

30 AND UNDER

Five who
are
'all in'

for their
Catholic
faith

BY MARY SOLBERG

In the Catholic Church, people often wonder where young people go after receiving the sacrament of confirmation in high school and before they return for marriage and children.

Five young adults in the Diocese of Erie provide a glimpse of amazing ministries and activities being done for the glory of God in northwest Pennsylvania.

Jillian Zaczyk, director of the Office of Young Adult and Youth Ministry, lauds the outreach of these young people age 30 and under.

"We often hear people lament about millennials and the younger generations in our church, but these five individuals show that young people in our church are all in," Zaczyk says. "They've discovered the richness of who Jesus is and that we are called to be his hands and feet in the world."

AMY
BOXER
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Amy Boxer is pictured in this 2019 photo playing guitar at an outdoor Mass during the diocesan youth mission trip in Kentucky.

- Crisis clinician, Safe Harbor Behavioral Health, Erie
- Director of the teen Mass music ministry at Blessed Sacrament Parish, Erie
- Theatrical production volunteer, Catholic Preparatory School (Cathedral Prep and Villa Maria Academy)
- Longtime adult chaperone for the annual diocesan Kentucky mission trip

Amy Boxer says she gravitates toward the people most in need.

In her work as a crisis clinician at Safe Harbor Behavioral Health, Erie, she answers phones and visits homes of people who are experiencing a mental health crisis, which, at times, includes being part of the trauma team.

As a longtime music minister and director of the popular teen Mass music ministry at Blessed Sacrament Parish, she oversees many high school and college-age students who play in the

band and sing.

"I have known two of our students who have chosen to become Catholic. I also have seen kids grow stronger in their Catholic faith," she says. "It holds me accountable to be honest and truthful with myself and with them as they go on their own faith journeys. It makes me feel kind of humbled."

Many of those same young people participate in the annual diocesan Kentucky mission trip led by Father Michael DeMartinis. Amy serves as an adult chaperone and oversees the band during the week-long excursions.

Her sister, Alyssa Boxer, first encouraged her to join the Kentucky trip when Amy was entering her sophomore year of high school in 2008. For Amy, it's been a gift to serve some of the neediest people of rural America.

"Being part of all of these experiences has helped me not only to grow in my spiritual life, but create friendships and lasting bonds," she says.



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ISAIAH
BROOKS
21



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- Junior, Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania
- Active in the Newman Center
- Longtime participant, organizer and leader of *Totus Tuus* (a Catholic summer youth program in the Diocese of Erie)

Isaiah Brooks credits his family for getting him involved in parish volunteer work at a young age.

His parents always pitched in with kitchen duties at the St. Philip Church Parish Center in Linesville. That's where Isaiah first became aware of diocesan summer youth retreats.

He attended three *Totus Tuus* camps during high school and then started working at the middle school retreats held at the parish. Young people attend daily Mass and adoration, listen to talks

and participate in small group discussions.

Along with his sister, he started learning the ropes of organizing large gatherings. He still helps coordinate the retreats with parish staff and the diocesan Office of Young Adult and Youth Ministry. And perhaps his hardest job is promoting the camp among young people in the area.

"*Totus Tuus* retreats sparked the fire inside me to want to do more with my faith and work on personal prayer and be a good example to others," Isaiah says. "I'm always inviting younger folks who

are coming of age to come along. It's nice to be a part of a group of like-minded Catholics who want to learn more about their faith and live it."

At Slippery Rock, he is active with the Newman Center. Even during the pandemic, he and another student are working on ways to continue social distancing and still conduct Bible studies on campus.

Isaiah Brooks, at lectern, helps lead a *Totus Tuus* experience at St. Philip Parish in Linesville.



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ASHLYN KELLY 24



- Analytical chemist, Plastics Services Network (PSN), Erie
- Project manager, volunteer, ServErie
- Volunteer, PSN outreach programs
- Chairperson, Civic & Community Engagement Committee, Young Erie Professionals (YEP)
- Community adviser, Alpha Phi Omega Service Fraternity, Penn State Erie, The Behrend College
- Religious education teacher, Blessed Sacrament Parish, Erie

Ashlyn Kelly says it doesn't matter how old someone is; he or she still has the power to make a difference in the world.

For Ashlyn, a native of Our Mother of Perpetual Help Church in Lewis Run, volunteer work is second nature. In fact, it's practically a full-time job, in addition to her work as an analytical chemist at Plastics Services Network (PSN) in Erie.

Most of her volunteerism centers around ServErie, a community volunteer network for which she is project manager. She develops the scope of various projects for ServErie Saturdays and the ServErie Summer Initiative Project.

Additionally, she is a religious education teacher at Blessed Sacrament Parish, Erie, is active with the Young Erie Professionals (YEP), and does community outreach on behalf of her employer, PSN.

This doesn't even begin to cover all of the volunteer work she did as a chemistry major at Penn State Erie, The Behrend College, including serving as president of the school's Random Acts of Kindness Club.

While she was in college, Ashlyn's father was severely burned in a work-related accident. He was flown to Buffalo for treatment.

"I used to be very shy, but when that happened, I got a whole new perspective on life," Ashlyn says. "My motivation is the first two commandments God gave us: love God with your whole heart, mind and soul; and love your neighbor as yourself. Everyone wants peace, but there will never be peace if we don't help one another, especially during difficult times."

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Ashlyn Kelly is pictured here at a ServErie summer project outside JoAnna Connell School in Erie. She helped to paint parts of the school's outdoor basketball court to make it more fun, inviting and kid-friendly.



- Communications consultant, Diocesan (national publication firm for Catholic dioceses)
- Member of parish council, parish volunteer, confirmation facilitator, St. Catherine of Siena Parish, DuBois



Contributed Photo

ADAM SNYDER 30

nights and weekends and holidays."

As the Spirit would have it, Adam met his future boss while checking him in to a local hotel. They exchanged business cards. Within seven months, Adam started working at Diocesan, a national publication firm for Catholic dioceses.

As a communications consultant for Diocesan, Adam services eight states from New York to North Carolina. He travels frequently, assisting parishes with their church bulletins, ad sales and sponsors. Diocesan services also include the popular MyParish App and Discovermass.com, and an online store that sells banners and other parish-based resources, including masks and social distancing kits.

"It's almost like a ministry," Adam says. "We're not just selling ads, we're forming a rapport with pastors and parishioners and even participating in church events."

Once, he helped make pierogis at a

For Adam Snyder, combining his faith with a full-time job has always been the ultimate professional goal.

After graduating with a degree in communications from Pennsylvania State University in 2014, he found himself working three part-time jobs: a hotel clerk, a marketing sales rep and a weekend house cleaner.

"I was praying and asking God for direction," he says. "I was wearing three different hats, had no schedule, working

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parish Polish festival in Pittsburgh. Other times, he has talked to people about their faith struggles.

Diocesan's mission statement is, "In love and service of Christ."

To young people looking for employment, he advises, "Look for a job that allows you to express your faith."

Adam Snyder contacts businesses to sponsor and advertise in church bulletins.

- Founders of Holy Family Young Adult Ministry, DuBois www.patreon.com/HolyFamilyYoungAdults
- Leaders of the confirmation program, St. Catherine of Siena Parish, DuBois
- Maria (self-employed), www.marialangart.com
- Maria, cantor, St. Catherine of Siena Parish, DuBois
- Silvio livestreams Mass for St. Catherine of Siena Parish



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Maria and Silvio Garcia, pictured at left, are leading the new Holy Family Young Adult Ministry in DuBois. Pictured with them are: Kyrstin Crusan, Rhett Stoltz, Nicolas Jensen and Madison Jensen.

MARIA & SILVIO GARCIA 27



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through occasional in-person get-togethers, service and faith formation.

Holy Family Young Adults hosts online Bible studies and provides thought-provoking videos, as well as small group Zoom discussions.

The pandemic has made Maria and Silvio want to expand their online presence

Sitting on the fringes of life was not an option for Maria and Silvio Garcia, who met as students at Saint Vincent College in Latrobe.

They got married three years ago with the hopes of sharing their mutual love of Jesus with others.

Last spring, just as the pandemic was beginning to take hold, they moved to DuBois and created a new full-time ministry, Holy Family Young Adults. Accessible on Facebook, the ministry aims to reach people ages 18 to 35 who want to nurture their spiritual lives

via YouTube and podcasts.

"We want to work retreats into this ministry, too," Maria says, adding that, for now, their online presence is growing to include people from across the state of Pennsylvania.

For Silvio, who was baptized Catholic at age 21 and attended World Youth Day in Madrid, Spain, spreading the faith is of utmost importance today.

"We both experienced in our conversion the power of community and how it helps us not only to enter into a relationship with Jesus Christ, but to go deeper and to do more, not just the bare minimum," he says. †