



Marmion students take national honors

Christian Surtz, Valen Piotrowski, and Harrison Kearby and their documentary, "Beyond the Pew: Catholicism in America," has been chosen as the national winner of the First Freedom Student Competition

They filmed an interview with Bishop David Malloy last November for the project.

The video has been officially released and is available online at <http://www.thevalentine.org/programs-tours/student-competition/video-winner>.

VOCATION CORNER

Trust and acceptance

requently when individuals begin sensing that God is calling them towards a particular vocation, one's mind starts racing and all sorts of questions pop into their heads. What would this look like? Would I be happy? What about finances? What would other people think? Am I good enough? Sometimes these questions become so overwhelming that they shut the idea out of their mind completely! This is a big problem if God is truly calling this person toward the thing that is making their minds race!

Here's the solution: Listen to Jesus! When He appeared after the resurrection He said to the Apostles "Peace be with you" but we are told that they still were startled and terrified! Then He said to them, "Why are you troubled? And why do questions arise in your hearts?" He concluded by assuring them that He was with them in that moment. The beautiful truth that we need to hold onto is the fact that Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever. This means that the words that He spoke to the Apostles still ring true for us today! When we question and find our minds racing, Jesus says "Peace be with you. Why are you troubled? Why do questions arise in your hearts?" No matter what our response is to why we are troubled or questioning, His answer remains the same: "I am with you." Let this bring us comfort and help us to not be afraid to follow where He calls.

— Father Keith Romke, Diocesan Director of Vocations
Write to him at kromke@rockforddiocese.org.

To Russia with love



Hannah Castree holds an icon of Our Lady of Sorrows that she brought home from Russia.

Boylan grad feels called to mission work in Siberia

By AMANDA HUDSON | News Editor

The deep love we had for everyone we met," Hanna Castree says, "made no sense, except that the Lord poured His love into us.

"It was so deep, and it happened so quickly, it wasn't us. It was the Lord using us in that way."

Castree was one of three college students from Franciscan University in Steubenville, Ohio, to serve last summer at a small Catholic parish in Magadan (Mah-GAH-dahn), Russia.

Father Michael Shields of the Archdiocese of Anchorage, Alaska, came to Magadan more than 20 years ago, beginning the mission parish in an apartment, then building a small church in part with his own hands. Castree considers the parish priest — the only Catholic priest within 800 miles — to be a saint-in-the-making.

So how did this Boylan Central Catholic High School graduate from Rockford end up at a tiny parish in a part of Siberia that is so remote it was a prison camp for Russian Catholics, artists, intellectuals and others thought to be a threat to Josef Stalin's regime?

Castree's roommate, Katalyn Miller, felt a call to do mission work in Russia, but didn't know where. While chatting with Father Matthew McMorro, pastor of Christ the Teacher University Parish in DeKalb, Castree mentioned her roommate's search. Father McMorro's brother is a youth minister in the Anchorage Archdiocese, and he helped make the connection with the mission parish in Russia.

"Learning about Father Michael's parish just put the mission on my heart," Castree says. Their friend, Theresa Weisbrod, joined in. After five days in Rome the trio spent 10 days in Garming, Austria, for a retreat and instruction. From there, they met Father Shields in Moscow and flew with him out to Magadan.

Father Shields provided his guests with spiritual direction, weekly confession and daily Mass. Thursday was their community night — the girls cooked a meal and the priest provided them with a talk. Each girl also spent time on two *paustinas* — 24-hours of just her, the Lord in the Eucharist, a loaf of bread, water and a Bible.

"You just go in and say 'I'm yours,' and let God do whatever He wants," were the instructions for what Castree calls a "once in a lifetime experience."

In the first half of summer, the girls taught English to children and helped with Vacation Bible School. In the second half, they taught English to



The three missionaries got to know Olga (second from right) and her grandson (center). Olga was taken to the Magadan prison camp when she was 18. She spent 14 years in the camp for the "crime" of being Catholic.

adults. They also visited homes for the elderly and for veterans, and they visited elderly parishioners with Father Shields. They also practiced what Father Shields called "Friendship Evangelization," walking around the city — population 95,000 including surrounding villages.

"Almost everyone in Magadan has someone in their family who was in the prison camps," Castree says. The prisoners, who originally had to build their own barracks, later built the city after they were released. "One of the big things Father Michael is doing over there is reaching out to men and women from the camps to bring them together so they can talk" about their experiences, Castree says. The camp survivors, she adds, are "very, very strong people. They're saints."

"From an American point of view (the Russians) can seem closed off," she adds, "but they were so sincere and so welcoming and very selfless. They are

just slower to open their hearts. They are a little more careful, but very loving."

Castree graduates on May 9 this year with a major in theology and catechetics. She hopes to eventually teach high school theology, may do additional mission work herself or lead high school mission trips. She's applied to graduate school as well.

But in the meantime, Castree and Miller are heading back to Magadan for this summer along with three other students. Plans are to do much of the same missionary work, expanding it to include working with juvenile delinquents and other adolescent-aged kids, she says, adding that she is very excited to return.

Her testimony, written partway through last summer, notes: "I am (God's) arms when He wants to hug them; I am His eyes when He wants to look at them with eyes of love. It is truly no longer I who live, but Christ



Father Michael Shields received this rosary from a woman of his parish who made it from bread, dirt and thread when she was in the prison camp.

who lives in me ... Magadan feels like home."

Three youths earn Eagle Scout honors

Alex Michael Vonderhaar is the son of Chris and Carol Vonderhaar. He has a sister, Kelly and two brothers, Joe and Eric, both of whom are Eagle Scouts. Alex is a senior at Aurora Central Catholic High School, where he is a National Merit Scholar, an Illinois State Scholar, a member of the National Honor Society, the National Math Honor Society and Worldwide Youth in Science and Engineering (WYSE) team.

He has played soccer at ACC four years and was

the team co-captain this year. He also played on the tennis team during his junior and senior years. He plans to pursue a degree in electrical engineering.

In scouting since first grade, he has earned many honors, including Bobcat, Wolf, Bear and Webelo and 38 merit badges, and the Light of Christ, Parvuli Dei and Pope Pius XII religious awards. Alex attended Cub Scout summer camp at Good Templar Park in Geneva. He also served in many leadership posts.

Vonderhaar's Eagle Project involved building a garden on the west side of the entrance to St. Patrick Parish's downtown church in St. Charles. He worked with Charity Davis to plan a garden that would replace the plain grass-filled area so that it would complement the flowers and pavers on the opposite side of the



Vonderhaar

church. With help from 18 volunteers, several area businesses, his mentor, Dan Kadolph, the Prayer Shawl Ministry of St. Patrick, fellow scouts, leaders and parents of Troop 10 he completed the project.



Markowicz

Max Markowicz is the son of David and Jo, and also the younger brother of Eagle Scout Grant Markowicz.

Markowicz's scouting career began when he joined Cub Scout Pack 110 at St. Patrick Parish in first grade. Max served in many leadership positions and earned 29 merit badges.

For his Eagle project, he renovated a large barn that is more than 50 years old for Garfield Farm in LaFox. The project took 165 working hours. He managed the

materials, the labor, and the work for this project. He credits its successful completion to generous support from fellow scouts, family, friends, and local businesses.

He is a senior at St. Charles North High School. While in high school, he participated in DECA, School Store, and Auto Club. He was also the team captain for the St. Charles North cross country and track teams.

Zachary Michael Mirza of Winnebago Troop 705 and a freshman at Boylan Central Catholic High School in Rockford has earned the Eagle Scout Award. His parents are Drs. Catherine Baer-Mirza and Razvan Mirza.

Mirza has earned nearly 70 merit badges. His Eagle service project was the creation of a Serenity Garden for his local parish, St. Mary in Pecatonica. The garden includes a water feature, "Peace Angel,"



Mirza

fleur-de-lis benches, and stepping stones reflecting the Gifts of the Holy Spirit."

In the three years that Zachary has been in Scouts he has served as patrol leader, assistant patrol leader, and assistant senior patrol leader. He currently is bugler, and chaplain's aide for his troop.

He has received the Parvuli Dei, and Ad Altare Dei awards. He attended the Jamboree in 2013, and NYLT. In fall of 2014, Zachary received his Order of the Arrow Brotherhood, a position elected by his peers to join a National Honor Society of Scouts.

Other outstanding Americans who have become Eagle Scouts include men from president to astronauts cinematographer to head of the FBI.

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