

A desire to serve



Jason Kotmel, an Immaculate Conception parishioner and former youth group member, donates blood for the first time at Immaculate Conception's blood drive March 18 at Immaculate Conception School in Ithaca.

Ithaca's Immaculate Conception Church could be mistaken for a youth-group newsletter.

Bulletins for March 4-5 and March 11-12 made note of weekly Lenten dinners at the parish; a blood drive; a youth retreat; a St. Patrick's Day dinner; Girl Scout Sunday; a family film night; and Living Stations of the Cross. In one way or other, all these events involve Immaculate Conception's teens.

"We try to have at least one major happening a month," said Greg Wesley, the parish's pastoral minister for lifelong faith formation.

Most of the activities require volunteer support, and Wesley said that the youth-group members are very generous with their time. One such person is Diana Weeks, who volunteered at a Lenten dinner held March 10 in the parish hall.

"I was supposed to go to a party tonight, but I felt I should come here and support my church," said Diana, 13.

The youth group sponsors dinners every Friday during Lent. Teens assist with setup and serve as greeters before they — along with most of the diners — head upstairs for Stations of the Cross at 7 p.m.

An especially busy stretch for the youth group occurred the weekend of March 17-18. In addition to the Friday dinner, Immaculate Conception teens helped out at a blood drive the next day, as well as a St. Patrick's Day dinner in the evening.

There is some payback for all their hard work. Funds raised from the Friday dinners and St. Patrick's Day event will go toward sending parish teens to a summer youth conference at the Franciscan University in Steubenville, Ohio.

Regina Fabbroni, 15, and Sarah Lynch, 14, are anxious to return to the summer conference after attending a similar event with the parish in Massachusetts last year.

"We were at a spiritual high," Regina said.

"On Saturday night, during the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, people were just filled with the spirit. I was crying my brains out," Sarah added.

Their positive experiences have gotten Diana, as well as 14-year-old Jessica Marsh, excited about attending their first summer conference this year.

"I think it'll be a good faith experience; it'll open up my eyes," Diana said.

"I thought it would be so fun to go there and be with people who shared your faith," remarked Jessica, 14.

In the meantime, the Immaculate Conception youths have had plenty to keep them busy at the parish. In addition to their fundraising activities, many helped out at the blood drive and/or took part in Girl Scout Sunday and a family film night, both held March 12. The youth group is also looking forward to attending a retreat at Watson Homestead in Painted Post (March 31-April 2) and an overnight fast at All Saints Church in Lansing (April 7-8); presenting the Living Stations of the Cross (Good Friday, April 21); and assisting with the Children's Living Stations (April 14).

The teens have also been involved in numerous service activities prior to Lent, such as blood drives last spring and fall; a Thanksgiving dinner; Christmas caroling at nursing homes; helping clean senior citizens' homes; and participating in parish cleanups.

Sarah noted that and said she helped clean the parish grounds last fall — although she'd rather forget some parts, such as discovering a dead squirrel.

Meanwhile, Regina said she has enjoyed being a blood-drive volunteer. "We had to make sure people ate before they left (after



Margaret Marisa, an Immaculate Conception youth group volunteer, helps run the canteen, which provided juice and snacks for people who gave blood.

giving blood) because if they didn't, they'd pass out," Regina remarked.

Jessica said she likes taking part in her parish youth-group activities because she forms bonds that don't exist in her public-school setting.

"I've always kind of wanted to be involved in church. It's a way to be with people who share my beliefs," Jessica said. "You feel like a minority at school."

And Diana, a relative newcomer to parish youth activities, enjoys the group because she has been quickly accepted.

"The people were real nice. They kind of allowed you into their circle," she said.

COMING NEXT WEEK:
Diocesan leadership program

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