

# MOVIE

## on the

Story by  
**Mike Latona**  
Staff Writer



Photo courtesy Church of the Assumption Youth Group

From right: Shayna Abiuso, Zach Summers and Justin Whelehan, youth-group members at Church of the Assumption in Fairport, enjoy a rousing moment at the July 14-16 Youth Conference.

## A powerful weekend in Ohio

**K**risty Rodgers clearly recalls the impact of her first night at a Franciscan University of Steubenville-sponsored Youth Conference. "They ask you to stand up if you haven't before committed your life to God," recalled Kristy, 17, from the Coming-Painted Post Roman Catholic Community. "It's really powerful to see people who haven't been that close to God, suddenly feel something and stand up."

Although Kristy didn't consider herself distant from God, she found that she, also, stood up with many other people on that July night last year.

This "public commitment" portion of the Youth Conference also leaps to mind for Meg Nupp, who attended her first of three national Youth Conferences in 1998.

"It was the first time I publicly devoted my life to Christ," said Meg, 16, a parishioner at Church of the Assumption in Fairport. Meg said that the conferences have, in part, fueled her desire to attend weekday Mass on a semi-regular basis.

Kristy and Meg returned to Steubenville this year, on the weekend of July 14-16, along with their respective parishes. Once again, Kristy said, she was excited to gather in worship with thousands of teens from across the country.

"It's unbelievable, to see all the people that feel the same way you do," Kristy remarked.

Coming-Painted Post and Church of the Assumption each sent several dozen teens to the July 14-16 event. They are among several parishes in the Rochester Diocese who attended Summer Conferences either in Steubenville, or at one of the Franciscan University's satellite conferences. Other diocesan parishes taking part this year were Holy Family Catholic Community in Steuben and Livingston counties; Immaculate Conception in Ithaca; St. Andrew's in Rochester, and the Roman Catholic Community of Geneva (which traveled with the Coming-Painted Post group).

Steubenville is located in southeast Ohio, near the borders of Pennsylvania and West Virginia. Just what is

the allure of these conferences, that youth groups would be willing to raise funds to cover their costs and then travel more than 300 miles for a weekend event?

"Kids experience Jesus Christ in a very deep way. That's the draw," stated Alene Goodman, religious-education coordinator for the Coming-Painted Post Roman Catholic Community.

"It's work, fun, pray and play — it's everything that youth ministers try to provide for the teens in their youth ministry programs throughout the year," added Marie Claus, youth minister at Church of the Assumption.

The weekend provides a full dose of faith-filled venues. Workshops were offered this year on chastity, and other ways of choosing faithfulness over the temptations of society. There are also guest speakers, musical guests and singalongs.

Opportunities abound for solemn worship as well. In addition to Masses, the sacrament of reconciliation is offered frequently during the conference.

Andrew Dyckman was in a group from Holy Family Catholic Community that attended the Steubenville East conference July 21-23 in Attleboro, Mass. Andrew, 15, said his favorite portions of the weekend were "definitely the Benediction, the adoration, and the Holy Hour."

Meg said she was inspired by this year's theme, "A Taste of Heaven," devoted to the Eucharist. The presentations, she said, help remind her "that this is Jesus I'm receiving, and how Jesus can be in my life."

Students and faculty from the Franciscan University of Steubenville are among the conference's organizers and volunteers. Although the university is noted for teaching traditional Catholicism, Goodman stated that "they bring no agenda to the conference, no ultra-conservatism." She noted that female altar servers are present during liturgies, and that organizers are "extremely welcoming to any non-Catholics."

Even so, Michael Theisen, diocesan coordinator of youth ministry, doesn't give a ringing endorsement of the conferences.

"While I have never been to the conferences themselves, I have heard mixed reviews from the groups that have gone," Theisen said. "While some have enjoyed the experience fully, others have found it less than satisfying, saying it does not meet their expectations."

Kristy said that the conferences may not be for all because of their intensity. For instance, the aforementioned "public commitment" sessions occur several times throughout the conference. Teens are encouraged not only to make a public commitment to Christ, but also to discern a religious vocation.

"A lot of the stuff can make you feel really uncomfortable if you're not used to it," Kristy said.

Andrew said that people who prefer quiet, private worship should proceed with caution to a Summer Conference, saying jokingly, "I only recommend it if you like to sing and dance and make a total fool out of yourself. He also recommended, in a serious tone, not to attend "if your parents are forcing you and you don't want to go. You are the only one who can make it worthwhile. And if you don't get into it and try to have fun, you won't."