

Fr. Joe Chapter 8 ~ Youth Club In his own words...

Teenagers had a hard time in those days and in the area. These were rebellious years and the birth of rock and roll. Parents did not understand teenagers and the teens did not understand the parents. There were no movie theaters in the area nor shopping malls. There was no place to gather, no television at home and they did not have cars to drive in those days.

I organized a CYO (Catholic Youth Organization) group. We met twice a month. The first hour I usually talked with them, discussed and debated with them about life issues. The second hour they socialized and played games and danced. During the winter, we had a telephone system and a carpool set up. When a good snow would fall, we would immediately gather at McCafferty's farm. They had a good hill for sledding and a pond for ice skating. They had a barn and would set a big bonfire in the field. When someone got cold or hungry, they would go to the kitchen, which was supplied with snacks and refreshments. Those were great days.

During the summer I would often rent out the roller rink about seven miles away. There were many enjoyable evenings back then. Occasionally, we would schedule a dance at the parish hall and sometimes at The Barn, a dance hall nearby.

Our activities included work projects, as well as entertainment. When I needed help with one of the missions, I would take a group of boys and girls, some would mow, some would paint, some would weed the tobacco patch, some of the girls would prepare and cook spaghetti for lunch. Some of the boys and girls would mow and trim our cemeteries all summer long. At the end of August, I would take the teens to Coney Island or to Columbus for a day at the Ohio State Fair.

I remember one day I needed help in the cemetery to reset and straighten fallen tombstones. I picked up two high school boys, took them and some tools to the cemetery and told them what to do. At noon, I stopped by to bring them some bread, bologna and some Cokes. At the end of the afternoon, I stopped again to pick them up. I thanked them for doing a great job.

As we drove home, I heard them whispering in the back seat wondering how much I would pay them. I pulled into town, let them out and said, "boys, thanks for doing a great job. Now we don't have any money in the cemetery fund so I'm going to give each of you free gravesites for your burial." Then I drove away.

Another opportunity to work with youth came when the Civil Servant Patrol asked me to become their chaplain. It was set up in a little town about ten miles away. I seized the opportunity since it had about 20 teenage boys and girls and none of them were Catholic. I would attend their meetings, not interested in their projects on planes, but I lectured for an hour on morality. The Air Force sent me a set of manuals to use as a text. I was surprised that its contents were very close to the Ten Commandments. But I was more surprised at the interest and attention of those boys and girls.

When a person reaches their teens, they step out of their childhood security, and the safety and security of the home, he or she has their sights set on the promised land ~ adulthood, freedom, success and fulfillment. Adulthood is still far ahead and unknown. They have to cross the desert of teen years with its questions, its fears and its dangers. To find strength and courage, they turn to their peers and they flock together. They do know that they need a shepherd to guide them, but they want to be led, not driven.

Parents and teachers must be patient and understanding, firm but flexible. They must be able to listen and often able to explain. If a sheep strays, they have to welcome it back to the fold. If the shepherd can't control himself, how can he control the sheep? And the sheep know this and will not listen. Deep within, the sheep needs and wants the guidance of a shepherd and will follow even though if it's in a scattered way.

