

Working for others, willingly



Brad Woehrlen, 16, plays outside his Rochester home with brother Frederick, 2. At right, Brad prepares dinner for his family.

Story by Mike Latona • Photos by Greg Francis

More than any other time of the year, Holy Week is when Catholics focus on the greatest sacrifice of all - Jesus giving up his life for us.

Although we'll probably never be called upon to make that level of sacrifice, many teens in the diocese do follow Jesus' example by willingly giving of themselves to help others.

For instance, Brad Woehrlen has been extra busy since his baby sister, Zoe, was born in mid-February. As the oldest of four children, Brad said he now shares many of his parents' responsibilities.

"Sometimes when my mom is making dinner and the baby is screaming her lungs out, I go over and change her diaper, burp her or hold her," said Brad, 16, a parishioner in Rochester's Roman Catholic Community of the 19th Ward.

And, he added, "I notice that when I see my mom and dad changing diapers, something clicks that nobody's going to go downstairs and feed the cat."

Brad said he also helps his parents by preparing daily lunches; occasionally cooking dinner; and spending extended free time with his brother Frederick, 2. He also plans to start biking to school so his father doesn't have to drive him.

Yet making these extra efforts has taken a toll on Brad's free time: He has decided to skip playing in his summer baseball league, and his get-togethers with friends are now more limited.

"They're talking about going to the movies four or five nights a week, and I'm here with a dirty diaper. That's my night out," Brad remarked with a smile.

Mary Beth Stein took on a similar role as Brad when her father died unexpectedly last fall. With three younger siblings at home, Mary Beth decided to cut way back on her social time to assist at home.

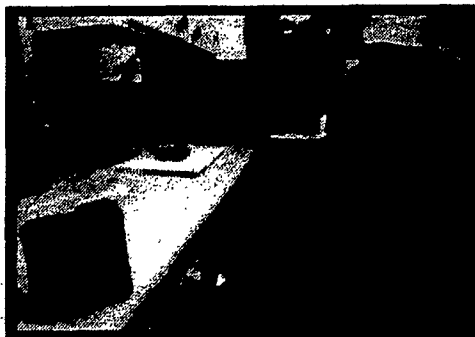
"My mom works until 4:30 every day, so I've taken on a whole lot of responsibilities," said Mary Beth, 16, from Eastside Catholic Parish in Elmira. "Everything changed so suddenly. Basically, I feel like I'm not a teenager but an adult."

Mary Beth said she starts dinner, picks up around the house and does laundry. Her dedication is so strong, she said, that her mother actually has to tell her to go out with her friends.

"I'm not told to do a lot of stuff, but I do it anyway," she said. "I don't think of the word 'sacrifice.' It's something I want to do."

In Wayne County, three youths have sacrificed school activities this year to attend Rite of Christian Initiation of Adult (RCIA) meetings. Josh Ginett and his brother, Paul, will be initiated into the Catholic Church at the April 11 Easter Vigil Mass at Church of the Epiphany in Sodus.

The Wednesday-night meetings have played havoc with Josh and Paul's sports



schedules. Faced with a difficult choice, they've decided to miss practices and games in favor of attending the RCIA activities.

"The classes started right in the middle of volleyball season (last fall)," said Josh, 15. He and

Paul noted that their decision was not always quickly accepted by volleyball and basketball teammates and coaches. But Paul said it's worth the effort so that he can become a full participant in the Catholic Church.

"I wanted to do it, so I could participate in Communion and stuff," said Paul, who will turn 13 on April 17.

The third youth, A.J. Secore, 13, is serving as both Josh and Paul's sponsor and has attended many RCIA classes with them. Even though he has sometimes stayed up late doing homework due to this involvement, A.J. said he's proud to be a sponsor.

"I don't really resent it at all. I want to help people," A.J. remarked.

Then again, Mary Beth said that she sometimes catches herself feeling resentful about the sacrifices she's chosen to make.

"I do ask myself why," she said. But Mary Beth said the experience has also brought her closer to her faith, and helped her understand the sacrifices Christ made for us.

"I know that God has a plan for everyone," Mary Beth said.

Brad said he, also, takes a positive approach when the going gets tough at home.

"This is building character. When I'm 30 years old and have a kid of my own, I'll know what to expect," Brad said. "I know teens who don't even know how to do laundry or cook dinner."

And Brian Pabis is actually looking forward to a personal sacrifice he will make later this month, when he travels to Nazareth Farm in West Virginia to help repair homes of some rural poor.

"We make the houses look livable. These people can't afford contractors when something goes wrong," explained Brian, 17, from the Church of St. Mary Our Mother in Horseheads.

Although he will pay \$100 to finance the trip, and also forego vacation time and the chance to make money at his part-time job, Brad said the benefits outweigh the sacrifices.

"You meet other kids who obviously have the same interests as you, and you make new friends," said Brian, who will travel in a group of 10 students from Elmira Notre Dame High School. "And I like to work with my hands, so it's not really like I'm making a sacrifice."

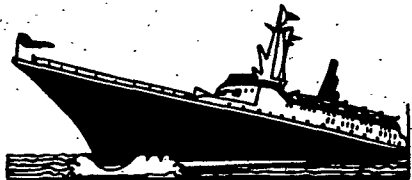
Brian said his service mission will also provide him with one of the greatest rewards of sacrificing for others.

"When you help someone and you know they appreciate it, it makes you feel good about yourself," Brian remarked.

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