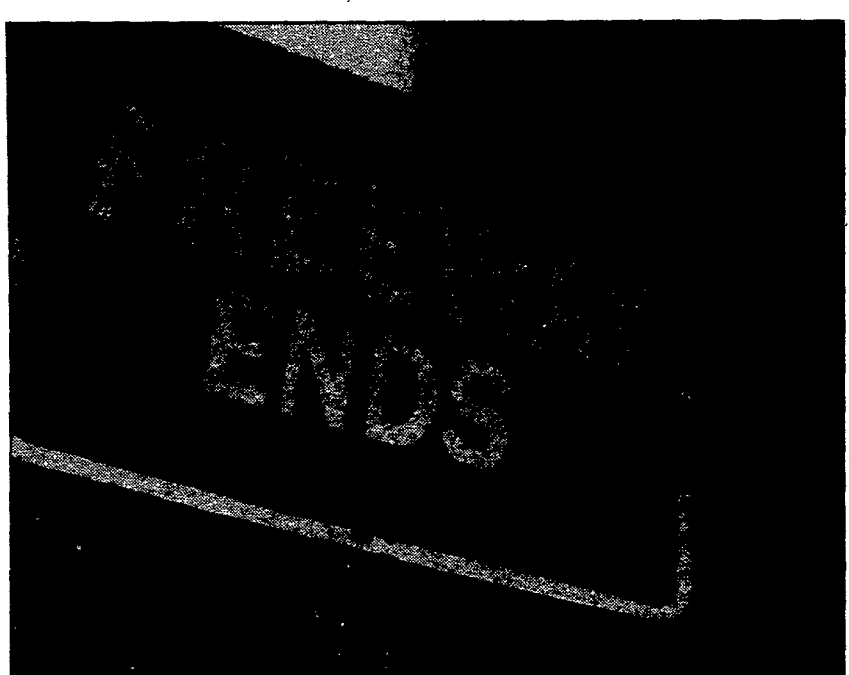
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