

On the MOVE

WORTHWHILE WEB SITES FOR TEENS

Were you unable to attend the last meeting of your youth group? Or maybe your parish doesn't have a youth group to serve your interest in subjects related to your Catholic faith.

Click on the Web site of Disciples Now, at www.disciplesnow.org, and you could keep busy for hours. This expansive site for Catholic teens was founded by Paul Raspa, a former youth minister in the Rochester Diocese.

Among the features on Disciples Now are reflections on Sunday readings, reading and music recommendations, explanations of numerous Catholic traditions and teachings, and presentations of the church's position on such issues as the death penalty. In addition, Disciples Now links to sites related to campus ministries; entertainment; religious communities; peace, justice and service organizations; and agencies that assist troubled teens.

Another neat feature is the "chat zone" in which teens can dialogue with each other as well as occasional guest "chatters." During National Vocations Awareness Week in January,

Story by Mike Latona

for example, a series on religious vocations and professional lay ministry featured priests, nuns, music ministers and youth ministers. And in April, national Catholic recording artist Steve Angrisano — who will appear at the Diocesan Youth Convention in August — was a guest for an online chat.

Raspa, who serves as executive team leader of Disciples Now, said he founded the site because he felt a "need to bring catechesis to the Web." Disciples Now debuted in 1999 and was presented at the National Catholic Youth Conference in November that year.

The site has proven successful. Raspa said more than 1,500 people from across the country, including the Rochester Diocese, visit the page each week. Seven hundred surfers also have registered as users of the site (membership is free) to take part in the interactive discussions.

Disciples Now is a completely volunteer effort, relying on grant money and private donations. Raspa said most of the advisory-board members

are adults employed in the Archdiocese of Baltimore, Md.

"It's catechetical professionals putting this together, and we've been true to the catechism," he commented.

Raspa said the Web site strives to avoid extreme opinions and views. "Young people ask tough questions, and the answers aren't always in black and white. We've tried to do that delicately; we're not trying to get stuck into the commentary piece," he said. "We don't want to get boxed into a corner. We have tried to appeal to all segments of the Catholic population — to be honest, we've had people on both sides saying we're too liberal and too conservative."

Raspa, 28, served as youth minister at St. Catherine of Siena, Ithaca/All Saints, Lansing from 1992-95. Today he lives in Severn, Md., and recently began a full-time position as development and marketing director for the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry.

Michael Theisen, Rochester diocesan director of youth ministry, is a big fan of Disciples Now.

"Paul has done an outstanding job in a grass-roots effort to reach out to young people," Theisen said. "This provides them with a place to gather, to search, to ask questions, to find some information. We certainly need

more people who have the technological gifts like Paul to provide these kinds of high-quality places for young people on the Internet. They help raise the bar."

More and more, Theisen said, Web resources are being successfully promoted to Catholic teens.

"Young people are finding links that speak to them. If we are to rise to the challenge of evangelization, then I think the Internet is a place we ought to be, proclaiming our voices and speaking our faith," he said. "There are lots of possibilities out there we've only begun to touch upon."

Theisen noted several other resources that might be valuable to Catholic teens and youth ministers:

- www.youthspecialties.com, then select "Link Central" for numerous links.
- www.grouppublishing.com, for buying information on religious publications and other materials.
- www.nfcym.org, for the National Federation of Catholic Youth Ministry home page.

In addition, Theisen suggested Web sites of any well-known Catholic entity — "places that have established themselves," he said. He acknowledged that lesser-known Web sites must be approached with caution regarding the religious message they're sending.

"The site is probably as healthy as its owner," Theisen said. "People should be using their common sense, as well as their faith sense, to assess appropriateness."

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7/01

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1. How often do you read the On the Move page? _____
2. What do you like best about it? _____
3. What would you like to see improved or changed? _____
4. What story ideas or topics would you suggest? _____

Include your name, address, age and phone, and mail to the *Catholic Courier*, P.O. Box 24379, Rochester, N.Y., 14624-0379.