

Tale of Two Churches

Youth ministry has become a defining part of community churches. The energy, enthusiasm and passion that youth bring to church can be the most motivational part of pursuing faith. In visiting two local churches, I came to find that the youth of these churches is as defining as the names themselves.

HOLY FAMILY

Holy Family takes to its namesake by showing that being a real, living and breathing family is possible through their church organization. They have a strong youth ministry on the rise. I joined some of them recently at a gathering at a local Chili's restaurant and learned much more.

When I met with the crew from Holy Family, it was eight kids, their three youth program directors, and the director's children. The kids were all part of the peer ministry at Holy Family, but it didn't seem that way. Looking down the table in the crowded Chili's restaurant where we met, it felt more like a group of friends. At first glance, you would never guess they were a church group. A lot of kids go into ministries because their parents make them or because they need the service hours. To see a group of kids my age united by faith, and actually liking it was nice. "Not everyone is as into it as we are" said Fremd senior Logan Cygan with a smile "We're the weird ones."

However it seems that the enthusiasm is catching on. Holy Families youth programs have in-

creased exponentially over the recent past, with the number of peer ministers going from around 40 last year to 80 today. The church is involved with kids all throughout their teenage years, from middle school with programs like "Ignite" and through high school with their confirmation program "FLAME". During the Sunday afternoon youth mass, peer ministers work to make church a more teen-friendly environment.

"We play a lot more popular songs," said Fremd senior and peer minister Elizabeth Tomal "A lot of K-Love." (One of today's most popular Christian rock radio stations.

"Sometimes I go to Our Lady of the Wayside in Arlington Heights," said Elizabeth Mohs "And all they play is organ music. At our teen mass on Sundays, everyone will be laughing, singing, and dancing around"

The ministry is also devoted to giving back to the community and donating to charities all around the world. Every week they take a new collection, everything from Chicago's homeless to youth in Africa. The kids also take part in mission trips.

"There is NCYC, the National Catholic Youth Conference, and we've even taken kids to build houses in New Orleans after the hurricanes," said Elizabeth Tomal. The Church also hosts a PADs program, which houses the homeless inside the church and gives them a place to stay through the winter. The peer ministry cooks meals and prepares places for guests to sleep.



PHOTO: MATT WEIDNER


Tom West will be a junior at Barrington High School this fall.

WILLOW CREEK

When I visited Willow Creek, I expected to meet a nun, talk to kids about their peer ministry and leave. But as I walked into Willows' massive church complex, I found a whole new world. I wandered aimlessly for a while and finally found what could have only been for teenagers. It was like I stumbled into the European underground dance scene. Futuristic metal banisters, huge projector screens and kids huddled around them playing guitar hero. Couches and chess loungers grouped in corners, and huge metal garage doors closed to a gargantuan concert hall. As I stood in "The Garage" I realized that I could have no assumptions as to what might happen during this visit.

"I think youth today is extremely interested in serving," said Lauren Wiens, a woman I had contacted for an interview at Willow Creek. During our sit-down, we were surrounded by the hustle of student volunteers preparing for the youth mass. Willow Creek teen services have almost 1,000 students and are never short of volunteers. U

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