

ng out homilies

regardless, and it's not a necessity, but you could draw a lot more teens in if you did that."

April Wrazen warned that long-winded, high-brow homilists might not gain a captive teen audience.

"They need to know that a lot of people our age have short attention spans. People start to drift after awhile," said April, 18,

something I can't relate to, if they're talking about grown-up stuff, then I tend to just tune it out," Gina said. "I understand that (homilists) aren't able to please everybody. But if it gets to be every single Sunday, then it's frustrating."

Father Robert Hammond, former diocesan director of youth ministry, agreed that teens need to be acknowledged directly every so often.

"If they feel themselves merely included in the adult audience, they kind of drift away," said Father

questioning their faith. Therefore, he said, teens do not respond well to a rigid homily.

"I tell them it's all right to doubt or ask questions because you're moving into a deeper sense of your faith. You're not *losing* your faith, which is how it might feel. It's more of an inquiry, and the more questions you ask, the more things open up to you," Father DeSocio said.

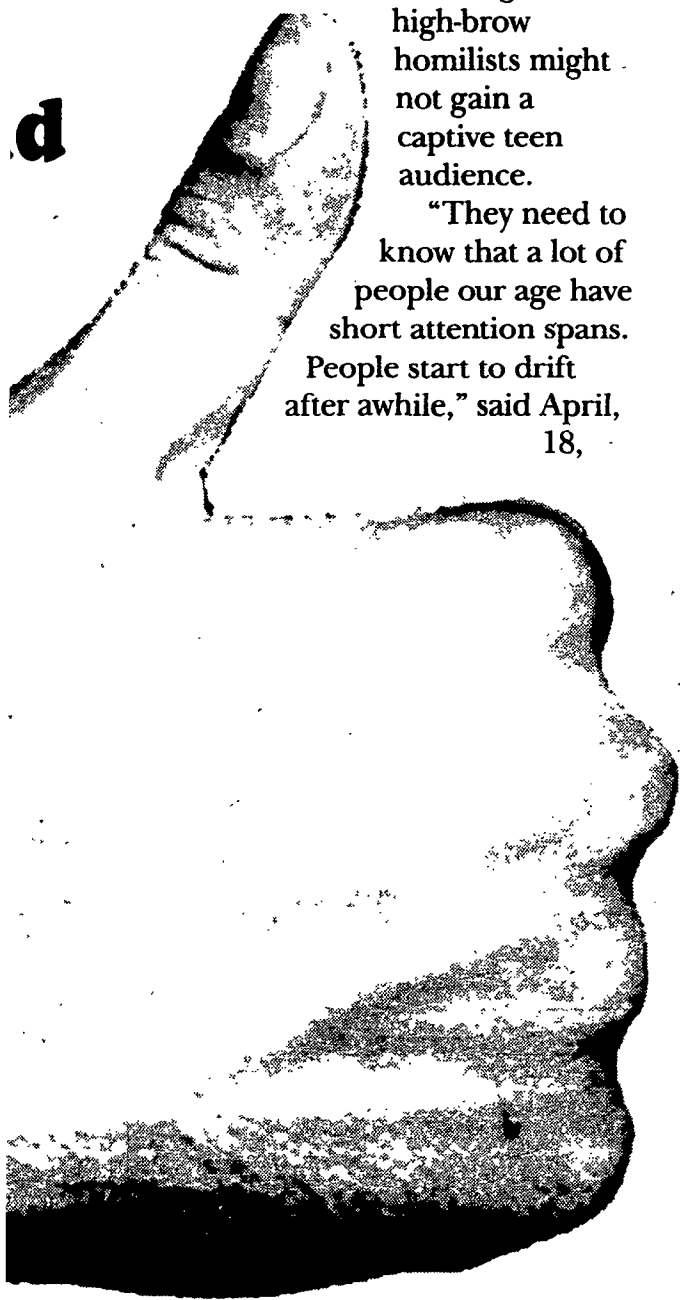
According to church law, a homily should tie in with the Scripture readings from that day. But Angel H. Garcia

Jr. feels that homilists who get "too technical" with scriptural interpretations may lose many teens who are skeptical or easily distracted.

"They need to reach out to the lost sheep," commented Angel, 18, from Holy Rosary Church.

Angel added that he prefers homilists who have a sense of humor, make direct eye contact with the congregation and speak in an animated tone.

"If they're reading off paper, they're not putting their heart and soul into it,"



Hammond, pastor at St. Mary's Church in Bath.

Father John DeSocio said he prepared for his homilies while a chaplain at Ithaca College by attending sporting events, plays and other events to familiarize himself with the contemporary youth culture.

"You try to sense where the people are at in their lives, where the kids are. That comes from their music or the things they like to do," said Father DeSocio, who serves as rector at Becket Hall, a center for priesthood vocations.

Father DeSocio noted that teens and young adults can be a tough audience to reach, so he picks his words carefully when speaking at diocesan retreats.

"You have to be very honest with them. You can't play games or snowball them. They can tell if you're speaking from the heart. They don't need you to be a teenager or at their level, in a sense. They just want you to be true," Father DeSocio said.

He added that many teens are at an age at which they've begun

from Rochester's Holy Rosary Church. April added that she prefers homilies that are "brief and to the point."

Homilies must also cover subject matter teens can relate to, Erin said. "A lot of priests talk about the past, and that's not necessarily a bad thing. But teens are thinking in the present and looking for guidance, I think," Erin said. She added that she appreciates a homilist who is willing to touch upon such subjects as friendship, crime and drug usage.

"Even if he just talks about school or something, it shows he's been there. That shows me he understands us," said Gina Ciarlo, 15, from Church of the Good Shepherd in Henrietta.

The flip side, Gina said, is when she hears sermons that focus on politics and other subjects she can't grasp easily.

"I like Mass and I look forward to the homily the most. But if it's

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Angel remarked.

Erin said she attempted an energetic approach when she gave her homily — which focused on the subject of togetherness — last December. (Although priests and deacons are normally the only people allowed by the Catholic Church to give homilies, exemptions are allowed in such special liturgies as youth Masses.) Overall, she was pleased with the results.

"I looked for eye contact and I think it was actually decent, as opposed to sometimes when I look around the church and people are reading their hymnals (during the homily)," Erin remarked.

Erin noted that Sunday homilies do appeal to all age groups, but does not feel it's an impossible chore. She cited Father Joseph Trovato, CSB, a parochial vicar at her parish, who gave a Valentine's Day homily in which he cited how people of all generations had exchanged valentines.

"He pulled examples from specific age groups. So it's definitely possible," Erin said.

Coming next week: Sexism.