

on the MOVE!

DYC:

Teen volunteers with adult duties



Benjamin Hernandez of St. Francis/Holy Redeemer Parish in Rochester laughs as he tries to think of something to say for a game, "Who's Your Neighbor?" at a Diocesan Youth Council overnight retreat Jan. 4 in Penn Yan. (From left) In a circle around him are: Sarah McCue, Martha McCahill, Becky Larzelere, Ashley Wood and Lynette De Jesus.

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Dan DeBoover of St. Theresa's in Stanley and Rachael Leger of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton in Hamlin listen to a prayer being said by Michael Theisen.

Year in and year out, the Junior High Youth Rally and Diocesan Youth Convention each attract several hundred diocesan youths. Planning for such large get-togethers doesn't happen with the snap of a finger; in fact, volunteers hold meetings all year long.

What's impressive is that these hard-working organizers are the same age as, or just a bit older than, those who attend the events.

The Diocesan Youth Committee is a group of 24 teens, from all sections of the diocese, who apply their leadership and creative skills in numerous ways. With the help of eight adults (five from parishes and three representing the diocese), these teens are responsible for planning portions of the liturgy at the junior-high rally and youth convention; devising skits; serving as masters of ceremonies; introducing guest speakers for workshops; and coordinating small-group gatherings.

This level of involvement was both surprising and pleasing for Jason Hartley and Amanda Zongrone, first-year DYC members who attended an overnight DYC planning meeting Jan. 4-5 at the Salvation Army Camp near Penn Yan.

"I always thought it was adults that

planned the events," said Jason, 14, who represents St. Mary of the Lake Parish in Watkins Glen.

"I didn't think I'd have such an impact, such a voice," said Amanda, 16, from St. John the Evangelist in Greece.

Jason said the DYC displays good teamwork at its meetings: "You just think of ideas and everything flows."

Michael Theisen, diocesan director of youth ministry, noted that DYC crews have come up with some memorable skits to connect with the spiritual-based themes of past Diocesan Youth Conventions. For instance, "Journey Along the Road" involved a takeoff on "The Wizard of Oz" and "Walking on Water" had DYC members dressing up as characters from "Gilligan's Island."

"I am always amazed at whatever develops out of these planning meetings," Theisen said.

With the Junior High Youth Rally (March 9) and Diocesan Youth Convention (April 6-7) right around the corner, planning is currently in full force. In addition, many DYC members will assist May 11 at the Fun for the Young, an annual 5K road race that raises funds for diocesan youth programs.

"I can't wait to see all the fruits of our work," said Becky Larzelere, 16, another first-year member.

Becky is the first teen from Holy Cross, Ovid, to ever join the committee. She said she became intrigued about the DYC after seeing past members in action at the Diocesan Youth Convention. "They looked like they were having so much fun," she said.

The first Diocesan Youth Committee was formed in 1993. Members are nominated by parish leaders, most often by their youth minister. Each nominee must be a high-school

freshman or sophomore who exhibits good leadership skills and can relate well to other teens. When the number of nominations exceeds the amount of slots open in a region, names are drawn randomly.

DYC members serve two-year terms, with four teens representing each of the following regions: Southern Tier; Genesee Valley; Finger Lakes; Monroe County East; Monroe County West; and Monroe County Urban. The urban region was created in 2000.

The committee holds seven meetings during the year — five of them overnights. DYC teens are also strongly encouraged to participate in at least one diocesan weekend retreat during the year.

"You do work, but it's also a lot of fun," said second-year member Sarah McCue, 16.

DYC teens typically uphold their commitment in commendable fashion, Theisen said. "They continually serve as models — and that's probably the heaviest responsibility — of what leaders should be in their diocese and community," he commented.

Although many close friendships exist within the DYC, Theisen said he often reminds the group to not form a clique but instead reach out to other youths, as does Bishop Matthew H. Clark, who is well-known for mixing in with participants at diocesan youth events.

DYC members should also lend their leadership skills to their parishes, Theisen said. One example is Sarah, who has promoted greater participation by teens in ministerial roles at her church, St. Michael's in Newark.

"DYC has helped me know how to get involved in my parish and get other kids involved. You take home the experience," Sarah said.