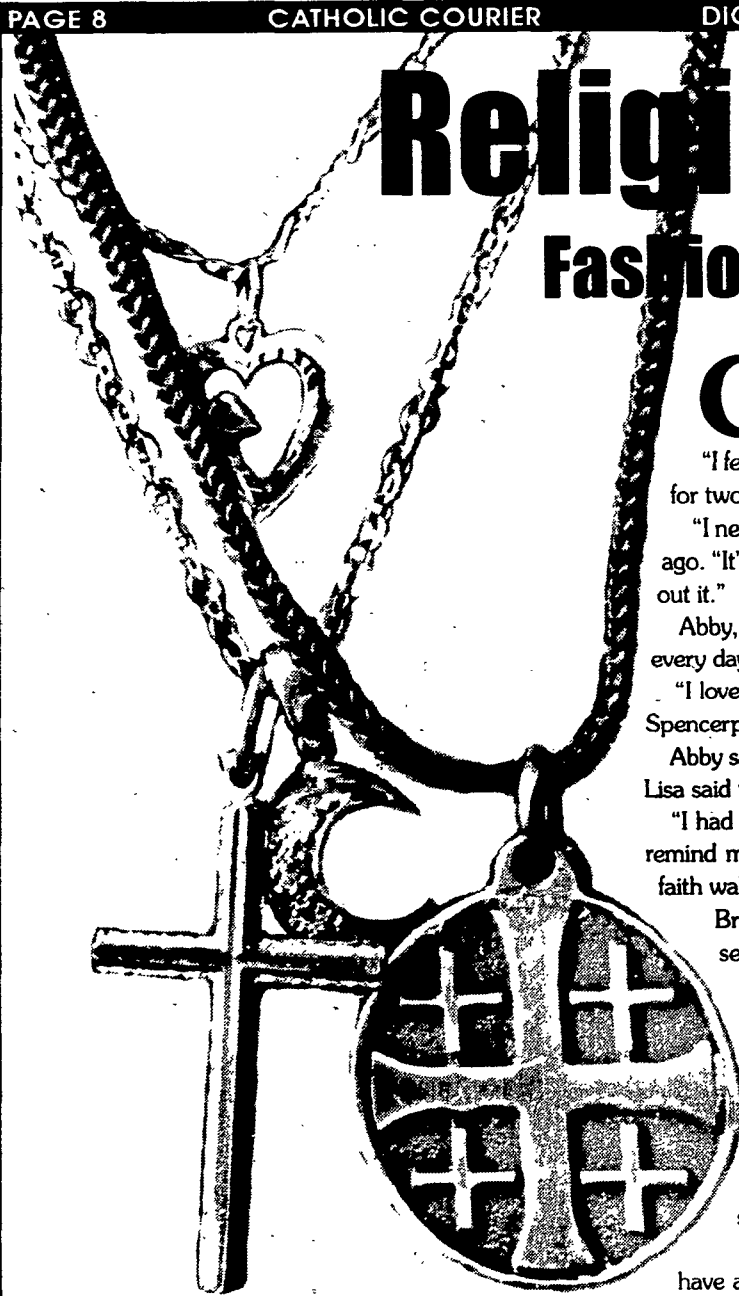


Religious jewelry Fashion statements for Christ



Story by Mike Latona
Photos by Greg Francis

Clothing and hairdos may come and go, but there's one constant in the fashion styles of Lisa Muscato, Brad Rhow and Abby Curatolo: the religious jewelry hanging from their necks.

"I feel incomplete without it," said Lisa, 17, of the silver crucifix she has worn for two years.

"I never take it off," said Brad, 18, of the gold crucifix he received three years ago. "It's something real precious to me. I would never want to lose it or be without it."

Abby, 16, received her gold crucifix during the second grade and has "worn it every day since."

"I love it," said Abby, 16, a parishioner at St. John the Evangelist Church in Spencerport.

Abby said her parents gave her the crucifix as a first Eucharist gift. Meanwhile, Lisa said that her crucifix was a Christmas present from her grandmother.

"I had begun to explore my faith and really wanted a symbol of it that would remind me of my new-found faith every day. This cross signifies my everyday faith walk," explained Lisa, from St. Helen's Church in Gates.

Brad's crucifix was a confirmation gift from Father Michael Volino, who served as his sponsor.

"To me, it represents our friendship. I like it a lot," said Brad, from St. Lawrence Church in Greece.

All three said that their crucifixes are important to their prayer lives.

"Whenever I pray, I hold it," Brad said.

"I always play with it. Sometimes I have a bad day and sometimes I really get nervous, and I know God is there," Abby remarked.

Lisa said she turns to her crucifix "to calm me down when I feel upset or alone. I grab my cross and imagine I am holding (God's) hand. It makes it easier for me to pray to something more tangible than our intangible Lord."

While crucifixes are among the most popular religious jewelry, "WWJD" necklaces appeared to be a hit at last month's diocesan Awakening Faith retreat for grades nine and 10. Participants were given medals featuring the popular WWJD (What Would Jesus Do) logo during a reconciliation service.

Chris Coniglio, Awakening Faith retreat coordinator, reported that the necklaces were quite well-received by the teens:

"A couple of them had clasps that broke and they sought me out to make sure they got a different one, because it was really important to them," Coniglio said. She added that the next morning, a large majority of the teens were still wearing their necklaces.

Coniglio commented that this occurrence reflects "a new spirituality. Kids are not afraid to wear these things."

Jeffrey Bush, 14, said he planned on wearing his WWJD medal at school, and wasn't worried about the reaction he would get.

"It should be good," said Jeffrey, from St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Church in Hamlin. He attends Brockport High School.

However, Abby said that her crucifix has caused divisiveness at times. At Spencerport High School, she said, she gets left out of conversations in which peers slam the Catholic faith or religion in general.

"They know I'm not afraid of expressing my faith or showing my faith," Abby said.

Lisa, who attends Gates-Chili High School, said she has experienced similar problems.

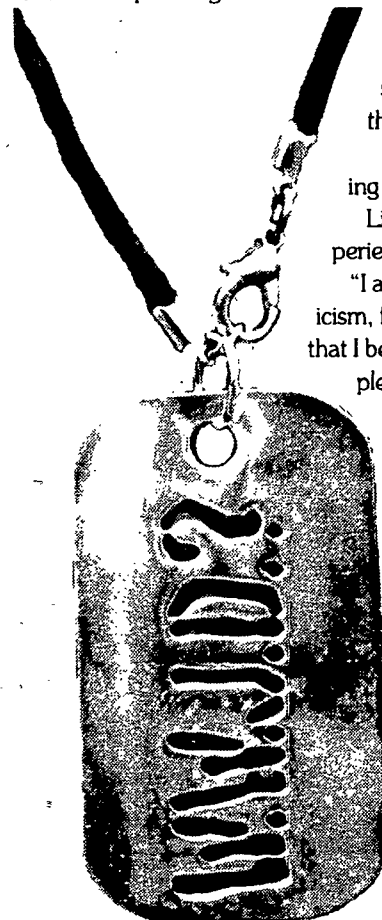
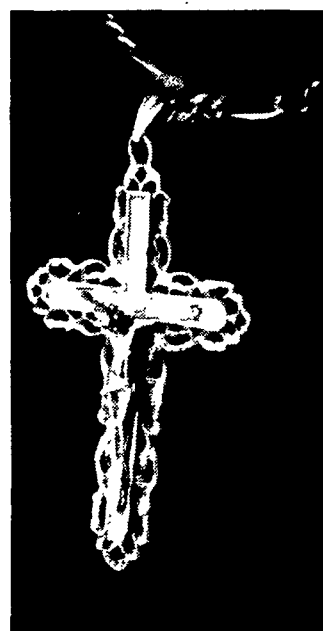
"I admit it does, at times, leave me open to judgment and criticism, for I am not hiding my beliefs at all, telling the whole world that I believe in Christ," Lisa acknowledged. "I have also had people tell me that just by openly displaying my cross, they feel as though I am pushing my beliefs on them."

Yet Lisa added that her crucifix provokes numerous positive responses as well, often serving as an ice-breaker for meaningful religious discussions.

"My cross can be a way to let people know I am Christian so they might feel more comfortable with me and tell me they, too, are Christian," she explained.

Coniglio pointed out that religious jewelry also helps less conversational teens to express their faith without having to speak.

"A lot of times, kids don't have the words for things. It's kind of a symbol when they don't have those words yet," Coniglio remarked.



Some teens wear and combine religious and sentimental jewelry.

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