

FEATURE

Evening centers on meaning of being Catholic

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

To Wendy Ames, a parishioner at Transfiguration Church in Pittsford, being Catholic means never having to say you're sorry about overlooking any aspect of Christianity.

"Catholicism encompasses all the details," Ames said.

To Ames, 33, Catholicism is a coat of many colors that allows Catholics to cloak themselves in both Scripture and the sacraments, unlike some Protestant churches that emphasize Scripture to the exclusion of the sacraments. Catholicism also allows Ames to worship with people with whom she may share little else, she said.

"(Catholicism) encompasses the fullest expression of Christianity available today," Ames said. "I feel comfortable that it's been so long enduring. It seems that the extremes on both sides balanced out to a center ... There's room for everyone."

"Even though I may not agree with people's personal political beliefs or their scriptural or doctrinal interpretation, I can still consider them fellow Catholics."

Ames was inspired to such rhetoric after attending a meeting of more than 75 young adults on Oct. 29, in St. Thomas More Church Parish Center, Brighton, with Bishop Matthew H. Clark. Titled "What does it mean to be a Roman Catholic?" the evening was organized by Odyssey, the diocesan network for Catholics in their 20s and 30s.

Following a buffet dinner, the young adults sat down and heard Bishop Clark give a personal talk on what being a Catholic meant to him.

"We are disciples of Christ, baptized into his dying and rising, nursed by his body and blood," the bishop said. "The more deeply we know the Christ, the more perfectly we know his God."

Bishop Clark told his audience he first learned about the church at the feet of his childhood catechism instructor "Ducky." Through her gentle method of relaying the church's teachings, Ducky taught Bishop Clark that to love God is to love one's neighbor.

"Catholicism ... always meant a relationship to God and the community," he added.

Bishop Clark pointed out that the church had ebbed and flowed in its understanding of how to express Christ's will. For example, he said, when he was a young boy, Catholics generally didn't enter Protestant churches, except for special occasions like weddings. The church has also had to purge itself over the centuries of such evils as anti-Semitism, he noted.



Following a session in which participants spoke about Catholicism in small groups, several individuals rose and gave

comments about the evening's topic.

One woman complained that older Catholics were not always open to discussing questions she had about her faith.

On the other hand, a man complained that he did not hear enough of the church's traditional teachings from the pulpit, including justification of the church's prohibition of artificial birth control.

Another woman said it was painful to watch the church publicly tear itself apart in arguments between Catholics of different points of view. Still another woman said she wished more women

were allowed to preach at Masses that of ten feature retired priests in the pulpit.

Arthur Ames, Wendy's husband, said he enjoyed the evening and came away with several ideas embedded in his mind.

"(Catholicism) is sharing the Savior, sharing the Father, being part of one universal family," he said.

Wendy Ames added that the fact that the church has existed for almost 2,000 years means much to her as a Catholic.

"I feel comfort that it's been so long enduring," she said of the church.

That's a sentiment that was echoed by Suzannie Ferrari, a parishioner at Blessed Sacrament Church in Rochester. Like Wendy Ames, Ferrari said she took comfort in the fact that the church has survived for so many centuries. In particular, she noted that the Mass was rooted in Christ's Last Supper.

"I can go back and say 'This is what Jesus did,'" she said.

Keeping the past alive through such traditions means that there is hope for humanity's future, she said.

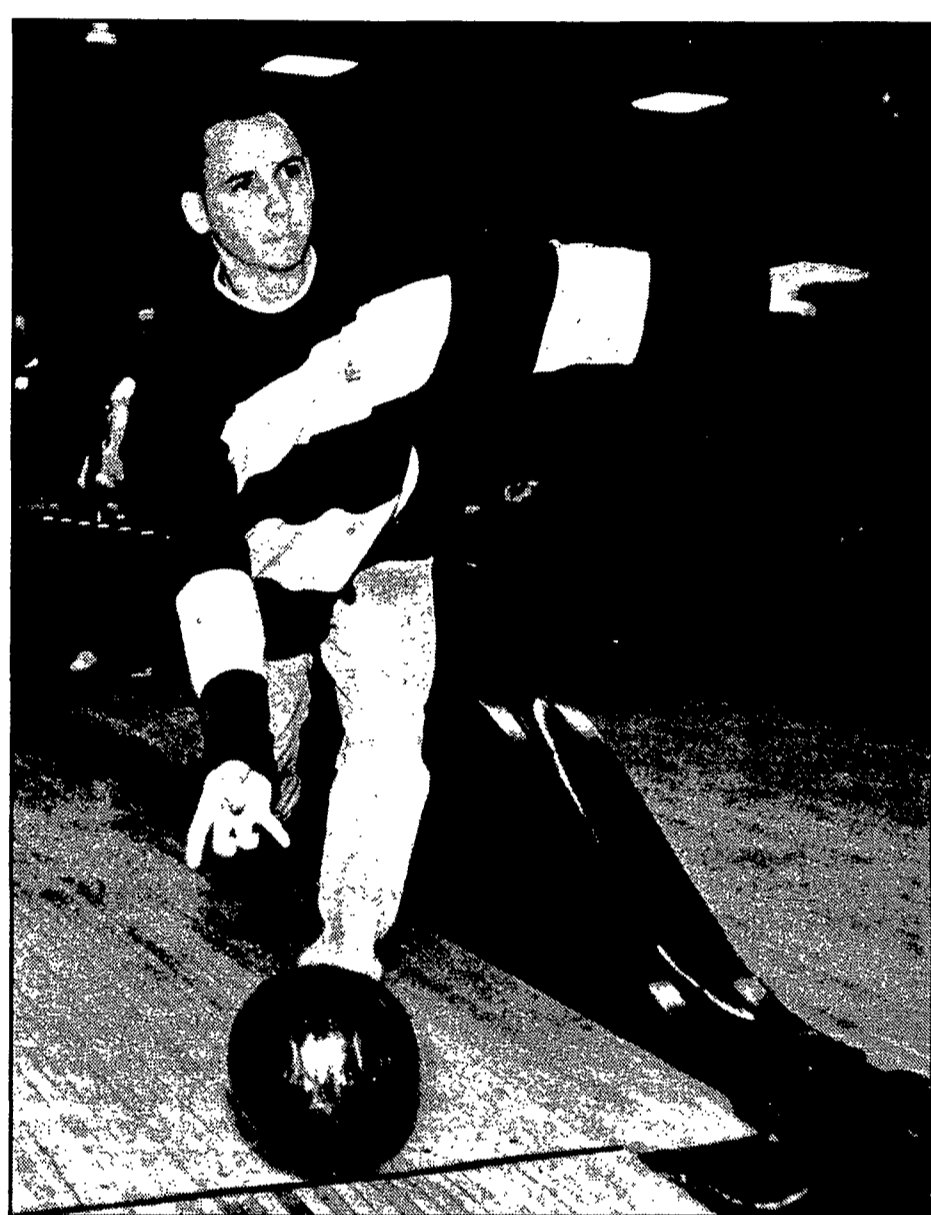
"It gives me a renewed confidence in mankind," she said.

She added that Catholicism offers her role models like Mother Teresa and St. Francis of Assisi whose faith was inspiring to her. Like her role models, Ferrari said she has grown into a mature acceptance of Catholicism.

"It means a different thing to everyone," she said. "What is important is that we continually renew what it means to us personally ... This is what I chose as well as what I was taught."

Song sung snow

Odyssey is organizing an afternoon of caroling at three Monroe County nursing homes for Saturday, Dec. 13, starting at 1:30 p.m. For details, call Micaela Gutierrez at 716/325-4456. For more information on Odyssey events, call 1-800-388-7177, ext. 255.



Greg Francis/Staff photographer

It's all in the wrist

An intent Mike Liberatore bowls a frame at Ladd's Bowling Center, Rochester, Nov. 14. Despite poor weather, about 50 people in their 20s and 30s attended the second bowling event sponsored by Odyssey, preceded by a dinner.

Congratulations to Karen M. Franz, general manager and editor of the *Catholic Courier*, and Joe DiJames, who were married Nov. 15, 1997. The *Courier* staff wishes them many blessed and joy-filled years together.

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