

on the MOVE

ANGER

Story by staff writer Mike Latona Photos by Greg Francis

When Tami Ziobrowski recently heard some upsetting information about an ex-boyfriend, she went into a rage that genuinely surprised her.

"I was throwing a fit. I might have beat him up if he was in the room. I did not expect to react that way because normally I'm the one least likely to get angry," said Tami, 17, a parishioner at St. Jude's Church in Gates.

Meanwhile, Betsy Bangert said her irritation gradually escalates when friends cancel dates or fail to return items they've borrowed.

"It starts out as a little thing and it gets bigger and bigger and bigger. I just blow up at little things," said Betsy, 14, from St. Mary's Church in Geneseo.

Although both Tami and Betsy said they were uncomfortable with their feelings of anger, they both acknowledged they could not prevent those feelings from occurring. And, according to Carla Stough, nobody is completely immune to the emotion of anger.

"Even the most peaceful, spiritual people can think of at least one thing that makes them angry," said Stough, a program specialist for the Girl Scouts of the Genesee Valley. She has conducted anger management workshops through both the Girls Scouts and Catholic Youth Organization.

Betsy noted that even Jesus was susceptible to such feelings. For instance, one Gospel story depicts an angry Jesus driving out merchants who were conducting business in the Temple.

"He was divine and all that, but he was still human," Betsy commented.

"Once you start accepting the fact that anger is a normal emotion, then you have to learn to channel it. That's your best option, because you'll never be (permanently) without it," Stough remarked.

"It's a natural thing. It's a part of life we all have to go through," agreed Christa Ryan, 17, from Eastside Catholic Parish in Elmira.

That point was driven home to Christa and another Eastside parishioner, D.J. Clark, during a youth-group meeting last June that was specially devoted to the subject of anger.

"People were angry over the fact people they knew were dying, and about how certain people were poor in the world — how it happened and why it happened," D.J., 17, recalled. "I was angry at the fact my parents were divorced."

The meeting, Christa said, "hit home for people."

According to Christa and D.J., teens' feelings of anger were expressed calmly that night. It's when anger starts to spin out of control that D.J. said he becomes uncomfortable.

"A simple conversation can turn into an argument. A person could hit another person over, maybe, a TV show they were watching," he said. "You don't know what's going to happen, who it's going to happen to and to what extent."

Andy Lazzaro expressed similar discomfort at being around people who appear on the verge of exploding.

"You can't calm them down that much, and you don't know what the next predictable thing is they're going to do," said Andy, 15, from St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Church in Hamlin.

Meanwhile, Christa said she knows fellow teens for whom "the slightest little thing will set them off. You could look at them wrong, and they'll blow it up into something huge and want to start a fight over it."

A tragic reminder of the possible effects of such sudden anger occurred in September 1995 when 13-year-old Stephne Givens of Rochester was stabbed to death by a 12-year-old classmate in front of their school. The two had been arguing after getting off a bus.

This incident spurred the formation of Project Stephne, a program run by Stough. The project, begun in May 1997, offers seminars for girls ages 11-15 on how to handle anger and conflict in a positive, nonviolent manner.

Stough noted that such incidents as the Stephne murder must be addressed because today's teens have increased access to dangerous weapons. She added that young people are also influenced by the violent examples with which they grow up.

"A lot of times, when kids vent this way, they're only doing what they see adults do," Stough noted.

To curb the possibility of violence, Stough suggested that teens give themselves a chance to cool down by distancing themselves from the source of their anger.

"When you're angry, it's not the best time to think," she said. "Deal with your physical energy, and then come back and attempt to resolve your conflict."

Tami, Betsy and Ryhan Kennedy agreed that it's important to vent your anger — constructively. "It's better to release it in some way, or it's going to fester and it's going to hurt worse," Tami said.

"You've got to get it out. I'll yell, scream and cry — but in my own private room," Betsy said.

"Walk away and come back. Hit your pillow, I don't know. But don't take it out on other people," cautioned Ryhan, 15, from St. Mary of the Lake Church in Watkins Glen.

Andy suggested using your head, not your feelings, so that



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