



FATHER STEVE LAPE, parochial vicar, Church of the Good Shepherd, Henrietta: "He was probably the youngest person I photographed for the project. (Lape will turn 34 on June 14). You could see his energy, his love for the priesthood. He was pumped. Even if it wasn't for a (photo) shoot, it would have been good to meet somebody so positive."



SISTER GRACE MILLER, RSM, director, House of Mercy, an inner-city shelter in Rochester: "She's an incredible person. I was really amazing to hear her story and everything she's been through. She would not let politics get in the way. She would do what she felt was right, even if it might be illegal or deemed inappropriate. She looked over (during the shoot) at all these obituaries she had put on the wall, and said that all those people couldn't make enough money to pay for their own funeral. So many people had problems getting jobs, she said, and yet they were just a few blocks from all these corporate offices. Throughout the shoot I felt she had a profound understanding of human dignity and she saw value in everybody."

Student, via photo assignment, gains insight on church people

This was a photography project that Justin Steele couldn't simply take at face value.

Earlier this year, for his sophomore photography class at Rochester Institute of Technology, Justin decided to shoot portraits of various religious leaders in the Rochester area. By the time the project was completed, he not only had clear impressions of their faces, but also of their hearts and minds.

"It was very touching, what they were willing to share about their lives," remarked Justin, who attends weekly Mass at RIT.

Among the 15 people Justin photographed, six are Catholic: five priests and a nun. All of his subjects, Justin said, revealed interesting facets of their personalities in their words, actions and expressions.

"I wanted people who have authority, who were shaping their religion — strong people," said Justin, 19. In portrait photography, he explained, "So much of what you photograph is a feeling, an attitude, an emotion."

For instance, Justin was struck by his visit with Father Jerome Schifferli, pastor emeritus at St. Joseph's, Livonia/St. William, Conesus Parish: "He came from a very religious family. His faith progressed and that eventually led to the priesthood. He had been a prison chaplain before becoming a pastor. At first I had him sitting in a sofa chair, but that wasn't working ... I finally got him standing up, in an authoritarian position. He had his arms crossed, very firm. I felt that was perfect."

Even when a glitch occurred, Justin came away with a telling reminder about the busy lives of priests. He noted that when he went to photograph Father Anthony Mugavero, pastor of St. Bridget's Church in Rochester, the priest was trying hard to juggle all his commitments that weekday, and didn't have as much time available as he had hoped.

"He had actually gotten double-booked," Justin said. "It's just an example of how incredibly busy people serving religion can get. They're not just saying Mass."

Justin titled his project "15

Strong." He said that when he showed his portraits in class, his fellow students reacted with enthusiasm.

"All of a sudden hands went up, and they wanted to know about the lives of the people. It goes to show young people are interested. I think there is an overall general respect young people have for religion and leaders, though that's not always evident," Justin remarked.

Justin, who recently completed his sophomore year at RIT, received an A for his project. This past spring, he incorporated a Catholic theme into another project by shooting the interiors of some Rochester-area churches for an architectural photography class.

Photography and the Catholic Church have intertwined in Justin's life ever since he was growing up

in Washington, D.C. When he was a young child, he recalled, a photographer from the Washington archdiocesan newspaper, the *Catholic Standard*, took a picture of his father, sister and him attending Mass. Many years later, while interviewing with a *Catholic Standard* editor for freelance work,

Justin was shocked to see the same photo on display in the newspaper's office.

Justin was only a high-school sophomore when he began freelancing for the *Catholic Standard*. Three months later, the enterprising teenager had his first business cards printed.

"I shot my first wedding before I was able to drive," he remarked.

Justin continues to shoot assignments for the *Catholic Standard* when he returns to Washington for the summer.

Though he's not yet sure which area of photography he'll pursue for a living, Justin doesn't rule out at least a partial involvement with Catholic publications.

"Just serving the Catholic press, and being a form of communication for them, is something that will always be there," he said.

STORY

BY

MIKE LATONA

**COMING NEXT WEEK:
Friend to the migrants**