

MOVIE

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A plea for world peace



Aimee Welch, 17, dries a platter in the kitchen of the parish center at the Church of the Epiphany in Sodus on June 4 after the Spanish Mass. Welch, along with her brother and her mom, volunteers about twice a month by settling out food and drinks after the Mass for a social hour for migrant workers.

Can, and should, a woman be president of the United States? Aimee Welch wastes no time offering her opinion. "Oh, yes. I think anyone can become president," stated Aimee, a parishioner at St. Mary of the Lake Parish in Ontario. Aimee, 17, is not ruling out the possibility she could become that person. "I say to my friends, 'So are you going to vote for me for president?'" she remarked.

Were Aimee to become president, she said a top priority would be to "focus on what's going on around here (in the United States) — improve our own country before we help other countries."

Aimee observed that the presidency requires "someone who's strong, that's the biggest thing. And you have to be very honest. That's so big, so big."

Aimee has already acquired some of the world vision that a high-ranking political leader must possess. A couple of years ago she traveled to Italy as part of a youth congress. While there, she chatted with young people who had grown up surrounded by ethnic war in Bosnia.

"Where they lived, guys with guns would be walking down the street. Hearing their stories, it was amazing," Aimee said.

Much as she sympathized with the Bosnians' plight, Aimee isn't sure the U.S. military should get tied up in other countries' wars, as was the case in Bosnia.

"You could try to work things out without being so forceful. I think we should lay off a little bit; sometimes we get too involved," she said.

Aimee strives for harmonious relations between all cultures. She practices this principle by volunteering regularly at the Sunday afternoon Hispanic Mass, celebrated at Church of the Epiphany in Sodus. Aimee, along with family members and other volunteers from her parish, helps serve refreshments after Mass to Wayne County-area migrant workers and their families.

Aimee's mother, Diane Welch, said she got her family involved in the Hispanic Mass because "I thought it was something they could learn from, seeing how other people live. Now we just like to do it."

The Hispanic migrant community is made up chiefly of Mexicans who labor in apple orchards, and Puerto Ricans who work in a canning plant. Some seasonal farmworker families live in Wayne County year-round, but most come north from Florida and Texas during the warmer months.

Aimee said she was initially surprised at the droves of people who attend the Hispanic Mass at Church of the Epiphany. "It was a very different experience; they just pack in," she said.

She also observed that many of the workers refuse to take Eucharist. "They don't think they're worthy to get Communion," she said.

Aimee said that most migrant families can't afford cars, and must get around on foot. Their plight, she feels, gives them an unfair rap among some local residents.

"People will say stuff — that they just hang around town and aren't doing anything, that they're crowding our streets," Aimee said.

Aimee, on the other hand, said she has become friendly with many Hispanics despite the ethnic differences. "That doesn't bother me. They're just people," she said. "They're really nice."

Aimee, who has lived in Williamson all her life, said she doesn't envy the migrant workers' lifestyle.

"I wonder what it must be like, their moving all over and not staying in one place at one time. It must be hard," Aimee said.

Her work with the migrants helped earn Aimee a diocesan Hands of Christ Award, given last fall to high-school seniors for outstanding service.

"She reaches out with love and friendliness. Her beautiful smile helps (the migrants) to feel welcome," wrote Lee Skerrett, pastoral associate from St. Mary of the Lake, on Aimee's nomination form.

After Aimee graduates from Marion High School this month, she will attend SUNY College at Purchase. She also plans to stay involved in Mariapolis Luminosa, a community located in White Plains, N.Y. Mariapolis Luminosa is part of Focolare, a worldwide ecumenical movement dedicated to world peace and unity. Aimee said she first visited Mariapolis Luminosa with a friend five years ago, and has made several trips to the community during the summer months.

Aimee said that everyone should maintain hope for world peace, no matter how impossible that may seem.

"Sometimes it feels like it's never going to happen, it seems like an unrealistic goal," she said. "But still we try. We're not going to give up. You start small, and it gradually gets a little bigger."



Father Jesus Flores introduces Aimee, her brother Mike, 13, and mother, Diane Welch to the congregation June 4, as volunteers who have helped at the Hispanic Mass.

COMING NEXT WEEK: Junior high rally