

Stewardship in Action at St. Bernard



ST. BERNARD YOUTH HONORED BY DIOCESE

In October 2017, two youth parishioners of St. Bernard, Taryn Ross and Max Renieris, were the recipients of the 2017 Diocesan Youth award. The most Reverend Bishop James Checchio of the Diocese of Metuchen presented the award to these two young adults during a special Mass held at St. Francis of Assisi Cathedral.

The award honors high school students of the Diocese for their outstanding faith and service to their community, school and parish. Stewardship in Action had a chance to sit with these two teenagers and got to hear their thoughts, feelings and perspectives about their Catholic faith.

SIA: First, congratulations on your award. Can you tell us how this came about?

Taryn: *"I got a letter from the Diocese of Metuchen and I was surprised. I texted Sean O'Brian, our Youth Ministry Leader, and he told me that he was the one who nominated me. I asked him if anyone else got it and he said, "Oh yeah, Max got it too."*

Max: *"There were 70 something other youths who got nominated from all over the Diocese. We would like to thank Sean for nominating us. If you've gotten nominated, you're already a winner."*

SIA: Why does a teenager like you practice stewardship?

Max: *"It is just the right thing to do. When I was a kid, I wanted to teach CCD. Then after CCD, they asked me if I could teach CCD, so I started teaching. I have been an active participant at Camp St. Bernard, one year as a camper and four years as a counselor and chaperone to the campers. I'm also an active member of St. Bernard's Youth Group."*

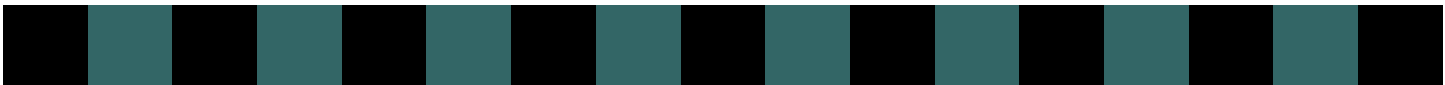
Taryn: *God has given me a lot and I should give back. I volunteered in the assisted living homes, and the Salvation Army, to name a few. I've been a counselor at Camp St. Bernard for six years. I was also a counselor at the Presbyterian church, like St. Bernard's bible camp. I'm a teacher aide for the 8th graders in St. Bernard. I go to the Youth Group every week. If I can only reach one or two kids to join the Youth Group, then I will be happy. I can't change them all but I can try. I'm also training to be a Eucharistic Minister. I'm excited to be more involved in that way. As an observer, I've been on the altar a few times and there's not enough Eucharistic Ministers, so I'd like to do that."*

SIA: What gave you the inspiration to teach CCD?

Max: *I really didn't like the way I was taught CCD. I wanted to make a difference, so I thought about teaching CCD the way I'd like it to be taught. I wasn't taught CCD here in St. Bernard--just for the record. In my CCD class, I teach the students the history and the context of the Bible verses and tell them the actual verses. For example, with Moses, if you think about the story of Moses, you must think about the time it took place and the way they were living. You always think of the Israelites as chosen people, but often they were ungrateful when they started worshipping the Baal cult. If you look at the context in history where they came from, they came from Egypt, one of the most civilized societies at that time, where they were fed and housed. But they left Egypt for their religion, they left for God, and that's the context of the story. They left for God because they were not allowed to practice their faith in Egypt.*

Currently, I'm teaching 1st, 5th and 6th for different days. I have the books that help me. The 6th graders are very mellow and calm; they're very interested to learn. The 1st graders are very honest and the 5th graders, they're in between stage, they're still childish but they want to learn. They're very rowdy at times, but that doesn't make me walk out anyway. They need spiritual guidance.

Taryn: *Aside from God, seeing how happy faith makes so many people, that inspires me. I, unlike most kids, enjoyed CCD when I was little, and my family always pushed my faith, which has been an essential part of my young life. When I was in 3rd grade I became an altar server and that made me more focused on my faith as a Catholic. Since sophomore year, I've been aiding the 8th grade class. I'm not teaching it like Max does, but I'm there to help. This year, though, I have been teaching a good amount and have been given more responsibilities. The reason I like doing it is because the kids, especially the 8- graders, are only four years younger than me; they respond more or relate better to me on the things I'm saying, rather than an adult. I kind of understand where their minds are at, and I try to drill things on them and engage them to focus on topics they care about, rather than just little things that go over their head.*



YOUTH RECOGNIZED BY DIOCESE OF METUCHEN (CONTINUED)

SIA: What is the importance and uniqueness of the Catholic faith to you?

Taryn: *I gave a talk to 2nd grade parents at CCD a few weeks ago, and I kind of just told them to encourage their kids to go to mass. I'll be sitting at the altar as an altar server and see only five kids my age in the congregation, while I made my confirmation with over a hundred kids. It kind of bothers me that people don't pursue it, because I know that it has impacted my life so much. Especially in high school through all these struggles, it's nice that I just had a foundation of friends in youth group and obviously knowing my faith helps. I think it's 'cause sometimes when kids are younger, their parents don't encourage them to come to church, and my main point when I talk to the 2nd grade parents is that obviously they're not gonna like it now, and they don't have to like it now, but just keep on teaching them about God. When I was little, I didn't think it was going to change me in anyway, I just went through the motions. But as I've gotten older, it has really become more than just a routine, it has become my life. The first paragraph of my college essay is about my faith and how it progressed in my life. When I was younger, it wasn't my choice, but now, it's completely my choice. It's come to the point where I drive myself to church; I just do it*

because I want to."

Max: *"There's always a Catholic church everywhere. When we were in Greece we went to mass and it's the same mass being celebrated, just a different language. The same Gospel is being read here in the US and all over the world."*

Role models?

Max: *St. Thomas Aquinas. He did not blindly accept the Catholic faith but sought to prove the existence of God. He questioned Faith. His goal was to prove God and why we should only believe in the Christian God and not believe in Allah, Brahma, or Buddha and why Catholic is the right religion."*

Taryn: *"Jesus! Also, I'm inspired by all Catholics who find joy in their faith. There is no purpose in life without faith."*

Any future Stewardship plans aside from teaching CCD?

Max: *We would like to do a Bible study during the summer and that's the goal.*

Taryn: *I want to go to a good college and there I'd like to continue my faith and my ministry. A lot of people fall out of their faith and I'd really like to not do that and find a church near my school. I have no shame in asking my friends to come with me to church, I'm proud of my faith.*

Message to their fellow youth:

Max: *"Please come to the youth group at St. Bernard. It will help you change your life. I'd like to share my favorite bible verse, James*

Chapter 2 verse 17: "Faith without works, is dead. Faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead." James was preaching and warning the people of his time that you need both and you can't have one without the other. And James says later in the same chapter "You believe that God is one. You do well. Even the demons believe that and tremble."

Taryn: *"I'd like to share this Bible verse, Psalm 73 verse 28: "But for me it is good to be near God." And please always remember, God is good all the time and all the time God is good!"*

CELEBRATING WITH OTHERS

St. Bernard parishioners shared in the spirit of Christmas!

Several carloads of gifts were purchased, along with over \$3000 in gift cards.

The generosity of St. Bernard parishioners made the holidays bright for many. Charities benefitted include: SHIP, LifeChoices, Center for Faith & Justice, the Diocese of Metuchen, St. Bernard Families and many more!

Thank you to all for your generous demonstration of stewardship!



Interested in learning more about the Stewardship Council?

Please contact Mark Dransfield (dransfam@gmail.com by calling 908-526-6649)