

Age group mobile, yet still faithful

Mike Latona/Catholic Courier

FAIRPORT — "Statistics don't lie" is an oft-used term in the world of sports. However, the truth about young adults may require deeper reflection than simply viewing a stat sheet.

At Church of the Assumption, 42 percent of the 8,021 registered individuals are between the ages of 19 and 45. So why does Father Ed Palumbos, pastor since 2001, see a much lower percentage at Sunday Mass?

The dilemma in Fairport is not uncommon, he said. In fact, it's an important enough subject that ministry to Catholics ages 20-35 served as the theme for the annual diocesan priests' convocation, held April 28-30 in Auburn. Guest speakers at the convocation were Father John Cusick, a Chicago archdiocesan priest who has worked extensively with young adults, and Kathleen Chesto, a national expert in family ministry. Among the chief points explored were:

- **Being 25 years old three decades ago is not the same as being 25 now.** Back then, Father Palumbos said, more 25-year-olds were rooted in jobs they would maintain their entire careers. Now, they're practically expected to change employment



Rebecca Gosselin/Catholic Courier

Father Ed Palumbos, pastor of Church of the Assumption in Fairport, greets 25-year-old Nikole Oak as she leaves Mass May 18.

and/or cities regularly. "In our generation they called that instability," remarked the 57-year-old pastor.

- **Welcoming is vital, especially toward those who have fallen away from the church.** For many young adults who seek to get married or have their baby baptized, this may be their first time back inside a church since confirmation. "To give them a hassle or make them jump through hoops, that may well be the last time we ever see them. It is a time to connect, and if we speak with black-and-white rigidity the value gets lost," Father Palumbos stated.

- **The "young" in "young adult" should not be overstressed.** "The emphasis should be that they're adults," Father Palumbos said, adding, "They're not the future of our church. They *are* the church."

He noted that the convocation theme sparked considerable discussion among the parish leaders who attended. "There was a great deal of concurring," he said.

Currently, Father Palumbos' parish is hoping to address the needs of young adults through a group that began earlier this spring under the guidance of Marie Claus, youth minister. Members are sought in the 18-35 age range to meet for spiritual reflection and also for service projects and social events; for example, they recently attended the Rochester Lilac Festival together.

One of the group's core members, Erin Driscoll, can relate to some issues raised at the priests' convocation. She lived out of town for several years during and after college before moving back to Fairport two

years ago. During all this time, she has remained on the parish registry through her family. Her own example, she said, may help explain why Assumption Parish has a large num-

Young Adult

ber of young adults on record who are rarely seen.


"I think that's a big factor; many young adults at a college level are connected to the faith but are not home all the time," said Driscoll, 28.

Or, she added, it could take years after college before settling in at either a childhood parish or elsewhere. "People may be trying to look to different parishes. It may take a little longer for them to find one to consistently go to," she said. "It's just the obstacles of being transitory and not having any roots anywhere ... it doesn't necessarily mean that we don't have faith or spirituality because we're not seen at a specific church every week."

On the other hand, Driscoll said that her contemporaries need to give each parish an honest try before moving on to the next one.

"It's up to young adults to seek out ways to get involved," she commented. "You can sit back and say 'There's nothing for me,' or find ways to get involved."

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