

# Marmion students take national first prize



Christian Surtz, Valen Piotrowski and Harrison Kearby

The video-production team of Harrison Kearby of Aurora, Valen Piotrowski of Aurora and Christian Surtz of Batavia, juniors at Marmion Academy in Aurora, has been named the \$2,500 national video award winner in the 2014/2015 First Freedom Student Competition.

They were honored for their seven-minute video "Beyond the Pew: Catholicism in America," which featured, among others, Bishop David Malloy of Rockford.

The competition gives high school students a chance to examine the history and current-day relevance of religious freedom, and then, by written essay or video production, present their evaluation.

This school year, students selected

a religion from their local community, state or region that was or is a minority religion, researched and analyzed its history as it encounters issues of religious freedom and equality, and then presented their evaluation of how this group's local history compares to the broader narrative of U.S. history and First Amendment law.

This year's student participants included 973 high school students from public, private, parochial schools and home-schooling regions nationwide, including American students living abroad.

"Beyond the Pew: Catholicism in America" is a short documentary analyzing the history and prosperity of Catholics in the United States.

As Bishop Malloy explains,

"Religious liberty is given by God and needs to be respected by government." It is a cornerstone of American government, and needs to be a top priority for lawmakers.

Featuring several interviews, quotes, and statistics, "Beyond the Pew" investigates from a Catholic perspective and offers insight into issues of religious freedom in the United States.

"The project was far more work than I initially expected, but it helped me discover the history of my faith. The project was an eye-opening experience and we were fortunate to interview such a variety of people," Kearby said.

"We thoroughly enjoyed our experience producing the documentary, and are excited that it



Watch the video at [www.marmion.org/firstfreedom](http://www.marmion.org/firstfreedom)

won the First Freedom competition, said Surtz. "We hope that it provides valuable information and insight to viewers and we are very grateful to the First Freedom center for providing us this great opportunity to learn and share our faith to a new extent."

The competition is hosted by the Valentine First Freedom Center, a non-partisan, non-denominational, non-profit organization.

"It is paramount that our young people understand the significance of religious freedom as a basic human right," stated John C. Stanchina, Valentine First Freedom Center board chair, "and it is equally important that we equip them with knowledge and respect for the diverse religious beliefs of others."

## 'In the Footsteps' students in Rome learn history, faith

By FATHER MICHAEL A. RUSSO for Catholic News Service

In an article in The New York Times, and in his PBS television documentary, Bruce Feiler writes about the allure of sacred pilgrimages, and concludes:

"At its core it's a gesture of action. In a world in which more and more things are artificial and ephemeral, a sacred journey gives the pilgrim the chance to experience something both physical and real."

For the past several years, Father David Gentry-Akin, my faculty-colleague at St. Mary's College of California, and I have taught a "faith-based travel course" during the January term.

This year, we set off for Rome with 17 undergraduates, and Ginny Prior, a journalism professor, travel writer and the editor of our course blog.

"Walking in the Footsteps of the Early Christians" provides students an opportunity to travel to Rome and examine first-hand the "symbolic inventory" of an "eternal city" filled with ancient ruins, obelisks, catacombs, churches and museums.

As old as stories from Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales" or the recent film "The Way," by Emilio Estevez, a pilgrimage can interrupt our lives



Students from St. Mary's College of California walk through St. Peter's Square at the Vatican in mid-January. The students traveled to Rome and examined the "symbolic inventory" of an "eternal city" filled with ancient ruins, obelisks, catacombs, churches, and museums. They also attended a papal audience at the Vatican.

to inspire us, help us to express our own faith and, along the way, give us the opportunity to interact with a rich tapestry of people who embody the spirit of the Catholic Church.

Hope Blain, one of our students, says one such interaction was with the religious brothers who hosted our group in Assisi.

"We were having a four-course meal with these two Franciscan friars, Brothers Gregory and Johnny — one's playing the accordion, and the other's telling jokes," she said. "That sense of community and friendship was there so quickly, that showed the vibrancy of the Church."

So much of our journey depends on

Ask at your college about undergraduate study-abroad options or read more about this course and its students, watch videos and hear podcasts at [www.smcpilgrimage.torome.wordpress.com](http://www.smcpilgrimage.torome.wordpress.com), [joyfulwarriormissions.weebly.com](http://joyfulwarriormissions.weebly.com)

close collaboration with friends in Rome. ... They have provided us with the "keys to the city."

We live in community for three weeks in Rome at the Villa Irlanda of the Pontifical Irish College, near the Colosseum ...

Meaghan Osborne told us: "I am still in shock that I met Pope Francis, who embodies the love and kindness of Christ Jesus in the world today."

Jacquelyn O'Neill said, "Our class just had such a sense of community. We could all open up to each other and talk together and eat together and have fun together. ... that was the coolest part of the trip." Yes, the pilgrimage was about building the faith community.

Matt Magnaghi told us that the trip meant so much to him that once home he telephoned his grandfather. Together they spoke for over an hour about Rome, the course and its impact on his Catholic faith.



My cousin is going to be confirmed at another parish soon and we will be going, along with some other relatives who haven't been active in the faith for years. My aunt — who was never Catholic — still goes to another church. Should they be able to go to Communion with the rest of us at that Mass? I've heard my aunt say that all Communion is the same and it shouldn't matter what church you are in.

Great question! The first thing that I'll say is that I'm glad to hear that your non-Catholic aunt will be going to attend the celebration and to be a part of your cousin's confirmation. It is always good for family to worship God together even when we don't share all of the same beliefs.

That being said, it is important that we don't just brush our differences in belief under the rug, and act as if they don't exist. We believe that what the Catholic Church teaches has been revealed to us by God, and thus it is important that we don't selectively choose what beliefs are important and what beliefs we can just brush off for the sake of making others feel included.

This is precisely why things can get a little tense — and misunderstood — when it comes time to receive Communion.

Some people believe that it is all the same so it really doesn't make a difference, others simply don't want to make anyone feel left out, and still others accuse faithful Catholics of being judgmental or of thinking that they are better than others simply because of our stance that only practicing Catholics should be coming forward to receive the Eucharist.

In light of this we need to do two things. Hold fast to informing others that if they aren't Catholic that they should not receive and, at the same time, teach and inform them why we hold this to be important.

It doesn't help anyone to insist on a rule without being able to show the purpose and even the charity behind it.

That being said, why is it that as Catholics we teach that only practicing Catholics are to come forward to receive the Eucharist at Mass? Well, let's begin by taking a deeper look at the word "communion." Communion is made up of two words: *com* and *union*, meaning "with union" or

"having union." In other words, to receive Communion is a statement that you are, in fact, in union with the Church and her teachings.

Coming forward and receiving is a privilege for those who truly are in union with the Church and who believe in all of her teachings. It is a public way of stating that "This is who I am and that this is what I believe in." If someone comes forward to receive Communion without being in union with the Church, then they are falsely stating to be in communion.

Secondly, Communion is not all the same, and this is where some people can, unfortunately, become offended at what the Church teaches. The fact of the matter is that Jesus instituted the priesthood and the Eucharist at the Last Supper. He made it possible that, through the grace of God, validly ordained men would be able to make Christ present on the altar through saying the words of consecration at Mass.

As history would have it, when groups of protestant Christians pulled away from the Catholic Church, they also left behind the sacramental power of the priesthood, meaning they left behind the power to truly consecrate the Eucharist. This, of course, is an unfortunate bit of history, but something that cannot be ignored. The end result of this is that Communion is not the same for Catholics and non-Catholics.

So, too, there are some Christians who believe that communion is merely a symbol of Christ, whereas we believe that it truly is the body, blood, soul, and divinity of Christ.

I could go on and on about the theology of the Eucharist, but I hope I have given you an idea of how it's not all the same and that it shouldn't matter what Church you're in." I wish we would all come to believe the same truths, but there are differences and we have to respect that.

It may be uncomfortable, but I'd try to find a way of politely pointing out that the differences in beliefs would preclude a non-Catholic from publicly (and falsely) stating from the action of receiving Communion that they believe and hold all that the Catholic Church teaches us.

That being said, because we do want for everyone to receive all the grace that they can and to avoid alienation, I'd encourage you to have them come up in the Communion line but to cross their arms across their chest to indicate that they would like to receive a blessing. I always love giving out these blessings because it celebrates the unity that we do have in the cross of Christ!

This month's YO Father question is answered by Father Keith Romke. Send your questions to [youngobserver@rockforddiocese.org](mailto:youngobserver@rockforddiocese.org).

## VOCATION CORNER

### What saints have in common

I've been blessed to attend three confirmations recently. Within the ceremonies, each of the confirmandi were anointed with Chrism oil and called by the saint name that they picked for the occasion. As the bishop read name after name after name at one of confirmations, I began to think about how diverse and unique each of the saints truly is. Each of them was called by God to a specific task, which they of course carried out to the best of their ability, hence becoming saints!

As I thought more and more about it, I realized that despite the diversity of vocations that different saints were called to that there are three things that they all have in common:

- 1) They wanted to do God's will.
- 2) They put God's desires before their own.
- 3) They relied on God's grace and power to fulfill His plan for them.

This is precisely what we are all called to do. We are called to walk in their footsteps. Each and every one of us ought to have a desire to do God's will, and to put His desires before our own. We should do this out of love for God, but knowing that it will bring us joy as well is a nice little incentive!

Carrying this out is of course easier said than done which is why we need to call upon the power of the Spirit that we were given in our own confirmations. Do this, and years down the road, maybe someone will pick your name, as their confirmation saint name!

— Father Keith Romke, Diocesan Director of Vocations Write to him at [kromke@rockforddiocese.org](mailto:kromke@rockforddiocese.org).



Aquin Central Catholic High School in Freeport held its prom May 1 in the auditorium. Prom royalty, crowned following the Grand March, was (back, from left) king Alex Feiner, prince Colby Smith, (front) queen Sara Johnson and princess Taylor Rhodes.



Juniors at Marian Central Catholic High School in Woodstock crowned their prom court May 1. "Midnite in Paris" was held at the Cotillion in Palatine. Court members are (front, from left) Makala Villont, Kersten Green, Amber Samonek, McKenzie Lindquist, Keyera Shaw, Erika Krak, (back) Sean Keisling, Carter Strode, Dallas McDonough, Gavin Dineen, Ethan Buck and Emitt Peisert.



Despite cold and rain, St. Mary Knights of Columbus and youth group members in Byron filled up two dumpsters of scrap metal on April 25. Proceeds will help fund a youth group trip to Young Neighbors in action for a week in Donaldson, Indiana, in July.

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