

on the MOVE



Cantor Heather Hubbell, 18, gestures to the congregation to join her in singing at the 10:30 a.m. Mass June 10 at St. Leo's Church in Hilton. (Below right) Jessie Reed, 17, and (below left) Laura Richardson, 17, also are cantors.

Their ministry is music

This is the second of a four-part series on diocesan Hands of Christ award recipients. These awards are given to high-school seniors for outstanding service in church, school and/or community.

Heather Hubbell is a percussionist, Jessica Reed a dancer. Laura Richardson plays the flute, piano and harp. All three are accomplished singers. They also plan to pursue majors in college that either fully or partially involve teaching music.

Obviously, these young women rank their musical endeavors highly. Yet their involvement at St. Leo's Parish, Hilton, they say, adds a very special distinction: Their music is also a ministry.

Heather said she finds this especially true in her role as cantor — an individual who leads the congregation in sung prayer during Mass. It's a duty that she, Jessica and Laura have performed fairly often in recent years.

"I really like being able to have some sort of connection, that people are getting something from this," said Heather, 18. "The greatest thing in the world is that we're making Mass more enjoyable and spiritual."

This ministry, Heather added, enhances her own spirituality as well. "When I'm cantoring it helps involve me more. If I weren't so active in the Mass, I wouldn't be getting as much out of it," she remarked.

At the 10:30 a.m. Mass on June 10, Heather smiled and raised her hands high as she encouraged Mass-goers to join in the hymns. Behind her, a 20-member choir — including Jessica and Laura — added vocal and instrumental support.

Heather, Jessica and Laura, who graduated from Hilton High School June 16, have been part of St. Leo's music program since they joined the children's choir in kindergarten. They later moved up to teen choir and now take part in the "festive choir," a combination of teens and adults.

The three musicians have taken turns ministering as cantors. Their voices are all well-suited for the role, said Patty Gorman, music director of St. Leo's. However, she noted, it's just as important for a cantor to engage the congregation as it is to have a good voice.

"We teach them to be a leader of the sung prayer, not a soloist," Gorman said.

Laura noted that the responsibility of cantoring, though gratifying, can also be intimidating.

"Not everyone (from the choir) wants to cantor. It's kind of nerve-wracking when you get up there in front of all those people," said Laura, 17.

Jessica and Heather said that when they're unsure of themselves — for example, if they're singing a hymn for the first time — they focus on a large painting of the Virgin Mary against the church's back wall. Heather said she also gains inspiration by focusing on certain members of the congregation.

"When I'm confident I'll make eye contact, especially with the people who are really into it," she said.

Jessica, 17, said her confidence is raised by the feedback she gets from the St. Leo's community.

"High school (performing) is a lot more intimidating. You're not judged as much — as



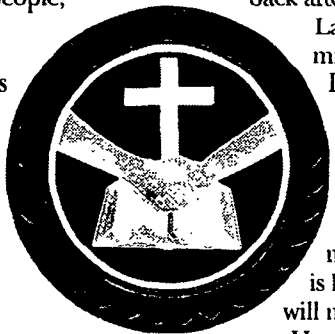
least, I think you're not — at church," said Jessica. She added that her most rewarding part of music ministry is "when people come back after Mass and say 'Guys, you did a really good job.'"

Laura has found this true even when she's made a mistake or two while cantoring. "One time I thought I'd ruined everything and someone came up and said, 'You really helped me to pray,'" she recalled.

"The congregation loves the teens. I have never, ever heard anything bad," Gorman said.

Heather and Laura will both attend Pennsylvania's Mansfield University in the fall, majoring in instrumental music education. Jessica is headed for SUNY College at Brockport where she will major in elementary education, specializing in the arts. However, Gorman said, the St. Leo's music program is abundant with other teens taking an active role in music ministry. Heather, for one, is thankful that people in her age group are given these opportunities.

"When young kids see people their own age, participating as eucharistic ministers, cantors or in the choir, it helps them feel more accepted in the church — where if it were just adults, they may not feel as comfortable," Heather said.



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