



Michael Theisen, director of diocesan youth ministry, and his 6-year-old daughter, Rachel, enjoy Catholic Family Day at Six Flags Darien Lake July 12.

## A decade of dedicated service

From the very beginning, Michael Theisen has demonstrated that working with teens also allows him to be a kid sometimes.

"It's who I am. I certainly enjoy young people," Theisen stated.

That was obvious from a July 1992 photo of him enjoying a roller-coaster ride with a diocesan teen. The photo accompanied a *Courier* story introducing Theisen as the new diocesan coordinator

of youth ministry.

"I was laughing so hard. We were on a rickety car and the photographer was turned around toward us, just getting tossed around because he didn't see the curves coming up," Theisen recalled.

Theisen returned to the scene of that wild ride, Six Flags Darien Lake, on July 12 for Catholic Family Day — the same event at which, 10 years ago, he met many of the diocesan folks with whom he would closely work.

Overseeing youth activities for an entire diocese can, in itself, be something of a roller-coaster experience. But Theisen, 41, said his time in Rochester has yielded many more ups than downs — largely because of the support offered by diocesan officials, beginning with Bishop Matthew H. Clark.

"The church of Rochester, it's a very open-minded and creative church. And I don't know of another bishop I'd want to work for," he said. "They truly embrace the young people. That is underscored when our youth ministers go to a national event and without exception, they'll come back and say, 'We have it so good.'"

Openness from his superiors enables Theisen to pass that attitude on to the teens: "Young people tend to be anti-institutional. So if the institution is welcoming, you can't help but see the ripple effect," he explained. "Youth should be respected and welcomed, and seen as having something to contribute."

Theisen came to Rochester from Richmond, Va., where he had served as a youth minister. Among his early duties was to coordinate a trip to World Youth Day in August 1993. He, Bishop Clark and 600 teens and chaperons journeyed to Denver, where Pope John Paul II delighted hundreds of thousands of young people. History will repeat itself in the final days of this month, when approximately 1,000 people from the diocese, including Theisen, will travel to Toronto as the pope and World Youth Day return to North America.

Theisen said the 1993 World Youth Day was a galvanizing force for youth ministry in the Rochester Diocese. Adding further momentum was the diocesan Synod later that year, as a result of the heavy emphasis put on youth at the conference, many paid youth-ministry positions were created in parishes.

In addition to these events, Theisen sought to continue several programs that had been successful under his predeces-

or, Patrick Fox. Examples include diocesan teen retreats, which are offered several times per year; the Diocesan Youth Convention, an update of the former Bishop's Day with Youth; and an expanded version of Hands of Christ awards, which honor outstanding high-school seniors.

Theisen has launched his own initiatives such as Gifted to Serve, which promotes parish involvement for young people in such liturgical roles as lectors and eucharistic ministers; the Junior High Youth Rally, a one-day event patterned after the Diocesan Youth Convention; leadership training for youths and adults; and Run for the Young, an annual fundraiser to support diocesan youth-ministry programs. He also instituted the Diocesan Youth Committee, a group of teens and adults who plan and assist at many of the major youth events throughout the year.

In the future, Theisen looks for youth ministry to enter "a new place of professionalism — developing master's-level programs, having more people getting certified." He also wants to see youth-ministry initiatives put a greater emphasis on the faith development of young people.

"We really have to use our creativity. We don't want to be known as just fun and games," he said.

Theisen was promoted a year ago from coordinator to director of youth ministry for the diocese. Thus far this year has been rather draining; several big events along with World Youth Day are being squeezed into a few months' time. "The biggest downs have been the stress of keeping all the balls in the air," said Theisen, who lives in Irondequoit with his wife, Mary, and three children.

Such an activity-filled agenda would be impossible without collaboration, Theisen emphasized. For that reason, he's uncomfortable taking sole credit for the successes of his office.

"It's not about me. Do I love my job? Yes. Do I do it well? I think so. But I tell people applying for youth-ministry jobs that you can't do this alone," he said. "I can't think of anything I've done alone."

Through it all, his job satisfaction remains very high, he said: "When I step back, I say 'They pay me to do this? Wow, this is great.' I never regret going to work, going out to a parish. I really do love it," he said.

### Seventy-second Annual NOVENA TO SAINT ANNE

July 18 to 26, 2002

Theme: "Are You Good News?"

"Rejoice always, never cease praying, render constant thanks. Such is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." (1 Thes. 5)  
If you come to live this way, you will be Good News.

Guest Preacher: Fr. Timothy Keating, C.S.S.R.

Nine Days of Prayers, at 7:30 pm Vespers, Sermon, Novena Prayers

Thursday, July 18	The Warmth of God's Love for You <i>1 Jn 15:9-17</i>
Friday, July 19	The Gospel's !!: Love and Life Win <i>Rom 8:28-39</i>
Saturday, July 20	The Joy and Strength of a Grateful Heart <i>Col. 3:12-17</i>
Sunday, July 21	Your Grateful Heart Finds a Voice: Praise and Adoration <i>Lk 17:11-19</i>
Monday, July 22	Quiet Time - A Way to an Uncluttered Heart <i>Lk 24:13-35</i>
Tuesday, July 23	Prayer on the Run <i>Mk 1:32-39</i>
Wednesday, July 24	Seeing With Joyful Eyes <i>Eph. 2:19-22 &amp; Phil 4:4-7</i>
Thursday, July 25	Living With Joy - Creating Hands <i>Lk 4:14-21</i>



Friday, July 26, 2001 at 7:30 pm  
Feast of Saints Anne & Joachim  
Solemn Celebration of the Eucharist

Fr. Timothy Keating C.S.S.R. is from Brooklyn NY; ordained 36 years. He has worked 4 1/2 years in the inner city, has taught Theology in college and has been in retreat work for 21 years (16 years at Notre Dame Retreat House in Canandaigua. He is presently conducting parish missions and retreats in northern and western New York.

### SAINT ANNE CHURCH

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