

Youths delve into social-justice issues

Mike Latona/Catholic Courier

At age 15, Emily Carlock has already formed a sensitivity toward the less fortunate.

"I have very strong opinions about making sure everybody has the same basic rights," stated Emily, a parishioner of St. Patrick's in Mount Morris.

Recently, Emily got to share her opinions with teens from other parts of the country. She was one of six young people from the Rochester Diocese who took part in a Youth Congress on Social Justice, held during the National Catholic Youth Conference in Houston.

Four members of the Diocesan Youth Committee represented Rochester at the congress that took place Nov. 14, the NCYC's second day. Joining Emily were Matt Bukowski, from Guardian Angels Parish in Henrietta; Jamie Farley, from Holy Cross in Charlotte; and Mark Thiell, from Christ the King in Irondequoit. In addition, two people from this diocese served as New York state regional Scouting representatives at the congress: Liz Hohl, from St. Rita's in Webster; and Paul Kurtenbach, from Our Mother of Sorrows in Greece.

The daylong congress involved small groups of youths along with adult facilitators. Many bishops, including Rochester's Bishop Matthew H. Clark, joined the discussions, which were based on quotations from "A Place at the Table," the U.S. bishops' document on social justice that was released in 2002.

Matt, 16, said the most interesting talk at his table was on workers' rights — "how to have human dignity as workers; the right to participate in unions; fair wages ... to make sure they weren't just workers, but also individuals," he said.

Liz, 16, said her group concluded that "the most vulnerable people are those that should come first; that we should stand for those who have been stood on; and that we do not live for ourselves but for those around us. The group, she said, also agreed that "one of the most important ways to make changes in the world was to educate."

Preparation for the Youth Congress began earlier this fall under the guidance of Ruth Putnam, diocesan Catholic Charities' Works of Love program coordinator. Rochester's delegates met with Bishop Clark and Jack Balinsky, diocesan director of Catholic Charities, and also interviewed people involved with social justice in their parishes and communities.



Leila Navidi/Catholic Courier

Teenagers who were scheduled to participate in a Nov. 14 Youth Congress on Social Justice during the National Catholic Youth Conference in Houston prepared a Nov. 9 dinner for the women and children at Sanctuary House, a women's shelter in Rochester. During the visit, 18-year-old Paul Kurtenbach plays with 3-year-old Shantique (left) and 1-year-old Quemaria.



Elizabeth Hohl (clockwise from left), Matt Bukowski, Emily Carlock and Jamie Farley play a clapping game after preparing dinner at Sanctuary House.

Youth Congress members were also required to study "A Place at the Table," which details how we as Catholics are called to action in the face of such chilling numbers as: more than 30,000 children die every day from hunger, deprivation and their consequences; more than half the world's population lives on less than \$2 a day; more than 1.2 billion people live on less than \$1 a day.

"I was very surprised by all the statistics. I didn't really realize there were that many people in poverty," Emily said.

Matt said he liked the document's emphasis that four institutions — families and individuals, community organizations and churches, businesses and government — must all serve as legs supporting the table at which all humans deserve to sit.

In addition, congress delegates did

hands-on service. She belongs to the Rotary Club at Webster Schroeder High School, collecting canned food, making holiday stockings for underprivileged children and assisting at nursing homes. She is also active in STARS (Students Teaching Assets equals Roads to Success) and SABA (Skating Association for the Blind and Handicapped).

Emily, who attends Mount Morris Central High School, participates in drives at her church to help the poor and donates to the Salvation Army. She said she's "very thankful that I have everything I need, and more," and would rather focus on service than the priorities conveyed in television commercials.

"The media does a lot to portray how a teen should dress, do their makeup and do their hair with all this big brand-name stuff. But I really don't think it is necessary," she commented.

She added that in the years ahead, "I know that whatever I do, I would always find the time to on the side to go help wherever I'm needed."

Matt, a student McQuaid Jesuit High School, is eyeing a career in social services or education — but he said anyone can practice social justice.

"It just seems like having a focus on helping everyone is something you can bring to almost every career," he remarked.



a required service project Nov. 9 at Sanctuary House, where they interacted with the homeless women and children that the program assists. "Being a hands-on experience, it allowed each representative to understand what had only been reiterated in words to us before," said Liz, 16, who belongs to girl Scout Troop 505 in Webster.

Actually, Liz is quite familiar with

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