

Fun and faith fill four-day NCYC conference

Alexis Armstrong/Guest Contributor

As the plane took off Nov. 13, I was ready to turn back and call it quits about this whole trip thing. I have a slight fear of heights, but by now it was too late. I cried like a little baby. Can you believe it? I'm a 17 year-old high-school senior attending Bishop Kearney Catholic High School. I'm about to enter the real world in less than 10 months, and I'm crying over a couple of thousand feet. I never traveled on an airplane in my life, so this in itself was a life experience that I can share with my children later on down the road.

But after we were in the air and all the bumps and drops were done, I was OK. I looked out my window at the sea of clouds and thought to myself that I was extremely blessed to have such an opportunity to have taken this trip. I laid my head back, and closed my eyes and thought about the things that were soon to come. I was about to be involved in a convention that was going to be filled with almost 23,000 teens who were as on fire about their faith as I was.

We arrived at the Marriott Hotel in Houston about 1 p.m. It was not as hot like I had hoped, but anything was better than Rochester's weather. I instant-messengered one of my friends back in Rochester, and she told me that it was snowing hard.

My sister La'Toni Cromes was one of my three roommates. The other two, Ashley and Leslie, from Immaculate Conception Parish, would get there about two hours later. We all knew each other, but we were not that close. I felt that this convention would really change that because we were on the same pages. And it did: They were really cool.

The convention began with song and dance from the local Texans that were involved in the show. Things went smoothly, and then a boy who was close to the stage had a medical problem. People were working together and praying for his safety and everything. It was touching.

The first interview I had was on Friday, in the Reliant Center. We had been with a man named Bud Welch. He was a man whose daughter was killed in the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995. About a year after her death, he changed from supporting the death penalty to taking a public stand against it. I felt he was a powerful speaker because he was straight to the point, and he didn't want to make you feel sorry for him losing his daughter; he just wanted the world to know about the kind of person she was. The purpose of his speech was to let people know that

the death penalty will probably never help people with their grieving process.

After lunch, I went to a workshop that was about the bread of life. There were people telling their stories about poverty and how we could help to stop it. The most interesting part of this workshop was the part where I actually had the chance to share some bread of life. I received a real loaf of bread and was told to go and share with all the people you meet on your way to dinner. The first person I saw I immediately walked over to and asked him if he wanted some bread of life. I thought that he was going to say no, but he said yes and he wanted to know if he could have the whole thing. I gave it to him feeling like I had won a million bucks just because I gave a loaf of bread away.

Friday evening, after my dinner was over, I went to the meeting place once again to interview a young woman named Rachel Lampa. From the moment she walked into the room, I knew that this girl had a lot of talent. She walked in with a smile that was warm and friendly. What made her so wonderful was, here is a girl the same age as I; a Dove Award winner; has been on countless TV talk shows; and is just this amazing person. It made me want to work much harder for the things I want in life. Later on after that interview, I went to the Reliant Stadium for more singing and dancing and cheering for my state when ever it was mentioned by one of the artists performing on the stage. Lampa was the best singer that I had heard in the whole convention. She was very energetic on stage and made the audience feel like they were a part of her songs that were giving praise to God. When our group finally departed from the stadium and caught the bus back to the hotel, everyone was pooped. I slept like I had never before.

Saturday was a free day for us for the most part. The highlight of this day was the dance. At first I was like, this dance is not going to be fun because people are not going to know how to act. But I'd have to say that I had more fun than I had had at any other dance in my life. There was a dancing priest, I'm not sure where he had come from, but he was break dancing to a Vanilla Ice hit in front of all these teenagers. It was not something you see every day. Mostly everyone stopped what they

were doing and went to go see the "dancing priest."

At the closing part of the convention Saturday, it was really the "get-to-know-as-many-people-as-you-can" day. There was also a sense of closeness between Immaculate Conception and St. Bridget's churches. Everyone felt there would be no way to break that bond that was formed over the past few days. I'm sure there had been some doubts about if we all were going to get along, but those doubts were put to the back of our minds. I know that I can count on them if I ever need some support and guidance. We were a team in Houston. There was never a bad time and everyone was always laughing when we were together.

I think the most I received from this convention is having pride. I

know that there are a lot more young people out there who are very excited about their faith and God. There are teens who love the Lord and try to do his will. There are teens in the world that are not always on MTV or BET, but are working for God.

This is our chance to show people who say things like, "Catholic people don't have fun" or "They never do anything for their youth that is positive," that we do have fun. But we have fun in a way that is still praising the Lord. We are positive despite what the media is saying. We do have strong faith, and with this strong faith we can do all the things that we put our minds into.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Alexis Armstrong, 17, is a parishioner of St. Bridget's, Rochester.

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