

ON THE MOVE

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NCYC '99 ST. LOUIS



Dan McBride blesses his son Ian Oct. 27 at St. Louis Church in Pittsford, during a ceremony concluding a "parent and pilgrim" planning meeting for the National Catholic Youth Conference. Bishop Matthew H. Clark will accompany more than 500 youths to the event.

Counting down to the national conference

After a year of fundraising activities, Amanda Harris can see light at the end of the tunnel. It's almost time for the National Catholic Youth Conference. "I've started the countdown," said Amanda, 14, a parishioner at St. Leo's Church in Hilton.

The national conference, held every two years, will take place Nov. 18-21 in St. Louis, Mo. Amanda expects her first NCYC to generate the same excitement as the Diocesan Youth Convention, held annually at SUNY Geneseo.

"If it's anything like Geneseo, it's going to be great," Amanda remarked.

Ashley Graham, on the other hand, is an NCYC veteran, having attended the most recent conference, which took place in Kansas City in 1997. She said she can't wait to again share her faith with thousands of teens from across the country. An estimated 18,000 youths attended the NCYC two years ago.

"Just knowing that everyone is there for the same reason, to follow God, it helps you focus. It's so cool, all the people," said Ashley, 16, from St. Louis Church in Pittsford. She's a junior at Our Lady of Mercy High School.

The conference will include numerous workshops, music and prayer opportunities, with nationally noted speakers and musicians taking part. (For more details on the conference, check out its Web page at www.nfcym.org in the "Projects and Publications" section.)

A gigantic contingent from the Rochester Diocese plans to attend. Michael Theisen, diocesan youth-ministry coordinator, estimated that 500 teens and 115 adult chaperons — more than dou-



Lisa Picone immerses a cotton puff into holy water before the blessing ceremony.

ble the number for Kansas City — will make the journey to St. Louis.

Theisen said he presents the trip as a pilgrimage "to denote this as a spiritual event, not just as, 'Hey, it's this great weekend.'" In that vein, regional pre-NCYC meetings in the diocese have been dubbed "parent and pilgrim" gatherings.

Theisen noted that Rochester will have the 13th-largest delegation in the country, an amazing total considering the distance that area teens must travel.

The \$500-per-person price tag has, in many instances, been offset by successful fundraising efforts within parish communities. Nancy Roy, youth minister at St. Mary of the Lake/St. Benedict in Watkins Glen and Odessa, noted that several Southern Tier parishes have employed "pink flamingo" attacks. Her own parish raised a whopping \$5,400 — including an anonymous donation of \$2,500 — from its "Flamingo Fling" during July.

Here's how it works: Youth-group members planted numerous plastic birds in residents' front yards, then charged a donation to have them removed. Or, would-be targets could buy "insurance" to avoid being greeted by a flock when they opened their front door in the morning.



Michael Theisen, diocesan youth-ministry coordinator, discusses details of the trip to St. Louis, Mo.

Roy observed that non-Catholic residents helped aid the pink flamingo cause as well.

"There was a Methodist who was so thankful that we thought to include him, he gave us \$250," said Roy, whose parish will send 12 teens and five adults to St. Louis.

St. Leo's in Hilton, also, has been heavily into fundraising. Amanda said she has helped out at a car wash, dinner, candy sale and bottle drive. Tim Santo, youth minister, added that the group has staged "Phabulous Phish Parties," and the parish held a benefit golf tournament for NCYC. All told, Santo said, the group has collected more than \$10,000 of its \$11,000 goal.

"We couldn't have done all this without the support we've gotten from the parish," said Santo, whose NCYC group will include 15 youths and five adults.

Santo credited the teens, also, for their efforts.

"I can tell the kids are burning out from all the work, but they're really looking forward to the trip," he commented.

St. Leo's parish previously didn't have a formal high-school youth group. Santo said that preparing for NCYC led him to become a volunteer youth minister, and that the NCYC teens will remain a youth group upon their return to Hilton.

Amanda, a member of the Diocesan Youth Committee, said she plans to help with the St. Leo's youth group so that teens have a place to share their faith comfortably.

"In school, a lot of people don't accept that," she remarked.

Santo said he will fondly recall this year's national convention as the youth group's starting point.

"We can only build from here, and so far we are building strong!" he said.

COMING NEXT WEEK:
Eagle Scout project honors vets