

on the MOVE

Different, but united

Story by Mike Latona Photos by Greg Francis

When was the last time you attended a Mass that featured all of the following:

- Choirs belting out tunes in both English and Spanish?
- People in the pews clapping their hands and swaying to the music?
- Liturgical dances featuring African, Laotian and Spanish cultures?
- Teens doing readings and preaching?

The atmosphere was high-energy from start to finish at the first-ever Youth on the Rise Mass, held Feb. 7 at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church in Rochester.

"Nice to see you here!" shouted Father Neil Miller, OLPH's pastor, in his opening remarks.

"Nice to see you, too!" the congregation roared back.

According to Elizabeth Quintana, liturgy organizers felt that such a lively atmosphere would be appealing to the largely teen gathering.

"It's not like something you had to go to. You wanted to go," remarked Elizabeth, 13, who attends Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church. She served as a lector for the Mass.

Showcasing ethnic diversity was another big focus of the day, Jasmine Campbell noted.

"I like expressing my (African-American) heritage, expressing who we are. You don't always find a black Catholic church," said Jasmine, 13. Her parish, St. Bridget's, is mostly African-



Shaundra Ragland, left, and Sasha Campbell act out a skit during the youth Mass.



Liturgical dancers pray prior to the Mass procession.

American.

"Everybody could feel joyful, and everybody could have the freedom to express their culture," said Scott Singavatoy, 12, from OLPH. His family is among the few Laotians in Rochester.

Elizabeth, Jasmine and Scott were among 20 teens who had been planning the Mass since last fall. Organizers came not only from OLPH, Mount Carmel and St. Bridget's, but also from St. Michael's and Holy Redeemer/St. Francis Xavier. All five churches are located on the city of Rochester's northeast side.

Youth groups from several suburban parishes attended the Youth on the Rise Mass as well — a factor that was important to Jasmine.

"We want to let other people know that we're trying to make a difference, that we do exist," Jasmine said.

Jasmine's sister, Sasha, said that Catholics from other parts of Monroe County may not otherwise be aware of inner-city youth ministry.

"They won't find out, because they're not a part of your world," said Sasha, 15, who lectured at the Mass.

One of the key differences at inner-city parishes is the style of liturgy, Sasha said. She noted that St. Bridget's — which features a Gospel Mass every Sunday morning — is typical of the lively worship in urban Catholic churches.

"It has a lot to do with singing, how you express the way you feel. It's the fun of it — it makes you happy, makes you complete," Sasha remarked.



Kimi Xaisaanasy joins in Laotian liturgical dance at the Youth on the Rise Mass Feb. 7 at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church, Rochester.



Father Neil Miller invites everyone to sing.

Another difference between inner-city and suburban parishes, Maria Syouthoum from OLPH pointed out, is the constant safety concern that inner-city teens must

face.

"They don't go through what we go through, with all the violence. Things could change in a minute. Everything could be fine, and then kids could start fighting, throwing beer bottles, pulling out a gun," said Maria, 17. She served as a member of the Feb. 7 liturgy's Laotian dancing troupe.

Youth groups offer a haven from some of these dangers, Elizabeth said.

"It's good to have youth group. Kids around here are on drugs or in gangs, so it's good to have a place to go," Elizabeth commented. She noted that a group of about 20 teens attends youth-group meetings on Thursdays at Mount Carmel. They also hold youth Masses and stage such youth-group fundraisers as car washes and Halloween parties.

Elizabeth said that the Mount Carmel youth group is made up of Hispanics and African-Americans. But at St. Bridget's, Sasha said, the youth group is all African-American — despite her attempts to recruit other ethnic groups from the parish.

"There will always be difficulty in blending races," Sasha said.

However, organizers of Youth on the Rise were pleased at their cohesion despite ethnic differences.

"We try to look past that," Maria said. "I learned we can do different things together, if we put our minds to it."

"We're different, but we're still united," Elizabeth added.

Sasha was pleased with the Feb. 7 Mass, saying she's enthusiastic about keeping Youth on the Rise intact.

"We definitely want to do another Mass," she said.

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