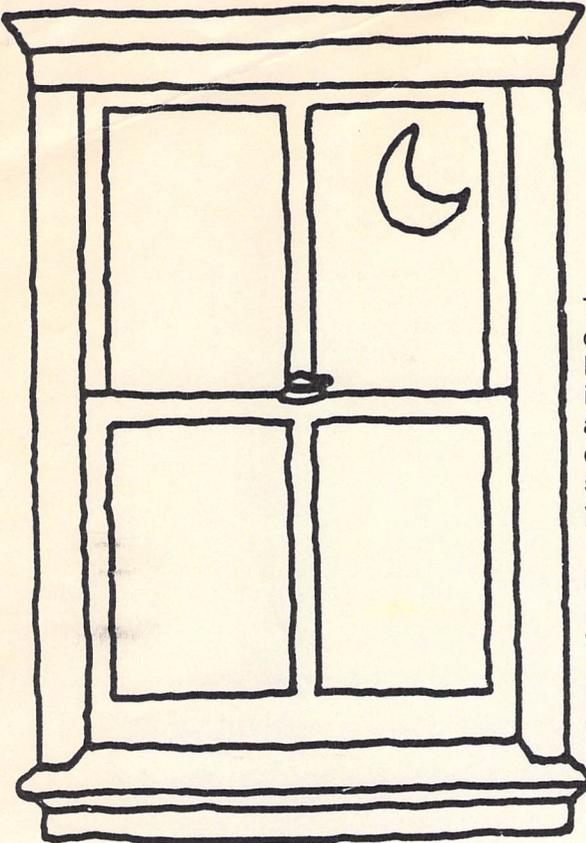


FOCUS

ON: Teen Suicide



The February 18th issue of **People** (one of our unfavorite magazines) carried a series of three articles on teen suicide. According to the lead-in editorial, about 5,000 young people commit suicide each year in the U.S. The editorial also estimated that some 500,000 others attempt suicide. Those are whopping figures. If we were to extrapolate them and apply them to parish life, the average parish should expect five or six suicide attempts and one suicide every 10 years.

Research does seem to indicate that boys are three times more likely than girls to commit suicide although girls are much more likely than boys to attempt it. Suicides come from all social classes. What they seem to have in common is a great desire to please their parents which is frustrated by events. Being unwilling to cope with the events which frustrate them, they seek a way out of their pain. Suicides also seem to come in clusters. When one teen commits suicide, he or she emboldens others to try it.

What are the suicide warning signals? The article lists these:

- preoccupation with ideas of death or expressing suicidal thoughts
- giving away prized possessions
- making a will
- changes in sleeping patterns--too much or too little
- sudden or extreme changes in eating habits
- withdrawal from friends or family
- changes in school performance, lower grades, cutting classes, dropping out of activities
- nervousness, apathy, outbursts of anger
- use of drugs or alcohol
- recent suicide of a friend or relative
- previous suicide attempts.

By befriending teens and helping them understand how important and valuable they are in the eyes of God, by helping them build better relationships with parents, by introducing them to service activities, by helping them to succeed at various activities, and by putting them in touch with their own religious tradition, youth ministers are providing a healthy antidote to the rising problem of teen suicide.

