

# Helping teens to move on

Jennifer Burke/Catholic Courier

Christina Hauryski, 18, was nervous about leaving home and starting college. The oldest of four children, she was worried that her parents would get so caught up in what her siblings were doing that they would forget about her while she was away.

"The thought of them forgetting about me ... I know they never would, but it was just one of those fears," said Christina, a high-school senior who attends St. Mary Parish in Bath.

Her fears were eased when she, along with both parents, recently attended "Moving On and Embracing the Future," a retreat day for high-school seniors and their parents sponsored by the diocesan department of evangelization and catechesis. According to Michael Theisen, diocesan director of youth ministry, the retreat offered activities to help teens — and their parents — face the coming transition of graduating from high school and leaving home to venture out on their own.

One activity required Christina to write down one of her biggest fears about moving on. Not knowing she would have to share her answer with her parents, she wrote down her fear of being forgotten. The activity turned out to be a blessing in disguise for Christina — when her parents heard her answer, they reassured her that they could never forget her.

The retreat helped ease her concerns about graduating from high school, said Christina, who plans to attend Daemen College in Buffalo.

"I think (the retreat) did a lot for my parents, too," she added. "My mom and I have been through a lot together, so I think she was a little iffy about me being far away."

At the retreat, other parents talked about their experiences sending children off to college, and hearing their survival stories helped her parents feel better about letting her go, she said.

The more students and their parents learn about what they will be going through, the easier the transition will be for them, said Anne Graham, director of guidance at Rochester's Nazareth Academy.

"What makes this scary is the unknown," she said.

If parents of college-bound teens are anxious about their children leaving home for the first time, Graham suggests making at least one visit to the campus where their son or daughter will be living. Walk around the campus together and



Mike Crupl/Catholic Courier

**Anne Graham, director of guidance at Rochester's Nazareth Academy, helps junior Raisa Priebe navigate a college Web site March 18. Graham and other experts offer tips to help teens — and their parents — ease the transition of graduating from high school and leaving home for college.**

see how safe it feels, see what the dormitories are like, find out where the medical facilities are, what security measures are in place on campus and what the school's safety record is like, she said.

When teens and their parents have a strong relationship with open communication before they leave home, their relationship is more likely to remain strong, which can make the separation easier on both parties, said Todd Wallace, director of counseling at Rochester's Aquinas Institute.

The "Moving On" retreat was meant, in part, to help students and parents improve that communication, Theisen said. Throughout the day, parents and teens took part in several games and activities designed to get the two generations talking to each other. In one game, parents were asked questions about their teens, while teens were asked questions about their parents. The "team" with the most correct answers won the game, but the real point of the game was to help foster communication between family members.

"It's a way to help them actively listen to one another, help them kind of listen to each other as far as what their needs are, their hopes, their expectations for this time. It helps parents let go and helps the students to say goodbye, which is a very important thing," Theisen said.

Students are faced with many decisions during their senior year of high school, and the college application and selection process can be scary and overwhelming, Wallace

said. Although parents and school guidance counselors can help provide students with the resources they need to make their choices, it's really up to the students, he added.

"(Parents) should help their kids get more confident and get ready to face this new challenge," Graham said. "Our role is to show them how to do these things and help them do them themselves. At some point, we're not going to be able to do it for them, and parents have to understand that. Parents should be working on their kids separating from them along their whole developmental stream."

This doesn't mean that parents should leave all the work up to their teens, Graham said, but parents must be careful not to take over the process, pressure their teens into going to certain schools or choosing certain majors, or attempt to live vicariously through them.

It's also important for students and their parents to realize that when students return home for the first time after being away at college, things will be different, she said. It's not that students will suddenly be "bad kids," she explained, but they can't help but be a little bit changed after spending time away from home, gaining independence and maturity, and being exposed to new people, ideas and cultures.

"They're going to come home different, and it's going to be hard for (parents) to accept in some ways," Graham said. "You learn so many new ideas, even in the first month, that when you come home, you don't want to be treated like that high-school student."

## Financial assistance available

Jennifer Burke/Catholic Courier

° Just hearing the words "college tuition" and "financial aid" can be enough to cause an almost instantaneous tension headache for many people. Enrolling in college, however, doesn't mean that students or their parents have to sign away their life, their home or their first-born child. Scholarship opportunities abound for those who look for them, according to officials at local high schools and colleges.

High-school guidance and counseling offices often keep updated lists of all scholarships being offered by community organizations and institutions, according to Anne Graham, director of guidance at Rochester's Nazareth Academy.

Many colleges and universities automatically award scholarships to students based on their high-school grade-point averages, and many also offer scholarships to incoming freshmen based on their intended major or previous community service and volunteer work, Graham said. When applying to schools, always check the catalog to find out what scholarships the school offers, she added.

Graham also recommends students register with FastWeb, a free Internet scholarship search engine, which can be found at [www.fastweb.monster.com](http://www.fastweb.monster.com).

Students who register with FastWeb fill out an online form asking for their age, nationality, religion, intended major (if known), hobbies, interests and schools they'd like to apply to. That information is then matched against the scholarships in FastWeb's database, and students are notified of all the scholarships they qualify for. When a new scholarship that they qualify for becomes available, students are notified by e-mail.

A recent FastWeb search for scholarships open to an 18-year-old Catholic-school student yielded 53 results, many of them essay contests with cash prizes.