

Past Young Disciples reflect on missionary experience

By Kristina Lahr



Young Disciples from 2018's teams celebrate their mission with an end-of-summer camping trip July 30 at Crow Wing River, Minn. (submitted photo)



Young Disciples Missions

Young Disciples is an apostolate of Catholic young adults that travel from town to town to evangelize and catechize in local rural communities through summer vacation Bible schools and teen retreats. The Young Disciples Teams seek to challenge youth to love Jesus Christ and to embrace the life of his Church. The teams also proclaim the Gospel through small groups, prayer, music, drama, games, and crafts.

While the retreats are a fun way for children and teens to see their faith in action, the missionaries that serve them also benefit from the summer experience. For many, this time of living and serving on a team with faithful Catholics their age lead them to a deeper appreciation of their faith and love for Jesus.

Two past Young Disciples missionaries, Meghan Meidinger and Father Paul Kuhn, shared their experience with *New Earth*. Two years after converting to Catholicism, Meidinger searched for missionary opportunities online where she discovered Young Disciples. She served during the summers of 2006, 2007, and 2011.

"I fell in love with the faith in RCIA, but a lot of what I learned about the faith I learned during Young Disciples training. I knew I had to teach these things to kids. Young Disciples gave me the opportunity to put what I was learning into practice. It really was the foundation for my catechesis."

After her summers serving with Young Disciples, she worked as a director of religious education in Louisiana. There, Meghan saw the skills she learned in Young Disciples developing further.

"I found myself putting as much time into teaching as we

did in spiritual exercises, praying the rosary, and learning about holiness and virtue. We did more small community events, things to serve the parish. Every month we learned about a saint and how we could become more like them."

Meidinger is now a stay-at-home mom with two toddlers and directs a children's choir in her parish in Louisiana. She and her husband Nathan met on Young Disciple as well.

"Living on team is a lot like a marriage," she said. "My husband and I use a lot of the tools we learned from team. The way we solve issues we learned during Young Disciples. On team, you learn how to both live and work together. You're dependent on each other and quickly learn a lot of skills you don't learn anywhere else."

Father Paul Kuhn, parochial vicar at Holy Family Church in Grand Forks, served with Young Disciples in 2007, 2009, and 2010.

"This was my first experience living on a team type mission for eight to ten weeks," he said. "That was a big challenge for me, learning to be patient with myself and also to be patient with other people. I also realized during training and with the kids, that I really could learn other people's names. I realized the importance of that as an act of charity."

Before their travels and mission, Young Disciples go through a week of training, learning basic teaching and teambuilding skills as well as everything they need to teach about prayer, the sacraments, and the Mass. It was during training that Fr. Kuhn especially learned the importance of prayer.

"Before that summer I never thought to set time aside for our Lord. Whether it's being in silence or reading scripture or praying the rosary, regardless of the form of prayer, it was there I learned to be intentional about making time for prayer."

Fr. Kuhn said Young Disciples also helped him in his discernment to the priesthood.

"It gave me a new groundwork for the faith and learning things about the faith that I either didn't encounter or understand growing up. It let me see people my age taking an active interest in their faith. I remember once being in the van and we were having a philosophical conversation. It was starting to get a little heated in some differences of opinion and suddenly we decided to pray a rosary. They introduced me to the power and gift of the rosary from some new angles."

Several priests in the Fargo Diocese served on Young Disciples before or during seminary including Fathers Greg Haman, Robert Keller, Matthew Kraemer, Christopher Markman, Jayson Miller, Sean Mulligan, Peter Sharpe, Troy Simonsen, Reese Weber, and Steven Wirth.

Young Disciples is looking for young adults ages 18 to 30 to serve as missionaries next summer. For more information, go to www.fargodiocese.org/youngdisciples or contact Ashley Grunhovd at (701) 356-7908.