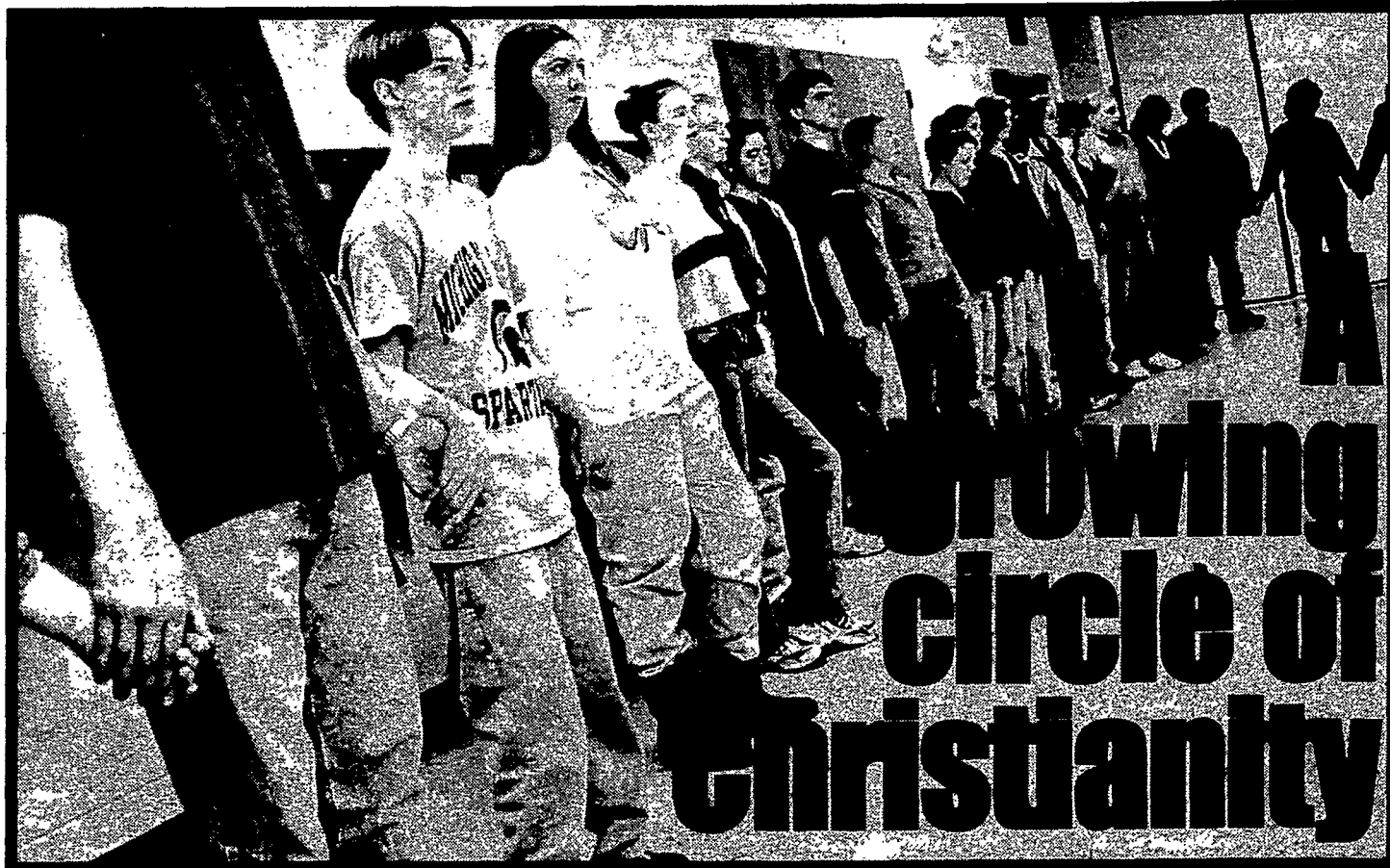


# MOVE on the



## A growing circle of Christianity

Teens begin an ecumenical meeting March 18 with a group prayer. Youth from seven churches in the Fairport-Perinton area met every Sunday during Lent at Church of the Assumption in Fairport.

**A** solitary candle flickered in the dark as 70 youths and adult leaders huddled around it in silent prayer. The candle rested in a specially carved wooden holder, depicting images of people standing arm in arm.

This "Circle of Friends" candle, belonging to the youth group at Fairport's Church of the Assumption, has taken on extra significance during the Lenten season. This year, for the first time, youth groups from seven churches in the Fairport-Perinton area gathered on Sunday evenings during Lent for prayer and small-group discussions.

Several Christian denominations took part in the six-week series, which ended April 8. Church of the Assumption served as host, and one other Catholic parish, Perinton's Church of the Resurrection, also joined in. The other participants were Fairport United Methodist Church, Bethlehem Lutheran Church, St. Luke's Episcopal Church, First Congregational United Church of Christ and First Baptist

Church.

Youths in grades nine to 12 participated in the series. Each week, after opening prayer, they divided into small groups of eight to 10 each. The groups were arranged to include a mix of denominations.

Their discussions touched upon the importance of openly and proudly living their Christian faith in the world, but not excluding others in the process. For instance, on March 11 the youths pondered how they can best interact with people outside their own church community, regardless of whether those people hold similar religious beliefs. Two small groups discussed the importance of associating with all members of society, noting that Jesus was compassionate toward prostitutes even though he didn't engage in sinful activity.

Many teens said it's important to build church-related activities in their schedules, yet they also agreed that it's not healthy to socialize solely with people from your church.

Emily McNeill, 14, said the discussions March 11 made her realize that "Christians sometimes leave out other Christians."

"They push people away, and people think they're excluded," said Emily, who belongs to Fairport United Methodist Church.

Dan Gocek, 15, said the members of his small group eagerly addressed this topic. "Not everyone contributed, but most of the people did," said Dan, from St. Luke's Episcopal.

Mark Phillips, 16, a parishioner at Assumption, said he favors the small-group format because it gives each teen a better chance to express his or her views. "In our regular youth-group meetings, the discussion is so broad because there's so many people," Mark explained.

Rachel Nickoloff, 14, said her small group had provocative discussions as well. "I wish we did it more than just Lent. It makes you think more," said Rachel, from Bethlehem Lutheran.

Rachel added that she was pleasantly surprised to find so much common ground among the denominations. "It's amazing to see how similar we are," she said. "I found out three different churches had done the same skit on the Lord's Prayer; we'd all done it in the last four months."

Emily, meanwhile, said she has more schoolmates who take part in church youth



Sarah Osterling, 14, a parishioner of Church of the Assumption, works with other youths in creating a poster advertising the "Kingdom of the World" and the "Kingdom of Jesus."



(From left) Peg Albright, a group leader, and member of Fairport United Methodist Church, discusses with Caitlin Barone, 15, also a member of Fairport United Methodist, and Lindsey Monnat, 15, a parishioner of Church of the Assumption, about the clash between the "Kingdom of the World" and the "Kingdom of Jesus."

**Story by  
Mike Latona**

**Photos by  
David Wallace**

groups than she'd realized. "I was surprised to see some of the people here. I didn't know they went to church," she remarked.

Marie Claus, youth minister at Church of the Assumption, said that she and Pam Renfro, lead youth counselor at Fairport United Methodist, had discussed staging a joint Lenten program for years. Claus, as well, was pleased at how well the various denominations bonded.

"We assured everyone that we were not trying to create one big youth group. We are trying to respect each other's tradition," Claus said. "To watch those kids interact was such an awesome sight."

Claus added that the youth groups have already planned a reunion event, featuring a Christian rock concert by the Bill Welch Band, on May 5 at the Perinton Recreation Center.

The Lenten program's title was "Roaring Lambs," to implore teens to be vocal about their faith. Claus thinks this is vital for today's teens, especially in light of recent school shootings in such communities as Santee, Calif., and Williamsport, Pa.

"We need roaring lambs. I think that's the only way we can change anything," Claus said. "We all need to become roaring lambs and value life. (The shootings mean) something is very wrong, and this is just part of the answer."

**COMING NEXT WEEK:  
Youth-group Web pages**