

Expert: Young Catholics yearn for spiritual home

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

GENEVA — A spiritual revolution is brewing in the church, a speaker at "Leadership Days '98" told pastoral leaders from 104 parishes and other faith communities.

Kathleen Chesto, a free-lance writer, video producer and nationally known expert on family and youth catechesis, said the revolution is quietly underway among people born in the years after the Second Vatican Council ended in 1965 and will eventually encompass the church.

More than 440 people attended the pastoral leadership conference Aug. 11-13, at Hobart and William Smith Colleges.

Sponsored by the Diocese of Rochester and its Parish Support Ministries office, "Leadership Days '98" offered speeches and interactive workshops on a wide variety of topics.

In her talk the final day of the conference, Chesto, who lives in Hartford, Conn., noted that the current church resembles more a governmental institution than a family, a situation that has existed since Roman Emperor Constantine made Christianity the state religion. Yet it's a sense of family that young people want from the church, she said, because many Generation X'ers were often scarred by their parents' divorces, or have no sense of rootedness due to the mobility that has marked life in the United States for decades now.

"Our most basic desire is for a place called 'home,'" she said. "This generation has been deprived of that."

"The only church they're going to recognize is a church that feels like a home," said Chesto, who is currently writing a book

about Generation X and the church.

The conference included a keynote address by Father Joseph Hart, moderator of the Diocesan Pastoral Center in Rochester, who gave a historical overview of the church Aug. 11. In addition, Bishop Matthew H. Clark gave a talk that evening on such subjects as the diocese's synodal goals and their implementation in parishes.

Workshops touched on topics including women's issues; financial planning; different racial and ethnic traditions in the church; parish pastoral councils; and parish outreach to young adult Catholics.

Suzanne Schnittman, diocesan consistent life ethic coordinator, addressed how parish leaders could use Scripture, church documents and the church's catechism to promote the consistent life ethic, which opposes abortion, the death penalty, economic injustice, euthanasia, violence and war. One of the diocese's synodal goals, the ethic was discussed by Schnittman and more than 20 people at a workshop Aug. 11.

Schnittman said the ethic could be promoted in numerous ways, from spreading the word on bulletin boards in churches to designing liturgies in a way that affirms life — for example, picking music that celebrates life or inviting people with physical disabilities to serve as lectors.

Parish leaders looking to promote the consistent life ethic should never hesitate to use the example of Jesus in their work, she noted, and ask Catholics where they think Jesus would stand on certain life issues.

"(Mass-goers) are there because they have a belief in this guy that you believe in that did some pretty wonderful stuff," she said of Christ.



Greg Francis/Staff photographer

Roni Antenucci, a participant in "A Conversation with Women of the Early Church," speaks in costume Aug. 11 during Leadership Days at Hobart and William Smith Colleges, Geneva. Antenucci is a pastoral associate at Our Lady of Mercy Church, Greece.

In her talk the final day, Chesto likened religion to a "bridge" that allows people to cross over to spirituality. Some young people simply consider religion irrelevant, while a small minority have adopted a "traditionalist" stance.

However, she noted, most Generation X'ers believe that spirituality is important, but have jumped off the bridge, preferring to "swim" in a river of diverse spiritual sources unconnected to a traditional faith like Catholicism. Hence, their spirituality is marked by an individualistic — and, at times, uninformed — approach.

Unlike their parents who may have disagreed with the church on certain issues but stayed within it, many young people today simply ignore the church and seek spiritual nourishment in other faiths or in pop culture, she noted. TV shows like the pop-

ular series "X-Files" are serving young people spiritual food that they aren't finding in their faith, she noted.

"This is the group that has discovered the holy," Chesto said. "But they haven't done it through us."

Conference attendees seemed generally pleased with "Leadership Days '98." For example, Amanuel Bolde, who coordinates religious education and youth ministry at St. Boniface Church in Rochester, said the conference helped him to look at his ministry more realistically. Having worked at St. Boniface for three months, he said he learned from others at the conference and various workshop presenters not to expect his ministries to take off overnight.

"It takes a while to build up a new ministry, be it youth or whatever, one to five years," he said he learned.

Syracuse Diocese settles lawsuits

The Diocese of Syracuse has settled two multi-million dollar civil suits that alleged abuse of three boys by Daniel W. Casey Jr.

A former Syracuse priest, Casey currently lives in Rochester and frequently conducts workshops and seminars for religious groups and Catholic parishes.

According to published accounts, the diocese agreed to pay approximately \$475,000 to settle the suits, one of which had been scheduled to go to trial Aug. 17 in State Supreme Court in Syracuse. The

Syracuse Diocese declined to confirm the actual amounts paid.

The suits stemmed from alleged incidents between 1987 and 1989 in Oswego, where Casey was serving as a parochial vicar at St. Paul's Church.

According to Syracuse officials, Casey subsequently resigned from the priesthood, but they were not certain if he has been formally laicized.

No criminal charges were ever filed in connection with the alleged incidents.

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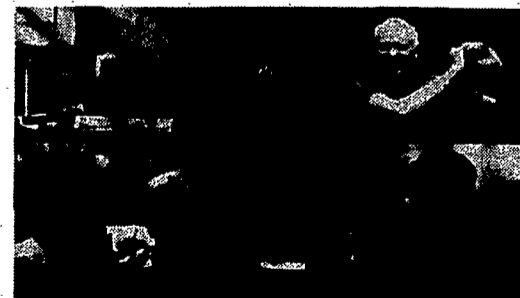
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★ Rob Burnham, RN, was named the first recipient of Elmira's St. Joseph Hospital's "Employee of the Month" for the month of June. The award is intended to honor an employee for consistent outstanding job performance.

★ Father Richard M. Myhalyk, an Elmira native, was elected superior general of the Society of St. Edmund at the congregation's general chapter June 10. The graduate of St. Mary's School in Elmira was elected to a four-year term.



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