



Greg Francis/Staff photographer

At your service

Mary Ellen Leahy serves food at Blessed Sacrament Parish's soup kitchen June 2. About 10 Odyssey participants prepared and served food, then washed dishes.

Ministry veteran to exit; offers advice to parishes

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — More than a decade ago, Mike Drexler was a parishioner at St. Boniface Church, 330 Gregory St., when he saw the potential for new kind of ministry at the parish.

"I think I realized, as did a number of other people, that there weren't a lot of opportunities for young people to get together and share their life stories in a church setting," recalled Drexler, now 36. "I felt there was a great need for reaching out to young people at the parish."

Together with parish staff and volunteers, Drexler began organizing social and spiritual activities designed to appeal to Catholics in their 20s and 30s. His volunteer work at St. Boniface later led to work with diocesan young adult ministry, he said.

"Mike has been an ongoing and key part of the development of young adult ministry in our diocese," said Karen Rinefierd,



diocesan coordinator for young adult, adult and family faith formation.

At the end of this month, Drexler will leave the full-time position he has held at Blessed Sacrament Church, 534 Oxford St., for the past five years as pastoral associate and young adult liaison. He and his wife Cindy moved to Avon in 1992, and Drexler has been hired as coordinator of faith formation and youth ministry at St. Agnes Church there. The couple have two children, twins Ben and Becky, who are 3½.

As young adult liaison at Blessed Sacrament, Drexler helped organize numerous activities directed at the parish's young adults, including Scripture study groups, video-and-discussion programs, Communion services, folk music Masses, service projects and parties.

"The one thing that we've tried to emphasize ... is to reach out those whose lives are not settled yet," he said. "It's a big time of discernment for a lot of young people in their 20s and 30s."

The parish has not only reached out to young adults, but has benefited from their participation, Drexler added. For example, he said, the parish operates a soup kitchen that draws a number of young adult volunteers. He added that about 30 young adults work on the parish's annual Christmas tree sale that raises funds for the parish.

Drexler's efforts at Blessed Sacrament earned him praise from Elisa Carillo, a young adult parishioner.

"I think he did a lot of good work to be very well-rounded," she said, noting how Drexler offered a mix of social, service and spiritual programs to young adults. "It's too bad he's leaving. It's a big loss."

Based on his experiences, he offered several tidbits of advice for parishes that are interested in starting young adult ministry programs.

First, he said, it's a good idea to designate someone as either a volunteer or professional young adult ministry coordinator. Second, he said, don't try to do too much at first. Start out with occasional social activities before moving into spiritual activities. A parish can also draw in young adults by inviting them to sing and play in the church's music groups at Mass, he said.

Meaningful hands-on projects are another way to reach young adults, he said. Such organizations as Habitat for Humanity, which builds homes for low-income people, are always looking for volunteers, and a parish's young adults may enjoy participating in such a project, he noted.

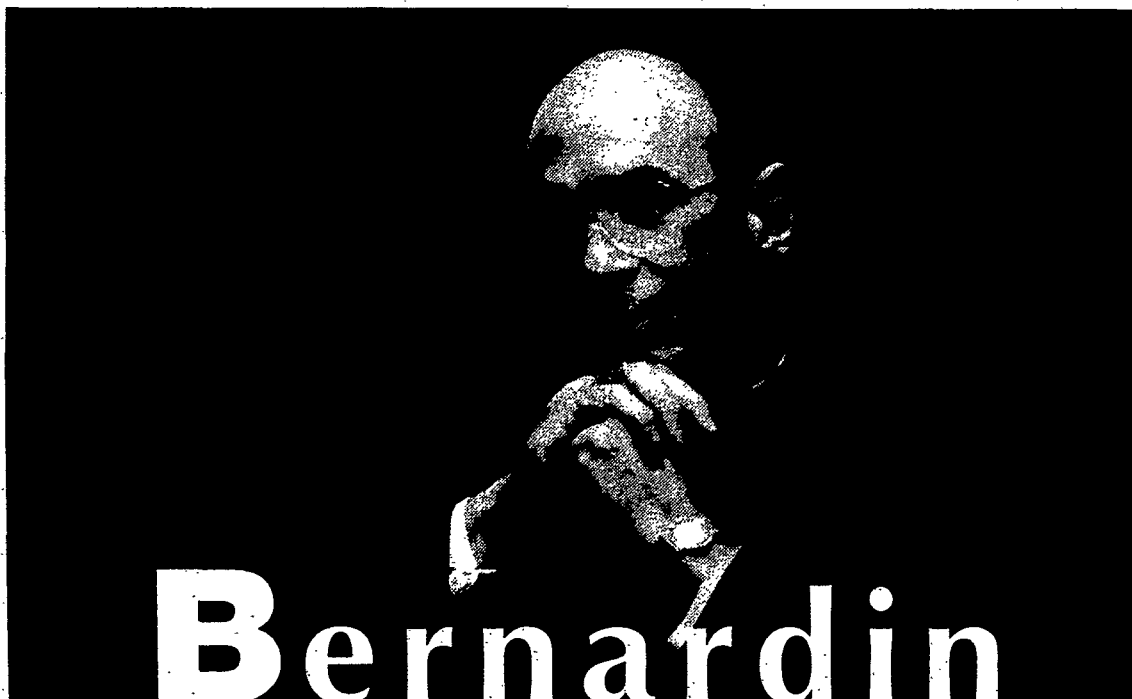
A parish might also consider organizing activities that specifically target young married couples, he added. For example, a committee of married couples put on a spaghetti dinner at Blessed Sacrament last March, he said.

Parish staff members should also personally invite young adults to participate in parish life, he said. Nothing works like walking up to a young adult in your church and saying: "We'd really like to do something for people your age," he commented.

Upcoming events

Odyssey, the diocesan-sponsored young adults network, has 50 upper box seat tickets available for \$6.50 apiece for a Rochester Red Wings baseball game on Friday, July 17, at 7:15 p.m. Reservations are required by Thursday, July 9. Call Karen Rinefierd at 716/328-3228, ext. 255, or 1-800-388-7177, ext. 255, or e-mail her at krinefierd@dor.org.

Odyssey is sponsoring casual dinners at The Distillery, 1142 Mt. Hope, Rochester, on the following Thursdays: June 25, July 23 and Aug. 27. Reservations are needed the night before. Call Teale Dominas at 716/637-4922.



Bernardin

a television portrait

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