

## THOUGHTS FROM YOUR PASTOR: Our Youth and Teens

This coming Wednesday, I will be travelling once again to the Catholic Youth Summer Camp held at the Damascus Mission Campus near Centerburg, Ohio (south of Mount Vernon), to assist a dozen other priests in hearing Confessions for the hundreds of teenagers who will be taking part in a week-long Catholic camp. The Catholic Youth Summer Camp (CYSC) program began in our diocese in 2001, and it's grown exponentially over the past seventeen years. Initially offering just one or two weeks of camp summer, they now have so many Ohio Catholic teens wanting to experience a deep encounter with Jesus with other teens that they now offer at least nine weeks of camps each summer, with nearly 2000 middle- and high-school teens altogether attending. So much has demand increased, that they built their current huge permanent facility just three years ago, and it will already undergo a major expansion next summer to accommodate what they project as at least a thousand more teens coming from all parts of Ohio. As a priest, I try to make a point to travel to CYSC three or four times each summer, on Wednesdays, to help offer the teens the Sacrament of Confession. We barely have enough priests there and time allotted to accommodate the desire of teens to encounter Jesus' love in this wonderful sacrament. And this is just one component of CYSC, which also offers daily Mass, Eucharistic Adoration, encouragement to explore vocations, along with the kinds of activities few teens can resist: jet skis, climbing wall, high ropes, club nights with skits, and other exciting stuff. It is an amazing thing to witness: the hunger of today's generation of teens for something more than what the "world" is offering them, something more substantial than what the "M-TV" culture is trying to push upon them: something like faith, holiness, true friendships, purity, meaning and purpose in life, centered on a living relationship with Jesus Christ in the sacraments of the Catholic Church.

My experiences over the years at CYSC are not atypical. In my last assignment, I ministered regularly at nearby Fisher Catholic High School in Lancaster. There, too, I saw over the past few years a growing desire for holiness among the teens. Last January, I helped chaperone two busloads of them to Washington, DC, to take part in the annual "March for Life." They came back so "fired up" that, on their own initiative, they began to gather at the school on Sunday evenings to do praise and worship (what they dubbed "The Upper Room") in front of the Blessed Sacrament in the school chapel. School Masses and confessions were, like CYSC, very powerful experiences for me as a priest, of seeing teens wanting to go deeper in holiness of body and soul as they struggle to cope with the less appealing alternatives that the pop culture is offering them.

All this is to say that, I encourage everyone to fully support all our own parish programs that are designed to support our youth and teens. In my years as a pastor, including when I taught the "Theology of the Body for Teens" in past parishes on chastity and sexuality issues, I've come to appreciate more deeply how much most youth and teens, deep down, really do want to be holy and are looking for something "more", even if they don't always come out and "say so". The future of our parishes depends in part on serving their needs. It is part, after all, of what St. John Paul II called the "New Evangelization": inviting folks to a deeper relationship with the Lord in the midst of increasingly secularized cultures like here in America. Please pray to St. Michael the Archangel on behalf for our youth and teens, please get involved with our parish youth programs, and reach out and say of word of encouragement to a teenager in our parish the next time you see one. St. Joseph and St. Mary, pray for our young men and women!

Fr. Ferguson is available to help you with any questions or concerns you may have; please contact him at [hamilton.college@outlook.com](mailto:hamilton.college@outlook.com) or at 419-634-2626.



### THOUGHTS FOR OUR PARISH CHILDREN by "Jackie", the Pastor's Cat

Hi boys and girls! My name is "Jackie"! I am a cat that belongs to Father Ferguson, your new priest! That's right! I'm still getting used to my new house. As a cat, I like to sit at the window and stare outside...for hours on end. But yesterday, as I was looking outside, I saw another cat outside at the neighbor's house! At first, I thought, "How dare he walk by my yard! That's MY territory!" I was almost going to hiss and growl at him. But then I thought, maybe I should be more like Jesus and be friendly to him. So, I decided the next time Father lets me outside, I might go over and try to become friends with this cat. Have you made any new friends this summer? I hope you play nicely with all your friends. Have a "purr"-fect week!

