

# on the MOVE

## Messages, prayers a welcome surprise

**A**s a freshman at Oswego State University, I know how it feels to fear losing your devotion to God because you chose to attend a public college. So many students are atheists, of different faith, or feel no real need to attend church regularly. It took me weeks before I found someone to go to church with and even longer to feel like I could talk freely about Catholicism to my circle of friends. However, no matter how hopeless it might have felt, there was always one person I could turn to and depend on.

Sister Kathleen Wayne is the vocational minister for the Sisters of Mercy.

She says her job is to "help people connect with God on their journey through life."

I was first introduced to Sister Kathleen through a congratulatory letter, after receiving the Hands of Christ award in 1999, recognizing my diverse volunteer work for the Diocese of Rochester. Each year she sends approximately 300 letters to girls, congratulating them for receiving this award from Bishop Clark.

She later explained, "I tend to stay just with the girls because of a special care and concern that the Sisters of Mercy have for women."

Sometimes the girls ask her to write to their boyfriends, too, and sometimes boys e-mail asking for help and prayers in adjusting to school. Some students ask



David Wallace/Photo intern

Sister Kathleen Wayne, RSM, greets college freshman Abby Curatolo, 18, at Holy Cross Convent in Charlotte March 17. It was their first meeting, though they've corresponded for months. At left is Abby's father, Sebastian Curatolo.

STORY BY  
ABBY ROSE CURATOLO,  
GUEST CONTRIBUTOR

her to keep in touch with a friend. Other sisters have asked her to reach out to someone they know who is attending college. For these reasons, and more, she makes exceptions.

Sister Kathleen sends out graduation cards and a note of good luck and prayers as seniors prepare to leave for college. Those who wish to stay in touch she keeps on an e-mail and mailing list. She makes it a point to send all the girls Christmas cards.

The other sisters also participate in this faith forming and community growth experience. When students ask Sister Kathleen schoolwork-related questions she can't answer, perhaps related to science, math or foreign language, she forwards the request to a sister with expertise in that specific field.



It is the best feeling in the world to go to your mailbox and have a package with candy inside, or a letter that says, "I'm praying for you."

"Sister Leon, who is retired and makes candy, keeps me supplied with Halloween treats for the students," Sister Kathleen has told me.

The most important aspect of this experience, is the prayer that all the sisters offer on the college students' behalf.

Sister Kathleen stated, "Everyone is ready to pray, especially at high stress times, such as exams."

I have received numerous cards and e-mails with devotional activities, to remind me who I am and where I came from. The relationship that I have built with a woman I have never met is amazing. I didn't even know it was possible until the day I first heard from Sister Kathleen.

"I am a firm believer that prayerful support and encouragement can help with the adjustment to college life. I also believe that there are many gifts among the young adults on our campuses today. If I can be an instrument in helping people connect with God while living life fully, I feel thankful! I see it as an investment in today for the adults of tomorrow!" Sister Kathleen wrote me in an e-mail.

If you are a prospective college student who is concerned that leaving high school will be the end of what you are used to, and that your faith will be affected, you are correct. Nevertheless, not all changes in faith are negative.

There are people in this world, like Sister Kathleen, who are enthusiastic about helping make your adjustment to school easier, while building your spirits. I am thankful every time I hear from Sister Kathleen. Knowing that I have someone like her in my life, to help me through these uncertain years, is the best guarantee that I will prosper and my faith and spirituality will continue to mature.

Coming next week:  
Super Scout

## Higher education equals higher faith

ROCHESTER — Ian McBride, 18, a senior at McQuaid Jesuit High School, can see the independence of adulthood beckoning him as he contemplates going to college next fall.

That's one of the reasons he joined 10 other high school students from Monroe, Livingston and Orleans counties who attended the March 25 "Transitions Retreat" at the University of Rochester. The daylong retreat was hosted by the Catholic Newman Community for high school students planning on attending college next year. Presentations dealt with such issues as adjusting to dormitory life and scheduling your day. They included a workshop on "Morality Away From Home," an important issue for McBride, an active Catholic who has led a retreat for his peers at McQuaid.

"I tend to take pride in my faith, and surround myself with others who are proud of my faith," he said.

Yet, he acknowledged that even if he goes to a Catholic college, as he is contemplating, he'll still have the freedom to shuck his beliefs and practices.

"It certainly is going to be an adjustment for me," he said. "I will have more responsibilities and ... newfound independence. But I think as I get older, with maturity goes newfound freedom. I will learn how not to abuse the freedom and handle the responsibilities."

Campuses can be places where students often experiment with their

STORY BY ROB CULLIVAN

new freedom, according to Romeo P. Galang, a sophomore at the University of Rochester who led the "Morality Away From Home" workshop. Students can drink too much, take drugs or indulge in sex, he said, and it's important for students to have their moral compasses in working order before they arrive on campus. Part of teaching high schoolers to become adult Catholics, then, is imparting the rational basis of following the church's moral practices, he said.

"I want them to realize that a good portion of our Catholic faith is not 'We're Catholic, so we have to do them,'" he said. "There's very good reasons we do them."

Galang's workshop invited the teenagers to ask such questions of themselves as who do you consult when making a moral choice and what does the Catholic faith advise you to do. He acknowledged that sometimes students don't want to explore such complicated questions when, for example, they're attending a beer bash. In such situations, he said, students should ask themselves about a tempting situation: Is it legal? Is it necessary? Is it safe?

Freshmen are often dazzled by stories of student excess, he said, and the workshop was designed to deflate some of the myths of campus life. Students can be misled

into thinking, for example, that bingeing on alcohol is something college students do regularly, he said. He urged the high schoolers to remember that many stories of student excess are exaggerated, citing, for example, one about the guy who drank a dozen beers at a party and then threw up outside.

"It was just an event that was memorable, not an accurate depiction of campus life."

Galang also said students who value their faith should hook up with a community of like-minded students to feel supported in their beliefs. Everyone is susceptible to peer pressure, he noted, and everyone does better when supported by others.

On that note, the Transitions Retreat left a lasting impression on Kelly Cosman, 17, a senior at Holley High School and a parishioner at St. Joseph's Parish, Albion, in the Diocese of Buffalo. Meeting the Newman Community members at the university gave her food for thought, she noted.

"I just saw the interest in other kids, and it let me know that I'm not the only one, and that there are other Catholics in college, too."

Those thoughts were echoed by Katie McGovern, 18, a senior at Greece Arcadia High School, and a parishioner at Holy Cross Church, Charlotte.

"(The retreat) showed me that no matter how busy you are, that you really have to have time for God," she said.