

Youth ministry year hits the ground running

I love them no less. It's just that it takes me longer now to recover than it once did after I spend the weekend with them. I am referring, of course, to our wonderful high school kids and their exciting convention held last weekend on the campus of SUNY Geneseo.

The event was beautifully planned by Michael Theisen and our Diocesan Youth Committee, a group of teens and adults from every region of our diocese. It flowed smoothly because of the DYC and the generous group of adults who served as chaperones and otherwise did all they could to ensure a safe and healthy experience for the young people.

But those I mentioned above can do only so much. Then it is up to the kids to bring life and spirit to the framework that has been provided for their enjoyment and growth. And bring life and spirit they did. They sang and danced, listened attentively to the thinking of others and shared their own, prayed and played with the kind of energy and enthusiasm possessed only by the young.

I don't know the exact number of participants for the weekend. But, I think that well over 600 were present to celebrate their faith and to learn more about it. This they did in a range of workshops on themes of great interest to teens; in liturgical celebrations of great beauty; and in the wide range of activities planned for their enjoyment.

One of the highlights of the weekend for me was the penance service we celebrated

along the way



BY BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK

on Friday evening. The beautiful rite, prepared by our young people, started in Wadsworth Auditorium where we began the Sacrament of Reconciliation with prayer, Scripture reading and an examination of conscience. After we had enjoyed that time together, 30 priests processed to a great lawn, where each had a candlelit place for the celebration of the Sacrament. The young people who wished to receive the sacrament were invited by school grade to go to one of the stations on the lawn, after which they joined me to sing the Our Father and to receive a final blessing.

There were several other moving moments for me during the convention. I think of meeting for dinner and conversation with the high-school graduates who returned on Saturday to spend time together reflecting on their post-high-school faith experience. Their faith is strong, and their honesty is stimulating. They are unafraid to name our faults and to call us to better things. And, they are generous enough to work to make things better. What are they looking for? Hospitality and inclusion in

parish life; respect for their ideas; preaching that is relevant to their life experience; and spirited worship.

I am always touched by the ways in which the young people respond to one another. It's not at all unusual to meet and speak with kids who will tell you: a) that they are there because they were in some way "pressured" to come by adults or peers; or, b) that although no one pushed them, they really didn't think the event would be really as rewarding as it turned out to be. I cannot document this, but my strong opinion is that the kids make the difference for one another. They realize that there are lots of gifted, loving people their age who are alive with God and active in the church. They find new confidence in that sense of solidarity and, in many cases, develop ongoing and supportive friendships.

We generally think of our youth ministry year as beginning with the High School Youth Convention. If that is so, we are off to a good beginning. Soon to come will be our Hands of Christ celebrations in October and the November National Catholic Youth Convention in St. Louis. We'll be sending more than 600 young people to that event.

You'll hear more about these events in the weeks ahead. In the meantime, I hope you will do all you can to encourage and support a lively and loving ministry with and to young people in your parish community. Your support does untold good for the church of today and tomorrow.

Peace to all.

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