

# NG OUR SHELL



don't know anybody that I'll get really quiet for a few minutes," remarked Kristina, 17, from St. Christopher's Church in Chili.

"In elementary school, you don't get a chance to get out and meet a lot of people because you're in the same small classes. But after eighth grade, everybody moves on. I was kind of forced to meet new people," added Michael, 15, from Sacred Heart Cathedral.

Even when one is willing to make new acquaintances Mary Logan observed, instant bonding is not guaranteed. Sometimes, she said, strangers "automatically don't want to make friends. They're out to get you or have a grudge, because they don't know you."

On the other hand, Mary said she refrains from making hasty judgments that would exclude people.

"I'm more of a 'people person.' Talking to people, and communicating with them, builds strong friendships," said Mary, 15, from Rochester's Roman Catholic Community of the 19th Ward.

Michael's brother John, 17, said he goes out of his way at some social gatherings to make sure nobody is ignored.

"When there's a lot of people, I'll go up and talk to anyone. But in a smaller group, I kind of sit back. I'm more of a person who waits to see who's not included, and then I try to get those people included, too," John remarked.

Mary pointed out that some people may not have the confidence or skills to expand their social horizons easily.

"I know a lot of people who aren't by themselves because they want to be," Mary said.

Kristina added that those who appear to be reclusive should not be automatically shunned.

"You can't really judge somebody like that. They might not be like that the whole time. Just because they're quiet doesn't mean that they're mean," Kristina said.

While teens interviewed agreed that compassion should be extended toward shy people, Sean Nagle also suggested that those folks make equal efforts to erase social barriers.

"Try opening your mind to new things," said Sean, 15, from Rochester's St. John the Evangelist Church (Humboldt Street). He remarked that socially isolated people frequently "just do things their own way."

Mary recommended that a realistic starting point in this process is to seek one new friend, rather than several friends.

"Find one person you can reach out to," Mary said. "Even if it's not a group, it's always good to have one friend. I believe there's one person for everybody."

Faith and Mary cautioned that people should not project artificial personalities in their attempt to win new friends.

"Sometimes I've tried to act like someone else, but it doesn't work. I have to be the real me," Faith commented. "The most popular girl in school, I might try to walk and talk and dress the way she does. I might get my hair done differently or buy new clothes. But then I never wear the clothes. It won't work — because she's her, and I'm me."

"People like you much more for who you are, than who you pre-

tend to be," Mary remarked. "Being yourself, you make more friends and better friends."

A good place to be yourself, Kristina said, is at youth group or other church-related functions.

"In school it's really hard to express how you feel, but youth group is a time when you can relax and talk to people about your day," Kristina said.

One reason many people don't break down social walls, Kristina said, is to avoid potential hurt or rejection. However, she said it's not the end of the world if this indeed occurs.

"I've been rejected, and I just keep on going," Kristina remarked.

Moreover, she said, those who fear rejection should weigh the potential rewards.

"I have friends who might like somebody, but they're like, 'What if they reject me?' But you can't think that way, because what if they *don't* reject you?" she said.

Faith took the optimistic approach during a recent summer camp session at Camp Stella Maris in Livonia. When she introduced herself to her roommates for the week, she said, they didn't initially appear interested in talking to her.

"I thought they were stuck-up," Faith said.

But she continued her attempts to be conversational with them, and returned home from camp with a feeling of accomplishment.

"One night we stayed up until 5 a.m. talking about our lives," Faith recalled. "Three days later, we were borrowing each other's clothes."

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Faith found that she quickly began reaping friendships with the Holy Name youths.

"Now, all my best friends go to Holy Name," she said.

Kristina Spall and Michael Robbins can relate to some of Faith's struggles. Even though they enjoy being around other people, they said the process of social interaction doesn't always flow smoothly.

"Most of the time I'm not shy at all. But there are times when I

self

in an

honest and

open way, however,