

Coffeehouse serves up timely topics

Mike Latona/Catholic Courier

If good conversation is as invigorating to you as a heavy jolt of java, the perfect combination might be brewing via the "Holy Grounds" discussion series.

The next installment of this coffeehouse program will take place Thursday, April 24, at Spot Coffee, 200 East Ave., Rochester. Father Lee Chase, pastor of St. Thomas More Parish in Brighton, will give his second presentation in a three-part series, "Love, Sex & Relationships," beginning at 7:30 p.m.

Father Chase will conclude his talks on May 29, also at Spot Coffee at 7:30 p.m. However, Holy Grounds is hopefully just beginning a long run, said Shannon Loughlin, diocesan director of young-adult and campus ministry.

Loughlin said six presentations are being developed for the summer; she's still in the process of identifying dates, sites and guest speakers. Although that series would take place in Monroe County, Loughlin is also encouraging parishes in all 11 counties in the Rochester Diocese to consider adopting a coffeehouse format, featuring topics

pertinent to the young-adult Catholic community.

Holy Grounds, according to Loughlin, is an offshoot of "Theology on Tap" — a model of discussion groups for young adults that began in the Archdiocese of Chicago in the early 1980s. Theology on Tap has been conducted in this diocese in recent years, most notably at Johnny's Irish Pub (better known as Johnny's Smoke Free), a popular bar on Rochester's east side, where Father Chase and other Catholic speakers have led discussion groups.

Although bars are the most obvious settings for Theology on Tap, Don Smith casts a strong vote for coffeehouses. Smith — who was one of approximately 20 young adults to attend Father Chase's March 27 lecture at Spot Coffee — observed that a nonalcoholic environment opens up options for a wider age range.

"By going to a coffeehouse, you still have a public social setting, but you don't have to be 21," said Smith, 23, a staff member in faith formation and youth ministry at

Brighton's St. Thomas More and Our Lady of Lourdes parishes.

Furthermore, Smith said, such topics as love, sex and relationships may be more timely for people of college age than for young adults in their late 20s and their 30s, where "there's a better chance they're already in a long-term relationship," he said.

Father Chase's talks cover such issues as cohabitation; Catholic moral teaching on marriage; responsibility in a relationship; and physical attraction vs. love as a choice.

"I thought it was a wonderful presentation, especially coming from a priest," Smith said of the March 27 session. "Obviously they're celibate, but he was able to give the theological basis of what love is and how it takes on different forms — friendship, love for humanity, the love of dedicating yourself to one person."

Loughlin, also, feels the subject



matter is invaluable: "We have a wonderful tradition in Catholic teaching about the gift of sexuality. It's something that our society sometimes overlooks," she said.

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