

# Encouraging words mark Stella Maris teen retreat

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

BRIGHTON — Abbie Gellman wanted to know why her Catholic friends at Brighton High School seemed to so enjoy retreats with their youth group at Our Lady of Lourdes.

"A lot of my friends are in (youth group)," the sophomore said. "They always came back all happy and smiling."

Raised in the Jewish faith, Gellman wanted to satisfy her curiosity about Christianity, so last weekend, with her parents' permission, she went along with the Lourdes youth group to their retreat at Camp Stella Maris in Livonia.

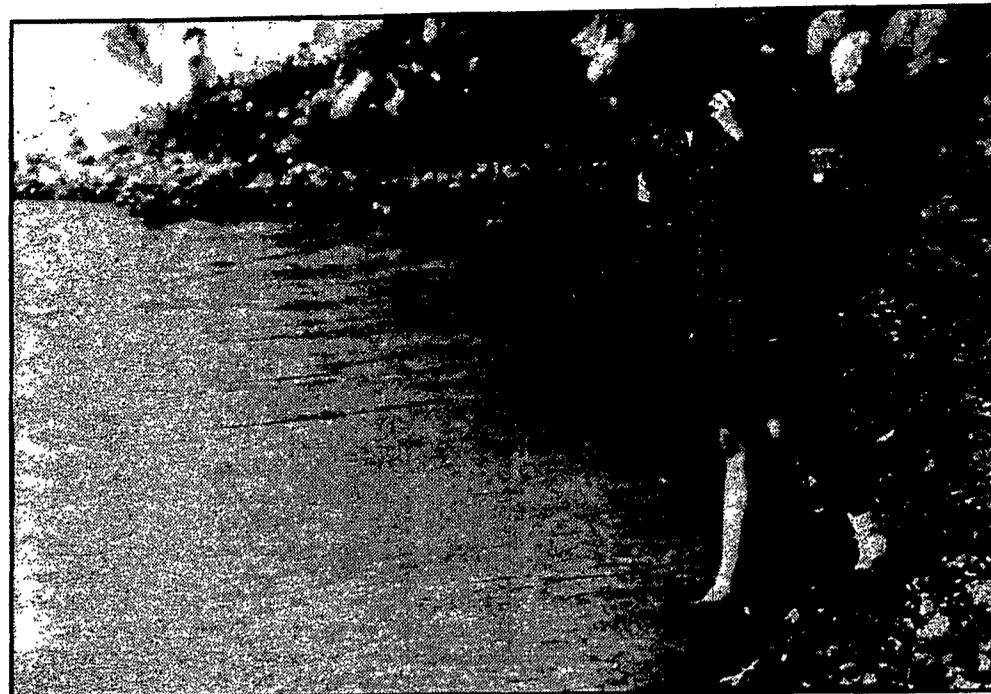
Sixty-four students attended the retreat, which took place from Friday night, Oct. 27, to Sunday afternoon, Oct. 29, said Jo-

han Engstrom, youth group leader. Engstrom added that 26 of the students came from neighboring parishes.

Gellman enjoyed her taste of Catholicism. "The Mass was a little awkward," she acknowledged, "because I didn't know what was going on."

The student remarked that she "never really learned much about God" before, but came away from the retreat understanding Christianity better. She particularly liked the retreat's thematic emphasis on Jesus' command to love God above all else and to love one's neighbor as oneself. Retreat-goers were given several opportunities to put Christ's command into action throughout the weekend.

One such exercise called for the students to spend a lot of time looking at themselves



Doug Meszler  
(Above) Michelle Battaglia of Brighton High School wades on the shore of Canisius Lake at Camp Stella Maris in Livonia where a youth group retreat was held Oct. 27-29. (At right) Geoff Dale, also of Brighton, entertains other youth during free-time on Saturday. The two-day event brought together students from all over the diocese.



Free time during the retreat found students sharing and laughing together and enjoying the beautiful fall day at Canisius Lake. Laura Rosenblitt reclines on her friends while soaking up some sun.

in their own individual mirrors. But unlike the average looking glass, these "mirrors" were made of poster board and hung on a wall, and the reflections they cast were written observations about the mirror's owner placed there by other retreat-goers throughout the weekend.

Following the retreat, Tammy Ellman, a Brighton junior, took another look at her "mirror" and liked what she saw. One anonymous student had written to Ellman: "You have insights that you should be proud of. Keep smiling;" while another had scrawled: "Use your gifts to your advantage."

Now that she knows what other people think of her, Ellman plans to take a more active role in leading the group, which she says forms an important support network for its members. "You can stop going to youth group for a week or a year and come back and people still love you," she concluded.

It was just such support that Jennifer Ianacone, a Mercy High School senior, was looking for when she went to Stella Maris last weekend. "(The retreat) came at a particularly good time," Ianacone said. "Everything made sense. We focused in a lot on how God loves each person."

The student added that she needed to hear such affirmation because the pressure to succeed academically and gain admittance to a prestigious college increases

each day. Ianacone shared some of her senior year anxieties with the retreat-goers at a rap session on Saturday night.

"You find that once you say what's bothering you, a whole bunch of people will come up to you and say they'll support you," she said.

C. J. Kosmicki came away from the retreat with a feeling of brotherly love — in the literal sense. The McQuaid Jesuit High School sophomore and his brother Jack, a Brighton senior, attended the retreat together.

"We got to know that we really loved each other a lot and we weren't afraid to tell each other," Kosmicki said.

Jennifer Jackson, a Penfield High School sophomore, found the retreat a pleasant surprise. "I'd never been to a retreat before," she said. "I made a lot of friends."

Jackson mostly enjoyed writing compliments on other students' mirrors, and said that one student surprised her by reminding her of a remark she made in a small group discussion. "You made me feel good today in small group," the student wrote on the poster board.

"She was talking about how someone called her a name," Jackson recalled. "I said that when people say things that are negative ... it's because of their own insecurities. That made her feel good," she ended.

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