

# Teens play adult roles on parish councils

B13

Faith & Family

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Mike Latona/Catholic Courier

Though Rachel Learned was the only non-adult on her parish pastoral council this past year, she certainly wasn't made to feel like a kid.

Rachel recently completed her one-year commitment as council youth representative for Our Lady of Lourdes Parish in Elmira. Early on in her term, she hatched an idea that solved a dilemma for the council.

The problem centered around a book, containing the names of soldiers for whom to pray, that had been erected in one corner of the church after Sept. 11, 2001. The book was eventually removed due to decreasing use, but that decision sparked protests. So Rachel proposed placing the book near a prayer box in the back of the church where people submit special intentions. "The two really related," she said.

The council readily accepted her idea and the parish's pastor, Father Jeremiah Moynihan, soon enacted it. There was good feedback from parishioners as well, Rachel added.

"I felt so happy that not only did the council members listen to my ideas, but my idea was actually used," said Rachel, 18, a recent graduate of Notre Dame High School.

Rachel is one example of how youths can bring a mature presence to their church committees. Michael Theisen, diocesan director of youth ministry, said this trend has grown following Bishop Matthew H. Clark's 1997 presentation of "Gifted to Serve," a set of guidelines that call for the full integration of youths into such liturgical roles as lectors and extraordinary ministers of holy Communion. Although parish council isn't liturgical in nature, Theisen said the spirit of "Gifted to Serve" still applies — and that several parishes have created positions for youths on their adult councils.

Ideally, Theisen said, a young



Mike Crupi/Catholic Courier

**Rachel Learned, a recent graduate of Elmira's Notre Dame High School, concluded a one-year term in June as youth representative on the parish council at Our Lady of Lourdes Church in Elmira.**

council member should represent the interests of all youths in the parish. "That's the unique contribution. They can offer the perspective that the adults don't have," he pointed out. For instance, Rachel gave a youth report at each meeting and relayed messages back to her Our La-

dy of Lourdes youth group.

Theisen emphasized that youths must be welcomed and valued by adult council members, stating, "It's more than just saying 'Oh, we have a youth on parish council.' A youth on parish council is a minority — and ask any minority how they're going to feel in a majority."

Rachel had some concerns along these lines when she started out: "I was concerned that I would not have a meaningful role. To my surprise, the first meeting went very well and all of the members warmly welcomed me."

A similar feeling has emerged for Bill Kuchman, 18, who is ending his one-year stint on the finance council at Church of the Good Shepherd in Henrietta.

"I see myself as a regular member," said Bill, a recent graduate of Rush-Henrietta High School. "They never don't listen to what I say; they take into consideration the comments I have and pretty much treat me as an equal." Bill noted that after some of his suggestions, "People said 'We didn't think of that.'"

Like Rachel, Bill was the only teen on an otherwise all-adult committee. He took part in such important deci-

## Youth

sions as recommending budgetary cuts — in fact, he said, one recent meeting about cuts ran so long that a special follow-up meeting had to be scheduled.

This example reflects the occasional stress and challenge of being on a council. "It's quite a commitment and a difficult one. Church politics — it's kind of a baptism for those who venture into that for the first time. Some people can handle it, some people can't," Theisen said, noting that time commitments and/or tense atmospheres have caused some teens — and adults, for that matter — to drop off their councils.

Theisen suggested appointing an adult advocate — a council member who works with the youth to ensure his or her comfort. Just as importantly, Bill said, a youth must strive to make the council feel at ease. For example, he has learned to be diplomatic: "An idea pops into my head, and maybe it's not the best idea or the right thing to say. You need to reflect first."

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URBI	ADEPT	TABS
NEON	SODAS	OGEE
CLOG	SUEDE	IRAE
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ECSTASY	POLE	
HAS	DOUBTING	
BABEL	SERRA	CIO
OMER	FIATS	BOLL
ABE	CELT	PINED
ZIPPORAH	HAB	
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STEN	EDGES	LENT

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