

Catholic Services Appeal

HOLY FIRE Middle-schoolers ignite their Catholic faith

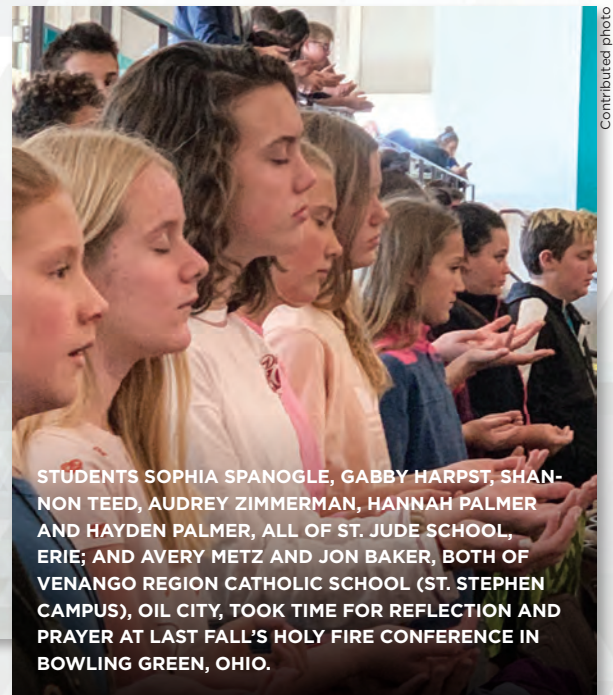
FOR EIGHTH-GRADER KATHRYN CARYL of St. George School, faith really can be fun.

She discovered this at last fall's Holy Fire Conference in Bowling Green, Ohio, where 1,000 middle-school students from the Great Lakes region came together to ignite their Catholic beliefs.

"People sometimes think a religious retreat couldn't be fun, but it was," Caryl says. "A lot of us who went learned a lot and it was a chance for us to bring out the fun parts of our faith."

Thanks in part to contributions made to the Catholic Services Appeal, 32 sixth-, seventh- and eighth-graders from the Erie and Oil City areas attended the event, organized by the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry.

A handful of chaperones also attended, along with Jillian Zaczyk, director of Faith Formation for Young Adult & Youth Ministry.



STUDENTS SOPHIA SPANOGLLE, GABBY HARPST, SHANNON TEED, AUDREY ZIMMERMAN, HANNAH PALMER AND HAYDEN PALMER, ALL OF ST. JUDE SCHOOL, ERIE; AND AVERY METZ AND JON BAKER, BOTH OF VENANGO REGION CATHOLIC SCHOOL (ST. STEPHEN CAMPUS), OIL CITY, TOOK TIME FOR REFLECTION AND PRAYER AT LAST FALL'S HOLY FIRE CONFERENCE IN BOWLING GREEN, OHIO.

It was the first time the diocese participated in the national event for middle-schoolers, Zaczyk says. In fact, the Diocese of Erie was the only diocese to represent Pennsylvania at the Holy Fire Conference.

"This was a way to provide experiences for our younger people to encounter Christ," Zaczyk says. "Jesus speaks to all of us, and reaching young people's hearts and minds is invaluable."

For Caryl and other students, the music and dancing, and even the speeches, were enjoyable. They also eagerly participated in confession, Mass and a prayer chain activity.

Avery Metz, a seventh-grader from St. Stephen School in Oil City, says she left the conference wanting to share her experience with her friends and family members.

"I told my class and my friends that it is a good experience if you are just starting your Catholic faith," Metz says. "I enjoyed the music because it was catchy and I like music."

Katie Chandley, the campus minister at Venango Catholic High School and a theology teacher at St. Stephen, was happy to serve as a chaperone and expose impressionable middle-schoolers to the larger, active church.

"I would like to take more kids to the Holy Fire Conference next year," she says. "This is an important age group because they're starting to make decisions and deciding how much they want to stay involved in their faith."

For those concerned about the future of young people in the church, giving to the Catholic Services Appeal is one way to respond. †



ABOUT 1,000 STUDENTS FROM ALL OVER THE GREAT LAKES REGION ATTENDED THE HOLY FIRE CONFERENCE FOR MIDDLE-SCHOOLERS IN OHIO LAST FALL. PICTURED HERE IS THE ERIE DIOCESAN CONTINGENT.