

# For the love of Jesus — and of family

Mike Latona/Catholic Courier

There were many chances for social time during the second-annual Catholic urban teen retreat in Rochester Sept. 28-29. Yet when participants stepped inside Holy Apostles Church to observe adoration to the Eucharist, the mood turned decidedly solemn.

The retreatants had the church all to themselves on this late Saturday afternoon. At first, they acted uncertain as they eyed the monstrance — a receptacle in which the consecrated host is placed during adoration — on the altar. Lynette DeJesus, diocesan coordinator of urban ministry, and Yolanda Ortiz, youth minister at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish, then explained the power of praying to Jesus in the exposed Eucharist.

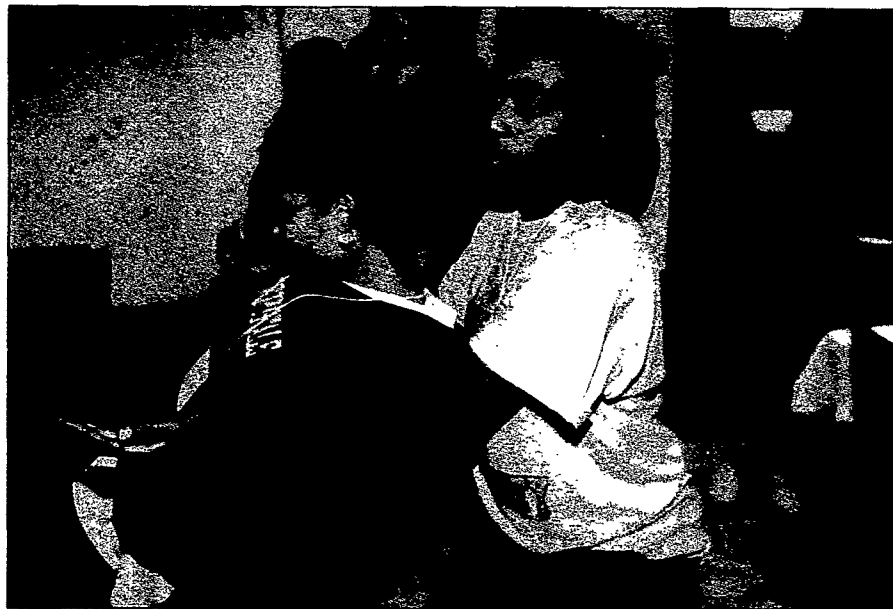
DeJesus urged the teens to let out their feelings, saying, "Jesus loves you so much. This is your chance to take your anger, your pain, your fears and just leave them right there (at the altar)." As this was going on, Jennifer Lafler, youth minister for the Flower City/Lexington parishes, played spiritual music.

Then DeJesus passed out letters of affirmation that parents had written in advance. And that's when the prayers — and tears — started flowing from many of the 22 young participants.

By the time adoration concluded, teens were holding their heads in their hands, kneeling, or grabbing tissue — in some instances, doing all three. When Ortiz called everyone forward to join hands for a closing Our Father, they rushed forward. DeJesus later observed that the "defense mechanisms" they had brought into the church were long gone by this point.

Gloriely Mercado, 15, and Elizabeth Rodriguez, 14, both of St. Michael Parish in Rochester, said they became emotional after reading very touching affirmation letters from their mothers.

"I was just sitting there, thinking, praying to God. And I got a letter from my Mom. I was just crying so



Jason Rearick

Leslie Pierre-Philippe catches Mariana Scott during dance rehearsal at the urban teen retreat presented Sept. 28-29 at Rochester's Holy Apostles Church. Both attend Immaculate Conception Church, Rochester.

**'Jesus loves you so much. This is your chance to take your anger, your pain, your fears and just leave them right there (at the altar).'**

*-Lynette DeJesus*

hard," Gloriely said. "Considering all the problems we've gone through together, and what she told me, I feel a lot better."

Elizabeth said her mother had written that "she was proud of me being her daughter. I thought she felt that way, but I didn't know she felt that way. So when I got the letter I busted out crying."

Emily Brasley, 14, of Sacred Heart Cathedral, was equally moved by the letter she got from



Mariana and Leslie give each other a hug.

her parents. "All day it was a good retreat but that was like the climax, the turning point," she said.

For St. Michael's Ray Mayoliz, 15, the weekend marked the continuation of a personal turning point. Af-

ter dropping out of the church he had started going back over the summer, and that spurred his interest in the urban retreat. During adoration, he said, he stared at a crucifix in the church and reflected deeply on Christ's suffering.

"I realized the cross, the pain Jesus went through and everything. So I should do him a favor and go to church, and preach his name," Ray said.

Some moral support from his mother will help him stay on this path, Ray added. "The things she said in the letter touched me. She told me not to let anyone discourage me because I've come a long way. When I was little, I didn't look like I was going to make it so far."

DeJesus said she was not surprised by the emotion these teens displayed: "A lot of these kids are from broken homes. A lot are going through tough times," she said.

This year's retreat theme was "For Love Alone" and was again held at the Urban Center, across the street from Holy Apostles Church. Teens from several city parishes attended, including some repeat participants from last year.

Other parts of the retreat included a workshop by Duane Beck, a seminarian at Rochester's Colgate Divinity School. Beck's presentation, titled "Follow Your Heart," encouraged teens to respond to their feelings of anger, happiness, loneliness, hurt, fear, and sadness. There were also witness talks by teens and adult staff; small-group sharing; skits; and music. Other prayer opportunities included a Saturday-evening reconciliation service with Fathers Dennis Shaw, Peter Deckman and Robert Werth, who are all pastors of urban churches; and, as a closing event, the noon Mass Sept. 29 at Holy Apostles.

Emily said she cherished the affirmation she got not only from her parents, but also from those she met at the retreat.

"Having other people tell me they love me, and that I have good qualities, was really good for me," she said.

Visit us on the web at  
[www.catholiccourier.com](http://www.catholiccourier.com)