

July 26, 2009

This weekend teens and their adult youth ministry leaders from across the diocese will gather in Valparaiso for our sixth annual Catholic Youth Xperience. I look forward to celebrating Mass with them at the new Harre Union on the campus of Valparaiso University on Sunday afternoon.

This event, which is the annual highpoint for youth ministry in our diocese, is meant to transform the few hundred young people who attend by presenting the Gospel message in a language with which they can relate. Each year, the CYX Planning Team presents a new menu of speakers, prayer services, catechetical sessions, and activities. Teens have come to embrace this variety, and have made the diocesan conference a highlight of their summer.

It is no secret that getting older adolescents and young adults to become active in ministry is, at times, a difficult task. But when we dedicate our efforts to initiating teens in ministries, they bear fruit a hundredfold.

During this decade, a tracking study called the “National Study of Youth and Religion” – the largest ever conducted of its kind – has provided Catholic Church leaders both challenging and affirming results.

Catholic youth ranked alarmingly low in their doctrinal knowledge of the faith. This reminds us of the importance of post-Confirmation catechetical programs like CYX, which delivers sound doctrine presented in methods appealing to teens. CYX follows the curriculum guidelines for high school students provided by the US bishops.

The study also showed that Catholic youth that participated in retreats, rallies, and conferences were significantly more likely to attend liturgy regularly, to read the Bible, and to report being close to God (“National Study of Youth and

Religion: Analysis of the Population of Catholic Teenagers and Their Parents”). There is a direct correlation between these powerful experiences and regular church participation.

This year’s CYX theme is “CROSSroads.” Through an intentional variety of experiences, including Eucharist, speakers, Reconciliation, Adoration service, upbeat music, learning sessions, and even a time for dancing (Eccl 3:1,4), teens will be led on a journey with Christ. The scriptural theme for the weekend is drawn from Christ’s walk with two disciples to Emmaus: “Were not our hearts burning within us while he spoke to us on the way?” (Lk 24:32).

Please join me in prayer that the youth attending this weekend’s Catholic Youth Xperience will have a profound encounter with Christ, that they will feel their hearts burning, and that they will continue that walk with the Lord when they return to their parishes.