

# FEATURE

## Regular prayer focuses thoughts, opens heart



**Young Adult**  
MONTHLY FEATURE

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

Whenever Filippo Lombardo is driving his truck, he reaches for the on-off switch as he passes a church.

"I turn off the radio and take a little time to pray," said the 29-year-old printer and married father who attends Most Precious Blood Church, Rochester. "It's just a time you have to take out of the day to show God you believe in him."

Lombardo is a former martial arts student who enjoyed karate's meditative discipline. But he has increasingly turned toward daily prayer in his 20s to maintain the "focus" he felt karate gave him in his younger days. He generally says the Lord's Prayer, the Hail Mary and an Act of Contrition every day as well as his own personal prayers, he said.

"It relaxes me because I'm more of an upbeat person, and I can't sit still," he said of prayer. "I feel if a problem comes about, I can deal with that problem in a more toned and civil way."

Lombardo was one of a handful of diocesan young adults who recently shared their prayer experiences with the *Catholic Courier*. They pray for themselves and others regularly on their own, in the morning, in the evening, or throughout the day. Some also participate in communal prayer and Bible study groups. Lombardo, for example, attends a monthly meeting at his parish for young males that uses meditation exercises based on the teachings of St. Ignatius Loyola.

Regular prayer relaxes their mind and spirits, allowing them to focus on their problems with confidence that God will help them, they said. In fact, nearly all of them pointed out that the value of regular prayer becomes most evident to them when they don't pray.

Take Janice A. Hassan, a 32-year-old physician's assistant who attends Holy Trinity Church in Webster. Hassan called herself a "spontaneous prayer" who also

works for her parish as a volunteer Stephen minister, helping people through such crises in their lives as a death in the family.

"I'm not very disciplined, so I don't have a set time when I do pray," she said. "(But) I find that when I don't make an attempt to connect with God, and I don't stay focused on God, I get too caught up in fixing things up by myself."

Hassan added that she tends to use her own prayers when praying alone rather than such traditional ones as the Lord's Prayer or the Hail Mary.

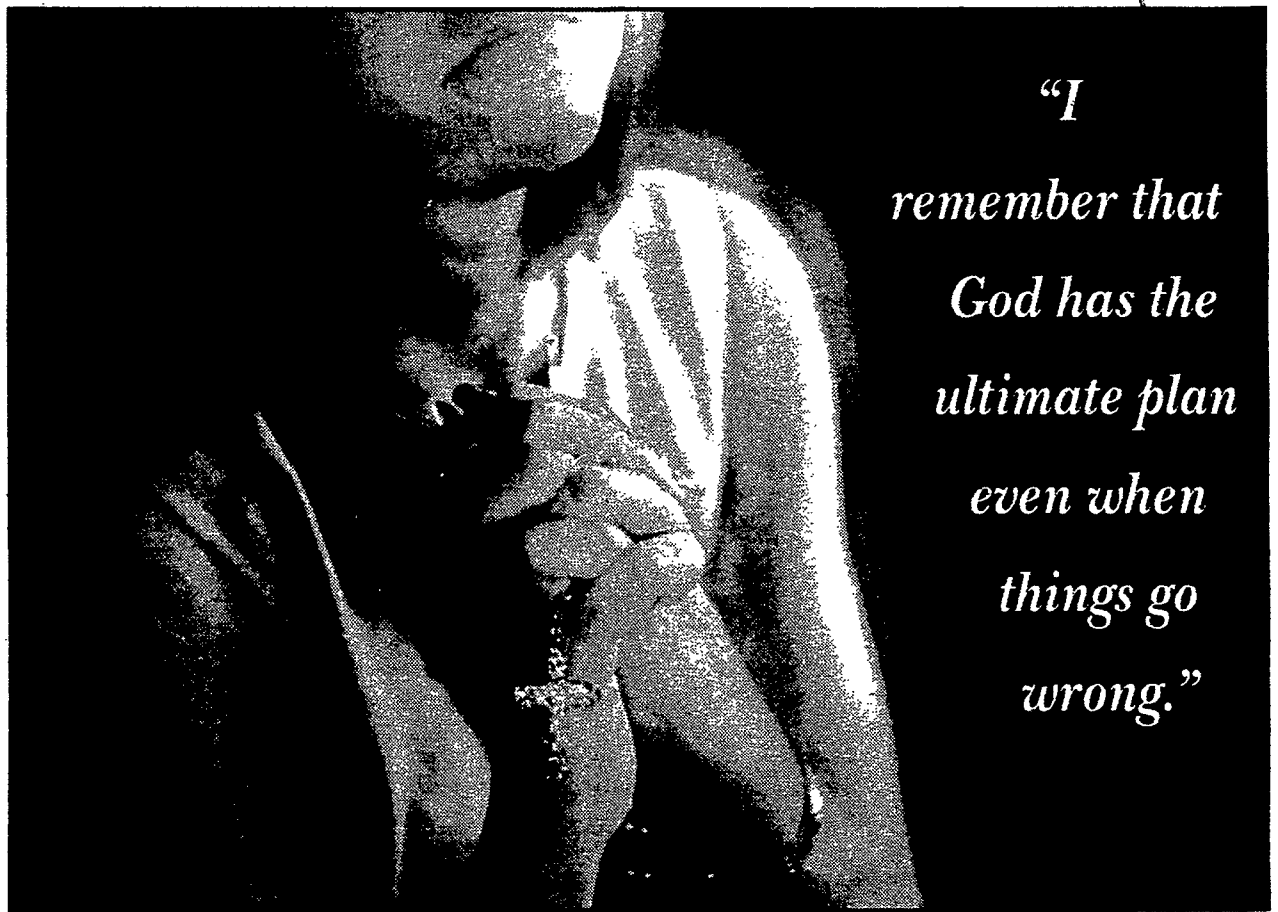
"I find those prayers are good, but that's not all I want to say," she commented. "They are more impersonal than what I would want my relationship with God to be."

Hassan also participated in a young adult prayer and Scripture study group that met weekly this summer at Holy Ghost Church in Gates. The group was sponsored by the diocese's young adult planning committee. She said she particularly liked being able to pray with young adults and share her faith experiences with people who had grown up in the post-Vatican II church.

"I think we were brought up when the church was more tolerant of gray zones," she said. "It's hard to talk about gray zones with people of older generations."

Stacey Maggio is a 22-year-old speech pathologist who attends the churches of St. Mary's and Blessed Sacrament in Rochester. Like Hassan, she prefers personal prayers to traditional prayers, but she said she does use traditional prayers regularly.

"They're a good starting point," she said of traditional prayers. "They're a good way to get myself focused."



"I remember that God has the ultimate plan even when things go wrong."

Photo Illustration by Greg Flume

Maggio added that prayer reminds her of the many blessings she's received in life.

"I feel really blessed that I'm 22, and I have a great job, and I have a master's degree," she said. "I kind of feel that I didn't do that all by myself."

Andrew K. Hoelperl, campus minister at McQuaid Jesuit High School in Rochester, said he likes to meditate daily on whether he's fulfilling Jesus Christ's two greatest commandments — to love God with all one's soul, mind and heart and to love one's neighbor as oneself.

"For me, it's the simplest form of living," the 25-year-old said of following those commandments. "These are the easiest things to kind of pick up on, but the hardest to learn."

Like Hassan, Danielle Merriam has participated in the young adult prayer group at Holy Ghost. Merriam, a 19-year-old parishioner at St. Jude's Church in Gates, says she prays the Lord's Prayer and her own prayers every morning and evening.

"I thought it was a good way to start out the day," she said of her routine. "Everything always works out better, and

I have a better day. I remember that God has the ultimate plan even when things go wrong."

Merriam added that she also likes the Hail Mary.

"I have my friends pray for me when I'm in trouble, so having Mary pray for me seems like a good idea," she said.

Regardless of the method they use to communicate with God, these young adults all agreed that praying regularly is the key to a truly Christian life.

"The Christian life is more than just action," Hoelperl said. "It's also a relationship with God, and a relationship with Jesus. It becomes very empty without that relationship."

### Network offers talk, pizza

Odyssey, the diocesan young adult network, is sponsoring a pizza dinner and discussion on "Moral Decision Making at Work and at Home," at St. Louis School, 11 Rand Place, off Main Street, Pittsford, on Monday, Sept. 22, from 7 to 9 p.m. Father Kip Corriveau, the parish's parochial vicar, will facilitate. For info, call 1-800-388-7177, and press 1-5-375.

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