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WALKING

Food for thought

STORY BY
MIKE LATONA

PHOTO BY GREG
FRANCIS



From left, Chris DeMillo, 16, Marie Peterson, 15, Tom Theimer, 17, Becky Peterson, 17, and Tim Donk, 15, walk in the Seneca Falls Crop Walk May 3.

When Megan Joseph lived in the inner city, she recalled, a couple of her neighbors always acted unusually hungry when they visited her home.

"They would just eat a lot of food. I thought, 'Hmmm ...,'" Megan, 14, said. Their hunger, along with what she saw as a volunteer at her parish's food cupboard, made Megan aware that hunger is not just a problem in Third World countries.

"People are really desperate. I've heard there have been break-ins at the food cupboard. That told me a lot, that they wanted the food that bad," remarked Megan, who attends St. Andrew's Church in Rochester.

Meanwhile, Thomas Logan was moved

by an appearance at his parish last year of Father Bill Brown, a missionary priest who works in Peru. During Father Brown's presentation, Thomas learned of the extreme poverty that Peruvian natives endure.

"People were robbing each other for food," said Thomas, 15, from St. Ann's Church in Hornell.

Thomas also said that he is bothered by television news reports and public-service announcements of starving people in poor African nations.

person was Tom Theimer, who said he got a pretty good workout walking the six-mile route through Seneca Falls.

"My feet, they're so sore. My legs are killing me. And I play lacrosse, so I'm in pretty good shape," remarked Tom, 17, from St. Patrick's Church in Seneca Falls.

However, Tom said he was motivated to finish the hike by remembering that people in other countries routinely walk several miles for food and drink.

"It seems impossible to imagine that people have to do that every day, because in America, people have what they want," commented Tom, who attends Geneva DeSales High School.

Tom said that despite his weariness, he was excited to learn how successful the Seneca Falls Crop Walk had been.

"I did feel better by the end, when I heard that we'd raised \$4,500 altogether among 75 people," Tom said. And Sarah Krijgelstein, also of St. Patrick's Church, said she enjoyed the walk because it was a communitywide effort.

"I just sit there and have a sadness, and wonder if there's really anything I can do," Thomas said.

Although they can't solve all the world's hunger issues, Megan and Thomas — as well as other diocesan teens — are trying to do their part by joining in hunger relief efforts. For instance, Megan helped launch a food drive among her freshman class at Irondequoit High School last Christmas. The food went to a Rochester family that was "adopted" by the Irondequoit freshmen. Megan reported that the drive was so successful, she decided to bring surplus goods to the food cupboard at St. Andrew's.

Thomas has taken part in fundraising activities at his parish, soliciting funds for Operation Rice Bowl and Crop Walks. Operation Rice Bowl, held during Lent, supports anti-poverty programs both overseas — through Catholic Relief Services — and within the diocese. And Crop Walk, held on designated dates in October and May, raises hunger awareness and funds for Church World Services, a multi-denominational coalition run by the National Council of Churches.

Several teens took part in Crop Walks across the diocese on May 3. One such

"It was just kind of fun to see people you know," said Sarah, 15.

In Webster, Shaun Milner was among the members of St. Paul's Church who went on the village's Crop Walk May 3. Earlier this spring, Shaun also took part in an overnight fast, held annually from Holy Thursday to Good Friday, with the St. Paul youth group.

Shaun said that the fast was designed to identify with the plight of the hungry.

"This is what people have to live with every day — little to eat, or nothing at all. We prayed for those people," Shaun said.

Shaun added that he got antsy waiting for a pizza party to begin on Good Friday evening that signified completion of the fast. Feeling hungry after 24 hours without food, he said, made him realize how awful day-to-day hunger must be.

"I really don't think I could imagine. I could go one day without eating — that isn't very much at all — but after five or six days, it would get pretty hard," he said.

And yet, Megan remarked, she's frustrated that not all people who live comfortably acknowledge that hunger is a severe problem both locally and abroad.

"I don't think they know how bad it is," Megan said. "They don't realize it; they don't want to."

She said that although the Christmas food drive was ultimately successful, organizers had to be extremely persistent in getting students to participate.

"It finally got through to them that people out there are hungry," Megan remarked.

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