

On the MOVE

Parish lives up to its pledge

Women in problem pregnancies can find a supporting community at Guardian Angels Parish in Henrietta.

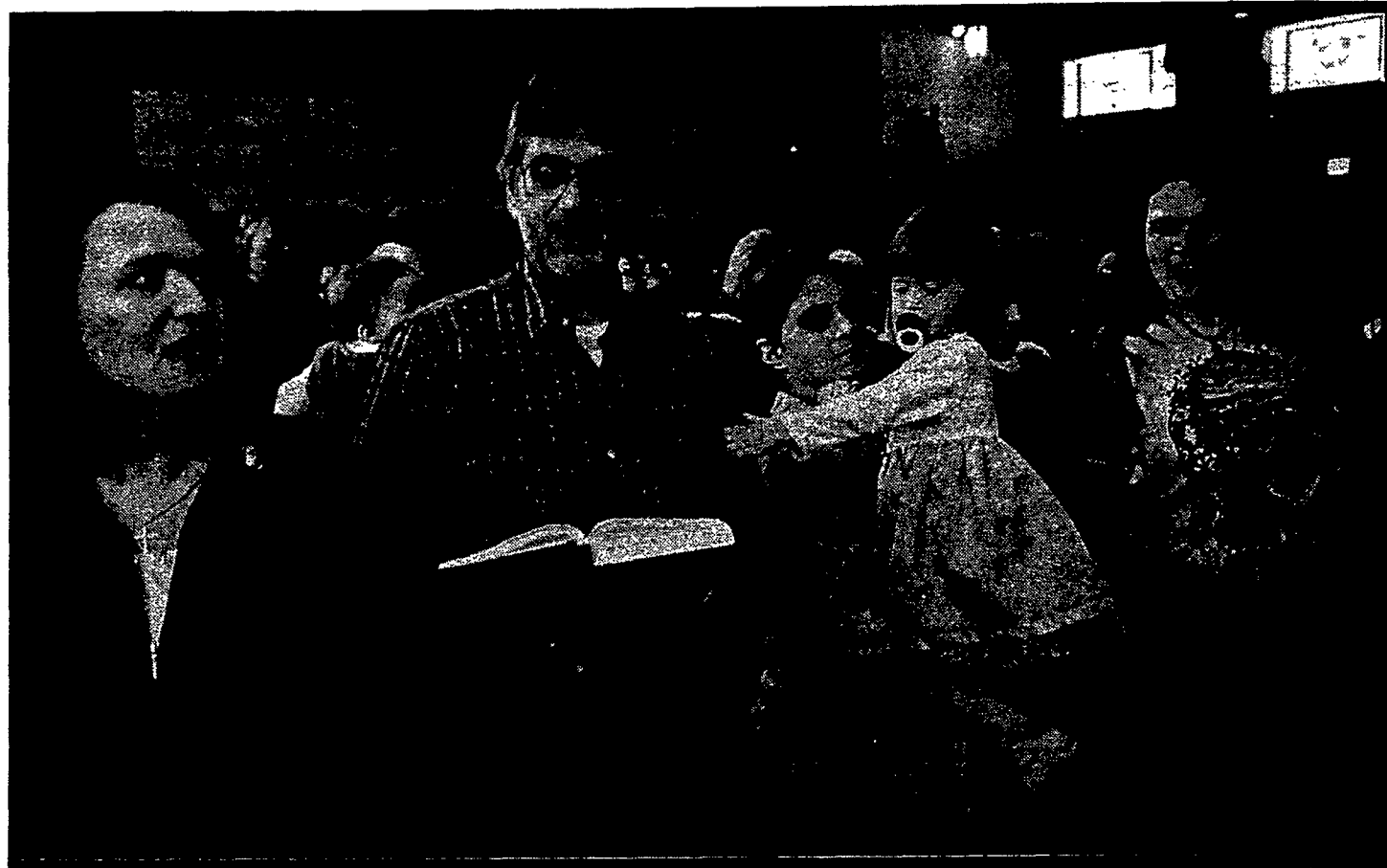
The parish has adopted the "Faith Community Pledge for Life." Begun in 1998 in the Rochester Diocese, the pledge commits a parish or faith community to provide women with goods and emotional support as they carry their baby to full term. Dozens of parishes have adopted the pledge.

Along those lines, Guardian Angels has developed the Unplanned Pregnancy Task Force. Mary Bills, pastoral/youth minister, said the committee provides mothers in need with such items as car seats, cribs and clothes. Mary who seek out the service, Bills noted, are non-parishioners, coming even from outside Monroe County.

According to MaryEllen Arden, Sherry (featured in accompanying story) has not gotten material goods from the task force but she has received financial support from a Guardian Angels parishioner.

Though some of Sherry's life choices — having a baby out of wedlock and living with her boyfriend — are not in accordance with Catholic Church teachings, MaryEllen stated that this does not give people the right to pass judgment on her or any other unwed mothers.

"We wouldn't be living the real call if we gave up on one another," she said. "We are all sinners and have blind spots. The most we can do is help one another in our walk if we start judging each other, we're wasting time and energy."



(From left) MaryEllen Arden joins the singing during Sunday Mass Jan. 21 at Guardian Angels Church of Henrietta as Sherry Moriarty, 21, of Avon holds her daughter Annabelle Rose, 2. At right is Emily Arden, 17, MaryEllen's daughter and Sherry's lifetime friend. With them is David Sowinski, a family friend.

A good deed for a friend in need

Story by Mike Latona

Photos by David Wallace

Emily Arden and Sherry Moriarty grew up two houses apart. Their friendship is so close, they say, they regard each other as sisters.

A couple of years ago, that bond rose to a new level through a life-changing event. One that caused both Sherry and Emily to mature more quickly than they'd anticipated.

While a senior in high school, Sherry became pregnant by her boyfriend. Though she was frightened and had little family support, Sherry said that abortion was never a serious option.

"I just didn't think I could kill a little baby," said Sherry, now 21. "I didn't want to get rid of her through abortion or adoption; there was just no way."

When Annabelle Rose was born in September 1998, Sherry was struggling to find a suitable living space. A few months later Emily and her mom, MaryEllen, entered the picture.

The Ardens have been on their own ever since MaryEllen's husband died of leukemia when Emily was only a year old. Their house in Henrietta is modestly sized, but they cleared enough space so Sherry and Annabelle could live there from July to December, 1999.

During that time, Sherry was able to complete school and work part-time while Emily and her mom served as babysitters for Annabelle. The arrangement was not without its challenges, Emily said.

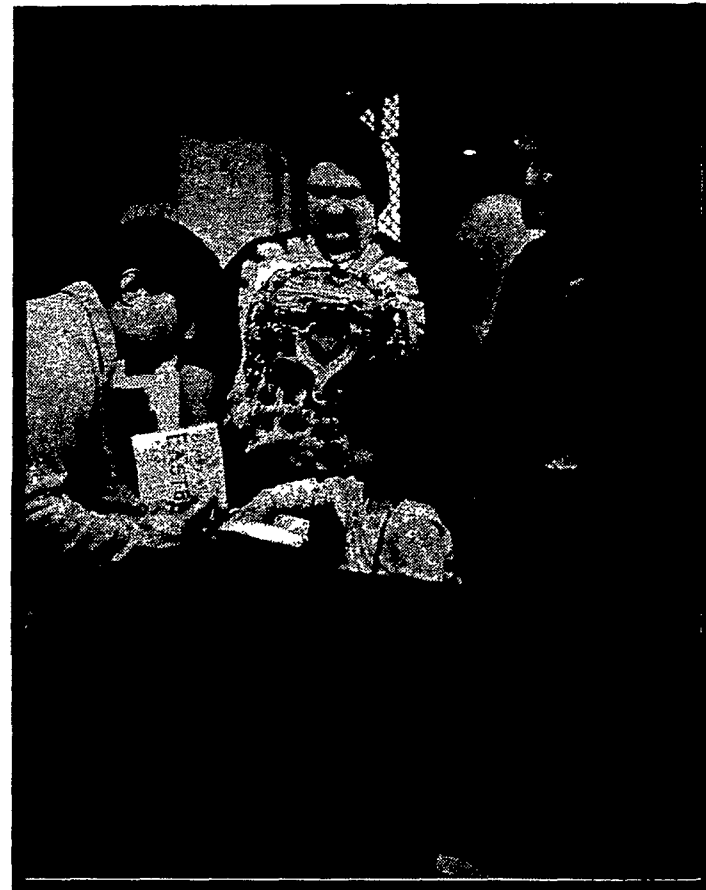
"Nobody was getting much sleep," remarked Emily, 17.

There was also unpleasant work involved, she added: "For a while I had been like, 'I want a baby for all the cool stuff' ... then you change that first diaper."

"There were privacy issues; it was a tough time. But we lived through it, guys," MaryEllen Arden added during an interview that also included Emily and Sherry.

Overall, Emily said she's thankful for the experience. "I just felt I had a focus now; I had to help raise a baby. It helped me mature, I guess," she explained. "So many of my friends are so wrapped up in themselves. They're in la-la land, thinking mommy and daddy are going to pay for everything. They don't know this (parenting) is going to happen to them someday."

For her part, Sherry is very grateful for the support she received from the Ardens when her options were so limited. "It's really nice that they were there for me. They're family to me," she said.



Sherry shows a children's book to Annabelle Rose, before Sunday Mass. With her are MaryEllen Arden and Emily.

Sherry, her boyfriend, Michael McHale, and Annabelle now live in an apartment in Avon. MaryEllen Arden noted that Sherry and Michael "are good parents" to Annabelle. Sherry describes Annabelle as "wonderful. She's been a good girl."

Sherry and Annabelle are still getting support from Emily and her mom. They stay at the Ardens' on weekends so Sherry can work at a greeting-card shop in Henrietta; Emily works there as well. When schedules allow, all four attend Sunday Mass at the Ardens' parish, Guardian Angels in Henrietta. According to MaryEllen Arden, the parish has openly embraced Sherry (an accompanying story discusses this), who was baptized a Catholic but has not practiced the faith in many years.

Guardian Angels has also recognized Emily for her support of Sherry, nominating her for a Hands of Christ Award. Emily, a peer leader for Guardian Angels' TOGA youth ministry, received her plaque from Bishop Matthew H. Clark in the fall. Hands of Christ awards recognize high-school seniors such as Emily, who attends Rush-Henrietta High School, for outstanding service in their church and community.

Mary Bills, pastoral/youth minister at Guardian Angels, said that Emily's sacrifices have helped spread the pro-life message that her parish seeks to promote.

"Emily has rearranged her life for a friend who has chosen life," Bills commented.

**COMING NEXT WEEK:
Marchers in Washington**