

On the MOVE

Story by Mike Latona
Photos by Mike Mergen

Sounding a note for youth groups



David Napoli filled in for the organist during the Oct. 23 Mass at St. Hyacinth's Church.

The effects of David Napoli's trip to the Holy Land go well beyond his 10 days there last February.

It was while on that pilgrimage, with other members of St. Hyacinth's Parish, that David decided to start faith-sharing sessions for teens in Auburn.

On Wednesday evenings, David, 17, can be found leading a group of high-schoolers in the former St. Hyacinth's convent. David runs the meetings with the help of Roberta Kukiela, the parish catechetical leader, who also went on the Holy Land trip.

David feels strongly that every Catholic teen should have the opportunity to experience youth group. If a parish doesn't offer one, he suggested that teens approach church leaders about getting one started.

"After you're confirmed, what do you have besides religious education? There's CYO, but not everyone's a cheerleader or basketball player," he commented. "Youth group keeps a faith environment and makes (teens) think about what they should do, and how they should act, when they go out into the world."

Youth-group meetings began last spring at St. Hyacinth's and are open to all high-school students. Attendance is often in double figures, David reported. "It's mostly guys, strangely enough," he said. "I've heard that most other church youth groups are mostly girls."

The group enjoys recreational activities and also thrives on its sharing sessions, he said. Subjects have covered a wide range — suicide, drugs and drinking, the death of a loved one.

"The first four sessions, we just talked. People had a place to open up. They had a place to feel safe," he said.

David steadfastly refuses to exclude non-Catholics from the youth group. "That's kind of, like, judging," David said. "We just work as a group — whatever the denomination, it's still in the house of Christ. We have born-again, Protestants. Sometimes Catholics are in the minority."

David's open-mindedness, he said, stems from his trip to the Holy Land. In Jerusalem, he saw Christians and Jews worshipping, and rich as well as poor people walking the streets.

"There were beggars everywhere," he said. "Back home, you don't see the poverty. It showed me a lot about how different people live."

He also got to witness the area in which Christ himself lived. "We talked about how it was for Jesus, how many nights he must have slept under the stars with his companions," David said.

David said that his group took a boat out on the Sea of Galilee, where he imagined Jesus calming the storm as described in Matthew 8:23-27, Mark 4:35-41 and Luke 8:22-25.

"Basically, everywhere we went, we read the Scripture passage (pertaining to that area)," David remarked.

Back home David is involved with, well, just about everything at St. Hyacinth's. In addition to his youth-group efforts, David has been a religious-education instructor, altar server, lector, organist and choir member. He also volunteers through the parish at Mercy Rehabilitation Center.

That's not all: David is a speaker with the PSI (Postponing Sexual Involvement)



David prepares hymn numbers to display for St. Hyacinth's 5 p.m. Mass.

program, operated through the Cayuga County Health Department. In his lectures, David tells youths not to use sexual activity to gain acceptance from their peers.

"There are a lot better ways you could show off," he remarked.

For all his accomplishments, David received a 1999 Hands of Christ Award from Bishop Matthew H. Clark. More than 500 diocesan high-school seniors have been named for this honor, which is based on outstanding contributions in their churches, schools and communities.

David, who attends Auburn High School, humbly received his plaque in an Oct. 22 ceremony at St. Joseph's Church in Penfield.

"Anything good I receive, whether it be an award, a reward, honor or glory, I accept on behalf of God," David said. "But anything sinful or bad, I can only blame on myself."

David said he is considering the priesthood or becoming a lay missionary; he also may opt for college next year.

"My heart is into the priesthood, but it could also be into a girl. Right now I'm taking it day by day," he said. "I'll wait for God to answer me before I jump into anything."

Whatever his future holds, David said he'll be satisfied with the simple pleasures in life.

"Be happy with nothing. If you get more, you'll be even happier," he advised.

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