

Student stands firmly for his faith

Mike Latona/Catholic Courier

IRONDEQUOIT — In a world where being accepted by one's peers is a top priority, Andy Follaco isn't afraid to take a stand.

He's a multi-sport athlete who prays before and during competitions. He abstains from locker-room language and from alcohol. He frequently discusses religious topics with schoolmates.

"This is who I am. I have to look at who's judging me in the end. I'm not looking to please high-school teenagers, I'm looking to please God," Andy declared.

Other teens could easily ridicule such a statement and ostracize him. But guess what? They've elected him class president four straight years at Irondequoit High School.

"They don't put you down for being a Catholic," Andy explained.

He describes his classmates as deep-thinking, motivated young adults — which flies in the face of the perception that teens are generally uncaring, self-centered slack-

Youth

ers.

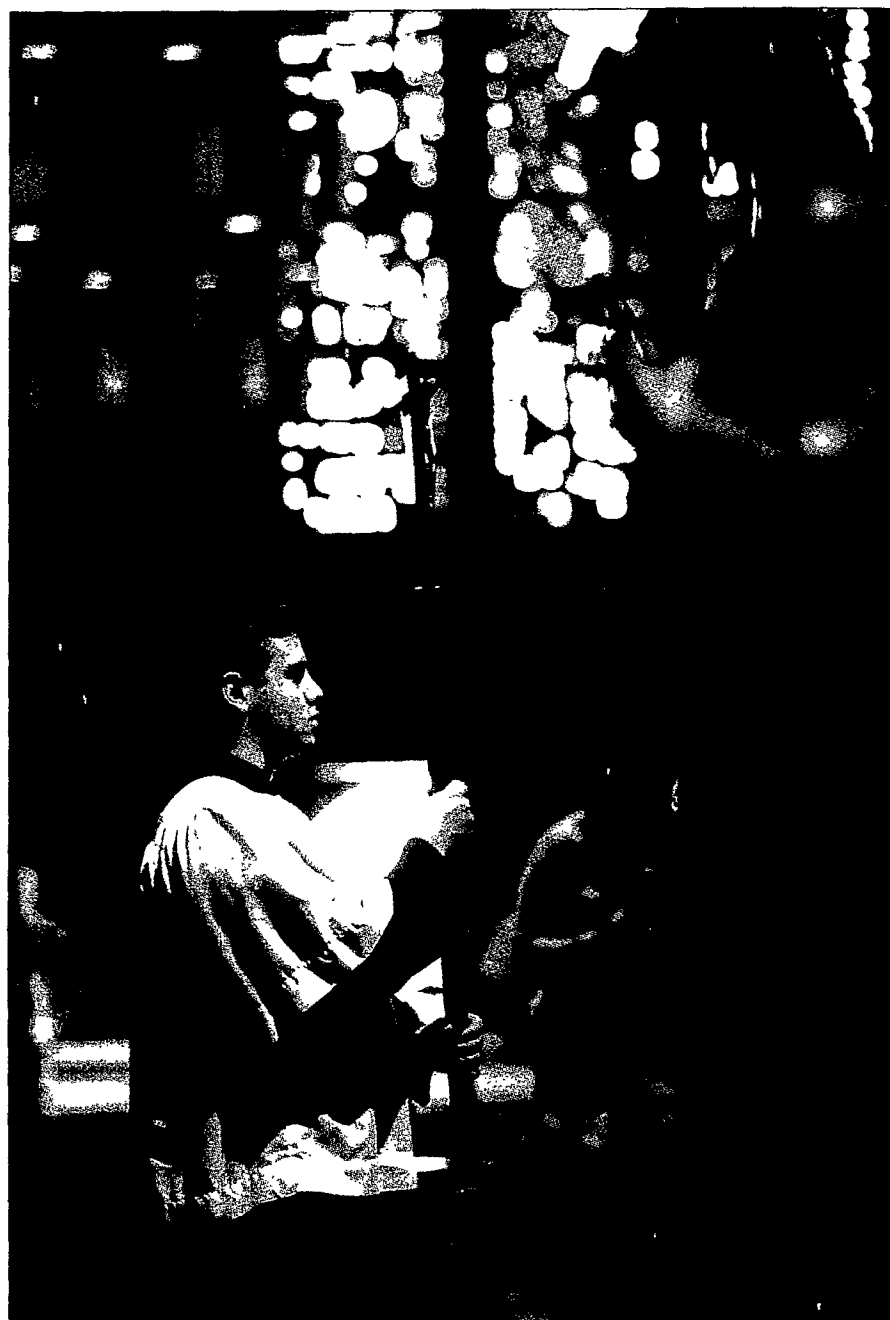
"That stereotype is very prevalent — and I don't like it," he stated. "There's a lot of good people out there."

Count Andy among those good people. His ability to separate right from wrong, he said, stems from the example of his parents Raymond and Debbie Follaco.

"My father always said if you're going to do something, do it right. So I'm going to give it my all," Andy said. "I don't like screwing up. I like things to be the way they should be. I've always wanted to be perfect, always asked 'what did I do wrong and how do I fix it.'"

Andy recalls having this trait as far back as third grade, when he was a rookie altar server at St. Thomas the Apostle Parish. He still altar serves and enjoys training others for that ministry.

Andy is also a lector at St. Thomas



Rebecca Gosselin/Catholic Courier

Andrew Follaco, a parishioner at St. Thomas the Apostle in Irondequoit, serves at the altar during Mass June 15. The Irondequoit High School senior says he is not afraid to stand up for his faith.

the Apostle. Not long after having back surgery last year, he fulfilled his liturgical duty one Sunday while standing the entire Mass because he was in such discomfort.

Strong dedication to his faith carries over into Andy's school life. Whereas he says silent prayers during his athletic events, Andy speaks up loudly for his faith when lunch-room discussions get around to religion.

"I don't sit back and let people say things I think are wrong," Andy remarked.

To better support his stances, Andy takes part in discussion groups at St. Thomas the Apostle on such issues as abortion and New Age spirituality. He also has gone with his parish on three trips to the March for Life in Washington, D.C., the annual protest against the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* ruling that legalized abortion in the United States.

In addition to serving as class president, Andy was captain of the varsity football and track-and-field teams this past year. Standing 6 feet tall and weighing 225 pounds, he is also an accomplished power lifter.

Following his June 22 graduation from Irondequoit High, Andy will celebrate his 18th birthday on July 29. Then it's on to SUNY College at Brockport, where Andy will play football as a lineman and study to become a math teacher.

With the beginning of college, Andy will encounter a fresh set of peers whose viewpoints and lifestyles differ from his own. But based on the mettle he's already shown as a teen, Andy said he's confident of his ongoing ability to defend his faith.

"I'm so glad I have the God-given strength," he said. "I think of it as just another challenge. I'm looking forward to it."

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