

TEEN PERSPECTIVES ON PRAYER



Janelle Borowski, 14, of Spencerport's St. John the Evangelist Parish, sits in reflection as her friends pray over her at Family Camp at Camp Koinonia in Italy Valley on July 13.

There's no shortage of prayer opportunities at Family Camp, held on the peaceful grounds of Camp Koinonia in Italy Valley, Yates County. Families and teen staffers take part in Masses, Communion services, campfire discussions, meals, singing, dancing and other prayerful activities throughout their one-week stay.

However, keeping up a good prayer life can be more challenging when Family Camp participants return to their daily lives, where distractions and pressures can be numerous.

Anna Mayton, 13, who attended Family Camp July 8-14 with her family, said she doesn't always pray daily "because I'm so busy with school things."

But being busy doesn't necessarily mean you have to put your prayers on hold, Charles Nagy observed. The key, he said, is to be imaginative.

"I'm taught that you don't have to be kneeling down. I'm taught you can talk to God anytime you want to," said Charles, 17, from St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish in Hamlin. He served as a teen counselor at the July 8-14 camp, the first of three Family Camps offered through the diocese this summer.

Charles explained that when he's about to take a math exam, for example, "I'll say to myself, 'Please, God, help me get through this test.' I don't make a big thing about it."

Part of the reason that Charles prays silently in school, he admitted, is because he's concerned about the reaction from his peers.

"I think it's because we feel weird expressing our religion in front of other people," he said. "I think one of the biggest things is, what are they going to say about me when I do it? Kids are so judgmental in high school."

Charles, a senior-to-be at Hilton High School, also pointed out that organized prayer is unlawful in public schools. In fact, when a friend was killed in a car accident, Charles recalled, a moment of silence — as opposed to a moment of prayer — was held at the school.

Jason Beardsley, 14, another Family Camp counselor, said that settings definitely play a role in his style of prayer.

"Here (at Family Camp), you're around friends. You don't have to worry about getting mocked for what you're saying," said Jason, from St. Joseph's Parish in Penfield.

Counselor Amanda Reitz, 14, said she is subject to peer pressure

about her religion as well, but that Family Camp inspired her to focus more on promoting her faith and less on impressing her friends.

"I should be praying, doing that for myself. People who make comments about it, they call you 'holy' and they expect you to take that as an insult. They don't understand what it's like to be close to God," said Amanda, who originally attended Family Camp as a youngster

when her family belonged to St. John the Evangelist Parish in Spencerport. She has returned to the camp as a counselor even though her family moved to the New York City area two years ago.

Anna, on the other hand, said she tends to be low-key about her prayer life. Yet that doesn't mean she's not devoted to her faith, she stated.

"I think some people like to talk about it and that's a good thing. But there are also people who don't, and that's fine too," Anna said. "Because that's just the way you are."

Jason said that prayer isn't always meant to be done in public, anyway. "You should do it both openly and by yourself," he remarked.

Jason also observed that during his stay at Family Camp, he was reminded how prayer can consist of actions as well as words.

"Instead of sitting down and praying, you could also be doing something," he said, using reconciliation as an example. Rather than simply recite the Our Father, you can live out *Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us* by "going out and showing the person you've forgiven them," he said.

Meanwhile, Amanda said she improved her prayer life at Family Camp by reading Bible passages with children ages 6-8.

"You're teaching (the children), but you're teaching yourself, too," she pointed out.

Explaining the story of Zacchaeus, the tax collector who climbed a tree to get Jesus' attention (Luke 19:1-10) gave her new insight, she said.

"It ties into real life. It just shows you that someone may not be the nicest person, but they can still believe in God and try to do what he wants," Amanda remarked.

**'I'M TAUGHT
THAT YOU DON'T
HAVE TO BE
KNEELING DOWN.
I'M TAUGHT YOU
CAN TALK TO
GOD ANYTIME
YOU WANT TO'**

— Charles, 17, from
St. Elizabeth Ann

Seton Parish in Hamlin.

COMING NEXT WEEK: Steubenville youth conference

STORY BY
MIKE LATONA

PHOTO BY
ANDREA DIXON