

Story by
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Mike Mergen/Photo intern

Ben Sear, a junior at Brighton High School, hands out bulletins after the 10 a.m. Mass March 26 at Our Lady of Lourdes Church, Brighton. Below, Ben takes up the collection during Mass.

Leaders of tomorrow

Janelle Borowski is eager to take on leadership roles in her church and community. She also feels she'd benefit from a training program "to help me be less shy."

Meanwhile, Ben Sear already has a fair amount of leadership experience under his belt. But by no means does he feel he's a master at his craft.

"I'm not going to claim to be the best leader in the world," Ben remarked.

Janelle, 14, and Ben, 16, were among the teens who attended the FutureNow Leadership Training Program Feb. 20-21 at St. Pius Tenth Church in Chili. The diocesan program, begun in 1998, has been offered in every region of the diocese and has been attended by more than 200 teens, according to Michael Theisen, diocesan coordinator of youth ministry.

FutureNow covers a long list of leadership skills for youths in grades nine-12. Sessions are offered in two levels, each consisting of 12 hours of training. Teens spend that time learning about leadership style; group dynamics; team building and decision-making; program planning; communication; prayer and worship; presentations; spirituality; and personal growth.

Nora Bradbury-Haehl, one of the program's creators, remarked that a common theme throughout the sessions is for teens to emulate the leadership values and characteristics of Jesus Christ.

"It's really the whole WWJD (What Would Jesus Do) thing," Bradbury-Haehl said.

For instance, Bradbury-Haehl asked teens at the February session to reflect on their lifelong goals and develop mission statements stating "what legacy you want to leave, the principles you'd like to uphold."

Janelle noted that she and other FutureNow participants practiced acting as small-group leaders. She felt very comfortable in that role, she said.

"I was able to be more open and talkative; it gives me more confidence. I was able to take more initiative without

feeling nervous," said Janelle, who is a lector, eucharistic minister and contemporary-choir member at St. John the Evangelist Parish in Spencerport.

Janelle added that FutureNow had an immediate effect on her. "I was a lot more talkative that (Sunday) night at youth group," she said.

"I liked the way they did it. It was a real good balance of talks and activities," Ben said of his FutureNow weekend. Ben is a member of his parish's youth advisory committee at Our Lady of Lourdes Parish in Brighton, as well as a hospitality ministry coordinator and youth representative on parish council. He also belongs to Natural Helpers, a peer leadership group at Brighton High School.

Theisen noted that the FutureNow program was begun because he'd been hearing from parishes that they needed help in developing youth leaders. He devised FutureNow along with three parish youth ministers: Bradbury-Haehl from St. Joseph's in Penfield and Holy Trinity in Webster; Sue Versluys from St. John the Evangelist in Spencerport; and Lynne Boucher, formerly of St. Louis in Pittsford.

Theisen and Bradbury-Haehl stressed that FutureNow does not begin and end with the training sessions. First, an advocate — usually a youth minister or adult volunteer — is required to work at the parish level with each FutureNow participant. In addition, a parish pastor or administrator must agree in advance to give a FutureNow teen the opportunity to use his or her leadership skills in the parish.

"We're not training you to be involved in your youth group. We're training you



to be involved in the entire parish," Theisen said.

In Ben and Janelle's cases, that involvement even extends beyond the parish. Ben is a member of the Diocesan Youth Committee and made his debut as a diocesan-retreat peer leader in February. Meanwhile, Janelle participated in the same retreat at Rotary Sunshine Camp in Rush and came away hoping to be a peer leader herself someday.

"I really loved the peer staff," she said. "The people are good role models and I really want to get into that."

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EDITORS' NOTE: Registration is currently open for FutureNow sessions April 29-30 at St. Anne's Church in Palmyra and July 12-13 at Holy Cross Church in Rochester. For registration and information about which levels are being offered, call 716-328-3228, ext. 279 or 1-800-388-7177, ext. 279.

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