

# Good for your soul"

Photographs by Matthew Scott

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teens' hands and feet were bound — so they could experience what it might be like to be handicapped — Quinones said several people began to joke, "Come to youth group, Carmen ties you up."

Humor, Quinones remarked, "is really important in youth ministry. Kids take themselves so seriously, and it's too serious because they don't know themselves."

But when you feel the humor with in their hearts, their spirit is alive, they can deal with other things in their life easier. I see it in their hearts."

Jeremy felt a link between humor and spirituality. He first became aware of this connection during a diocesan retreat at St. Stella Maria in May 1996.

With a wry smile, he said, "I was with them when they carried him the way they do."

Jeremy said, "I was telling jokes or show up slipping on a banana peel or other things."

St. Cecilia's Church, "you see a smile on their faces. They go to a more friendly relationship."

At the same 1996 retreat, Heather recalled that Dan Kwicien, a teen from Scottsville's St. Mary of the Assumption Church, did a hilarious Richard Simmons impression — complete with wig — in leading participants through "morning exercise."

"You have a good laugh, and you feel more comfortable. It calms the group down," Heather said. "Then, when you do something spiritual, it's a little easier to share with people after you've laughed with them."

Quinones agreed that humor is a wonderful trust-building tool. "The most vibrant person in youth group, the most spiritual, the one who's most alive — kids tend to draw themselves to that person because they want that, too," she said. "People are drawn to others with a joyful spirit."

Yet Jeremy also emphasized that he does not act whimsically in order to draw attention to himself. Rather, he regards it as an extension of God's will.

"The thing I'm here to do is be a jokester, but God gave me the gift of humor to bring through me," Jeremy said.

Heather said that some priests also use humor effectively. Several years ago, she recalled, a guest priest at St. John the Evangelist lightened up a week-long parish retreat with his witty personality.

"The place was packed, he was so funny," Heather said.

"People brought tape recorders. In school, everybody was, like, 'Are you going to church today?'"

Similarly, Jeremy has often seen visiting priests

help the parish to get to know them by leading off with humorous anecdotes.

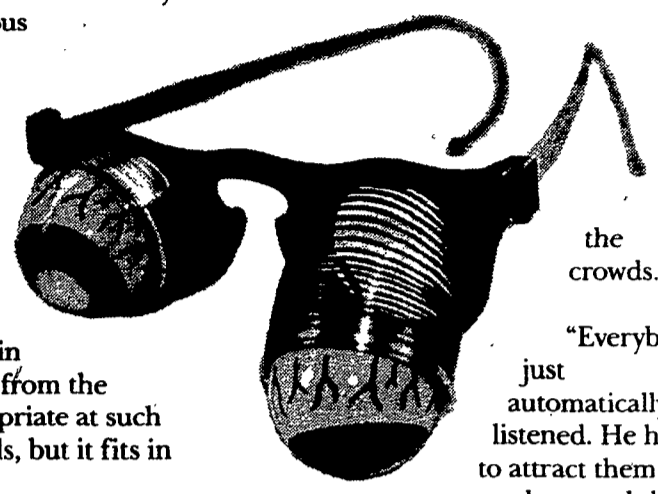
"Anytime this happens, you're touching a lot more people," Jeremy said. "You open yourself up to everybody, and it helps a great deal."

Ben Hagan, from St. Mary's Church in Elmira, said that humor from the pulpit may not be appropriate at such solemn events as funerals, but it fits in fine most of the time.

"If the priest decides to explain the readings and have a good time, that's right. It's however you relate to them — they might seem serious and they might not," said Ben, 16.

Quinones said. For example, she cited a Gospel passage when Jesus blessed the children, reasoning that Jesus must have shown some sort of merriment to the young people. Otherwise, she said, "I don't think they would have come to him because they would have been afraid of him."

Although Jeremy said that there is no evidence Christ was a comedian — "I don't think it was written in the Bible that Jesus cracked a joke in the middle of a story" — he feels Jesus definitely employed humor when he spoke to



the crowds.

"Everybody just automatically listened. He had to attract them somehow, and the

most effective way is to get somebody through humor — because people like to laugh," Jeremy said.

"I'm sure he had some fun doing what he was doing," Ben commented.

However, Ben and Heather ventured that New Testament writers may have intentionally portrayed Jesus in a more solemn fashion.

"Maybe the disciples put it down that way so they looked like they were a little more organized," Ben suggested.

"People wouldn't take (Bible passages) as seriously if they were presented as funny," Heather added.

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