

EDUCATION

Catholic schools value volunteerism

By Jennifer Burke
Editorial intern

Catholic schools in the Diocese of Rochester are dispelling the stereotype that today's youths are greedy, materialistic and self-centered as they encourage — and in many cases require — students to take part in community-service activities.

"We just find it extremely important to do, because what you do molds who you are," said Eileen Pollack, coordinator of the Christian service and campus ministry programs at Rochester's Nazareth Academy.

But it's not only administrators who feel that the community-service experience is an important part of Catholic education. Students, including 15-year-old Chelsea Bonosky, a sophomore at Our Lady of Mercy High School, have witnessed firsthand the benefits of giving of themselves for others.

Not only is Bonosky a student with the usual slate of school-related responsibilities and activities, she also dances 30 hours a week with the Rochester City Ballet. And, she says, she still finds time to volunteer. In the past, she has volunteered at Bethany House and St. Peter's Soup Kitchen in Rochester, and has participated in Mercy's Christmas Basket Families program, which raises money to buy items for local families.

"It was pretty fun," Bonosky said. "It helped my friends and I to realize and appreciate just how much we do have."

Bonosky is a staunch supporter of volunteering, and recognizes how important it is for everyone to be involved, not only students at Catholic schools.

"I think it is especially important for kids. We don't realize how much of an advantage we have, even things like where we

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live and where we go to school. I think it's important for anyone to help out, no matter what culture they grew up in or what religion they are," she said.

Mercy strongly encourages its students to become volunteers, but many of the area's Catholic high schools have gone a step further by requiring it.

Nazareth Academy requires students to accumulate 100 hours of community service before graduation, and the service makes up a half credit of religion.

Rochester's McQuaid Jesuit High School also requires community service through its Magis program. Each student must complete 100 hours of community service by the end of his or her senior year, and seniors are required to participate in an off-campus service project once a week.

At Rochester's Aquinas Institute, underclassmen are required to perform eight hours of community service each semester, and students must complete 20 hours during the summer between their junior and senior years. Students must do this work outside of class, but may work with their classmates.

"It's a fundamental part of the curriculum here in the theology department at Aquinas, and it's a pretty critical part of our formation program," said Damian Zynda, chairperson of Aquinas's theology department.

At Aquinas, students have to complete their community-service hours with an agency or organization. Baby-sitting and shoveling snow don't count toward community-service hours, but working with a parish or a homeless shelter does. Students are encouraged to find an area where they

can "teach what they love," said Zynda. Several students from the hockey team, for example, volunteered their time with a youth-hockey league.

Notre Dame High School in Elmira has made its mission to "transform the school community through fostering the traditions and values of the Sisters of Mercy," according to its principal, Mercy Sister Mary Walter Hickey.

"We feel it (community service) is really very important, and it ties in with our Mercy mission. I think it's a very important aspect of the church that we respond to the needs of those less fortunate than us. The earlier people learn this, the better it is for our church and our society," Sister Hickey said.

Seniors at DeSales High School in Geneva are required to complete 20 hours of community service, according to principal Karen Juliano.

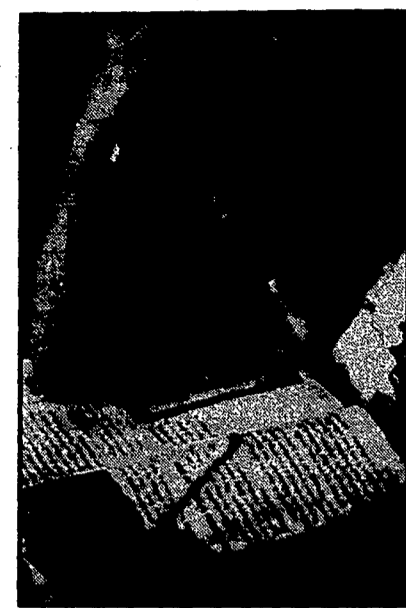
"Some of it is done within the school and within the community, such as food banks," Juliano said. "They also volunteer at their own school functions."

DeSales students participate in some volunteer activities individually and some as a class. At Christmastime, each class sponsors a needy family for whom they buy food and gifts, Juliano said.

Mark Ball, director of admissions and communication for Rochester's Bishop Kearney High School, says students have responded well to service-oriented projects.

"We currently require 25 documented hours of work for seniors. The reality of that is that we have a large number of students who just blow the 25 hours away. They've been volunteering all their lives and that's what they do," Ball said.

Although Bishop Kearney currently requires only seniors to complete communi-



Karin von Voigtlander/Staff photographer

Taking notes

Third-grader Erin McLoughlin of St. Mary's Parish in Auburn writes in her workbook July 11 during the summer religious-education program at Auburn's Sacred Heart Parish. The program, for students in first-through eighth-grades, also included children from St. Ann in Owasco.

ty-service hours, there are plans to make it a requirement for all students.

"Being a Catholic school, a big part of our character development is community service. We want to be challenging our students to be good servers, and that can't just start in their senior year," Ball noted.

Pollack, of Nazareth Academy, agrees. "You do it (community service), then you learn to love it," she said. "I think that what we do helps build character so that, eventually, even when you're not required to do it, it just flows from you. We're very social-justice-oriented, not just Nazareth Academy, but the Roman Catholic Church in general. I think where your feet go, your heart will follow."

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