

MOVING ON THE

Gather Us In

Does it seem unreal to you that 50 strangers can get together for a weekend and end up sharing laughter, hugs, tears and phone numbers by the time it's all over?

Then you've probably never been on diocesan retreats offered for teens: "Awakening Faith," for grades nine-10; and "Encountering Christ," for grades 11-12.

Kim Dimitri speaks for many other teens when she says her retreat experiences have produced a new-found closeness with her faith.

"Before retreats, I didn't know how I related to God," said Kim, 15, a parishioner at St. Louis Church in Pittsford. "I didn't know those answers; everything was just a blur.

"But hearing other people, and thinking about the talks and discussions — you get your own answers."

Without question, the spirit of God was moving like a lightning rod through Awakening Faith participants at Camp Stella Maris May 3-5. The retreat's closing Mass, held outdoors at the Livonia camp, was marked by a long series of group hugs — with some intense prayer thrown in for good measure. Indeed, the Mass's opening song, "Gather Us In," fit like a glove for this event.

Faith-related activities conducted by adult and teen leaders include reconciliation sessions, liturgies and group discussions. By nearly all accounts, it's the discussions that play the biggest role in moving participants toward deeper relationships with their friends and their God.

Take Kim, for example. At Stella Maris this month, she willingly shared feelings about sensitive topics such as depression.



Heather Hossenlopp (center), from St. John the Evangelist Parish in Spencerport, joins Michael Kita (left) and T.J. Torpy, both from St. Mary of the Assumption Parish in Scottsville, in song during the closing Mass at Camp Stella Maris May 5.

"Usually I try to cover things up, but here I wasn't really worried," Kim said. "You can talk about things, and there are so many deep feelings behind the words people are saying."

One aspect that helps people open up, Kim added, is the air of welcoming that greets each camper.

"I don't think there are cliques here at all," Kim stated. "You can just talk to whoever."

Not only does Kim make new friendships at retreats, but she also deepens old ones.

"Even though I already know a lot of people," she said, "I get to learn so much more about them."

On the other hand, Maria Farrell was making her debut at a diocesan retreat when attending Awakening Faith this month. She started the weekend knowing only one person, Sarah McKinley; both are youth-group members at St. Mary's Church in Bath. However, Maria found her social network expanding quickly.

"I felt comfortable at the beginning."



Plenty of willing arms wrapped participants in hugs at the conclusion of the "Awakening Faith" retreat.

Coming Attractions

from the Catholic Courier

Summer Guide

Publication Date: May 23
Advertising Deadline: May 19



As Courier readers prepare for the summer months, this special supplement will present them with a host of activities for their consideration. From nearby church-sponsored festivals and retreats to places beyond, this supplement will serve as a well-used summer planning guide.

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Graduation

Publication Date: June 13
Advertising Deadline: May 30



(Bonus distribution to graduating students)
A look at the high school Class of '96 as its members prepare for life after high school. In addition to the annual listing of graduates' names, this

special supplement also will contain feature articles on selected graduates, with special emphasis on their expectations and plans for the future.

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