

Parish livens up for Life Teen liturgy

Mike Latona/Catholic Courier

FAIRPORT — Are your Sunday afternoons a bit too much on the mellow side? Check out Church of the Assumption's Life Teen liturgy, and you're bound to get a satisfying jolt.

Each week at 5:30 p.m., Assumption rocks with pulsating music that practically has worshipers dancing in their pews. More and more, those pews are filling up as Life Teen grows in popularity.

Weekly attendance has more than doubled — the average number is currently 350 — since Church of the Assumption held its first Life Teen liturgy this past Sept. 28. Though aimed at the teen population, Life Teen has generated a sizable number of adults who respond to the energetic environment.

"Teens are loving it. Families are loving it," remarked Marie Claus, Assumption's youth minister.

"The Mass seems to tap into the deep spiritual hunger of people of all ages," added Father Edward Palumbos, pastor of Assumption, who serves as celebrant for most of the Life Teen Masses.

Assumption is the first parish in the Rochester Diocese to implement Life Teen, an international movement. Life Teen liturgies last slightly more than an hour and lead into Life Night, the weekly meeting for Assumption's high-school youth group.

Teens fill many of the liturgical roles — greeters, ushers, lectors, eucharistic ministers. Prior to Life Teen, youths at Assumption "didn't really get themselves involved in the Mass," said Seth Pensgen, 16, a lector and eucharistic minister.

Teens are also encouraged to join the celebrant on the altar during the latter part of the Mass. At a Life Teen Mass Jan. 4, approximately 40 young people — many of them arm-in-arm — formed a semicircle around Father Palumbos.

"None of the kids are really afraid," said Matt Phillips, 15, a eucharistic minister who enjoys taking part in this ritual. "We all go to school together and are really good friends."

"It's an issue of intimacy. We're trying to say 'You have a place at the table,'" Father Palumbos said, emphasizing that this — and all other Life Teen elements — fall within Catholic Church liturgical guidelines.

The cornerstone of Life Teen is a group of eight to 10 talented young adults — both Catholics and non-Catholics — who form the weekly



Mike Crupi/Catholic Courier

Teens join arms in a semi-circle around the altar during a Jan. 11 Life Teen Mass celebrated at Fairport's Church of the Assumption by Father Edward Palumbos, pastor (center).

musical ensemble. They offer quality vocals, guitar, drums, flute and brass, playing selections ranging from Christian rock to music from "Godspell" to a lively version of "O Come O Come Emmanuel" during a recent holiday liturgy.

Claus said the music is so crucial that Assumption refused to launch Life Teen before the musicians were firmly in place. Added Father Palumbos: "People are taking that music away when the celebration is over. To me, that's good spiritual music — it doesn't leave you when you leave church."

Though new in the Rochester Diocese, Life Teen is well established in other parts of the United States. It began in 1985 and is still headquartered at its original parish, St. Timothy's in Mesa, Ariz. Life Teen has approximately 850 affiliates at parishes in the U.S. and 11 other countries.

Claus, Father Palumbos and others connected with youth ministry — including Seth and Matt — observed Life Teen and Life Night gatherings first-hand in Arizona in the two years before it began at Assumption. This detailed preparation is emblematic of Assumption's intent for Life Teen to be a permanent fixture there. "It's a big commitment, it's not a fly-by-night experience," Claus said.



According to Claus and Father Palumbos, some diocesan pastors are now venturing out to Fairport on Sunday evenings as they consider launching Life Teen in their own parishes. Meanwhile, within Assumption, Life Teen continues catching on with people of all ages.

"The older people do relate to it. It's not the youth revolution, so to say," Seth said.

"I even saw some grandmas and

grandpas there, and I didn't really expect that," Matt said. "I think older people like seeing the teens be so into the Mass."

Sally Sanford, 50, serves as head usher at Life Teen Mass. The Assumption parishioner said she has struggled with her Catholicism at various times in recent years, but Life Teen has helped renew her spirituality.

"Isn't this great?" Sanford exclaimed during the Jan. 4 liturgy. "It's bringing a lot of people back to the church, and it's just what I need."

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