

YO CALENDAR

Save the date and share the news!



What: The 2016 Rockford Diocese Catholic Youth Summit packed with music, adoration, confessions, Mass, quality time with Bishop Malloy, food and friends.
When: Oct. 30, 9 a.m.-4 p.m.
Where: Rock Valley College in Rockford
Theme: "Blessed Are the Merciful."
 Watch for more details right here in YO, on Facebook and Twitter.



Present in the past

Boylan history students learn about war from Vietnam vets

When Vietnam veterans and history students at Boylan Central Catholic High School got together last month, the students learned about the realities of war. In "Operation Cheiu Hoi: War Vets Up Close and Personal," the students listened to each veteran introduce him- or herself, then got to ask questions.

Rockford area veterans brought their panel discussion to Boylan for the second year.

Students in Louise Basile's advanced placement U.S. history class and Connor McGarry's U.S. history class made up the audience for the last presentation of the day.

"The assignment was not a major assignment grade," Basile said. "The goal was for the students to record on paper what stood out to them in the presentation."

Basile continued, "All Boylan juniors participated in the question and answer session

during their regularly scheduled U.S. History class (April 22).

Four of Basile's students shared their reflections about the experience.

— Sharon Boehlefeld, Features Editor

Differing views surprising

I was incredibly impressed with every Vietnam vet that shared their experiences with our class on Friday. Their stories helped me understand so much more about the war than any history book ever could.

I was surprised to hear the differing views from the veterans. One veteran lied about his age because he was so excited to join the Army while another got drafted and never wanted to step foot in Vietnam. I felt those two certain veterans truly expressed the opposing feeling in America during the time of the war. Many Americans felt proud to

fight for their county; however, many were either indifferent about the war or against it because of the massive loss of life.

None of us will ever be able to completely understand what Vietnam soldiers went through, but hearing their stories opened my eyes to the impact war can have on people.

No one should ever feel ashamed at any point in their life for defending their country, yet many Americans made veterans feel that way. I am extremely thankful for the opportunity to talk to just some of the men and women who gave up so much to defend our country.

— Bridget Bishop

Experiences were profound

The Vietnam veteran's presentation was illuminating concerning the emotions and experiences of war. The most shocking thing was the young age at which many of the veterans had been sent to war. It is impossible to imagine having to fight for one's life and having to experience the traumas of war at such a young age.

The long-lasting effects of Agent Orange on the veterans were also surprising. Even today, over 40 years later, the veterans experience the consequences of decisions made during the war. Knowing the pain and suffering Agent Orange has caused U.S. veterans makes one question whether its use during the war was worthwhile.

The reaction of the two drafted veterans to the question about (President Jimmy) Carter's pardon demonstrates



(Observer photos/Sharon Boehlefeld)

Vietnam veterans share their experiences with students at Boylan Central Catholic High School in Rockford April 22. On the last panel of the day are (from left) Rockford veterans Don Allen, U.S. Marines;

their pride for America. They became angry at the mention of draft dodgers, which displays the disdain the veterans have for people who do not respect the country enough to fight to protect its liberty.

The veterans' experiences during the war were so profound that one class period was hardly enough to understand them, but as one veteran noted, the things they experienced could not be understood in a lifetime.

— Ronan Jansen

Veterans' visit was awe-inspiring

We students study history in class, but the Vietnam veterans lived it. My classmates and I gazed in wonder and fascination whenever the veterans would bring up important historical figures or terms, such as Henry Kissinger of the Domino Theory. Being able to talk to the veterans about Vietnam, their thoughts and their reactions was a truly awe-inspiring experience.

I usually do not reflect on the words I say every day during the Pledge of Allegiance,

but I must never forget that the veterans fought for every single freedom we have in this country.

For their bravery and dedication, we should always be indebted to and grateful for these courageous men and women. Not only are these individual heroes, but they are also real human beings who felt fear, sadness and joy. From these trials and tribulations, the veterans grew thicker skin and became stronger people, and because of this, they even said they did not regret Vietnam and saw the experience as a positive one.

Smiles radiated from the veterans as they laughed and told stories about being thankful for the beautiful women who were brought into the medical centers on the often male-dominated camps. Although the veterans shared light-hearted memories, they transitioned into life lessons and wise words with ease.

The veterans went through so much physically, emotionally and psychologically. Some said the transition back home was difficult at times because the pace in civilian life was much

Mary Nicholls, U.S. Army; Daniel Burd, U.S. Navy; Boylan graduate Pat Derry, U.S. Army; John Paddock, U.S. Army; and Belvidere veteran Dave Hammer, U.S. Army.

slower than their demanding pace in Vietnam. When returning home, the veterans described some hardships of hearing harsh words about veterans, such as "baby killers."

Later on, some (people) pretended to be veterans because of the praise the veterans received, but one (could be identified as) a true veteran if he said there were no weekends in Vietnam because no one even knew what day it was.

This session was my second time with the Vietnam veterans, but it was still as amazing and inspiring as the first. I was humbled by all the words and lessons the veterans shared with us and I realized how important it is to reflect on all the blessings we have and all those who fought for our country. ...

Decades have passed since Vietnam, but we are still thankful for all veterans' service to our country in order to uphold our principles of

freedom and honor.
— Ella Domingo

Stories sad, eye-opening

Seeing the Vietnam vets on Friday opened my eyes as to the experiences of the actual people in Vietnam. It is one thing to read and learn about the Vietnam War, but it is another thing to hear the real life experiences of the veterans.

Hearing how the veterans were upset when (President Jimmy) Carter pardoned the draft dodgers was very interesting. I knew that this event was controversial at its time, but I never fully realized how it impacted the veterans.

Also, it was saddening to hear about all the terrible diseases the men have because of Agent Orange, but above all, it was unbelievable to hear that they would do it all again without a doubt.

— Kaleigh Brauns



History students from Boylan Central Catholic High School listen as Vietnam veterans answer their questions about the war, their experiences in it and their feelings about it 40 years later.



Adam Pycior (front right) and Connor McGarry (wearing bow tie) join classmates in thanking veterans for their service.

YO FATHER

Q I know we're supposed to love others because that's what God teaches us. But it's hard for me to love the people who are shooting other kids or blowing themselves and other people up. How am I supposed to love them?

A The world that we are living in today sure makes it hard to fulfill Jesus' command to love others as He has loved us! That being said, I think that there are two main things that we have to consider: The first being that Jesus never said that it was going to be easy, and the second being that despite how difficult it may be, Christ still calls us to love everyone.

Let's look at the first point: It is *not* easy to love those who hurt us, or who hurt others, or who cause damage, pain, or destruction senselessly. It

is downright hard to do! I think that the way in which Jesus asks us to love, by loving one another as He has loved us, seems to make the task even more daunting.

We might ask ourselves: "How can I possibly even begin to love like Jesus?"

Well, let's consider how it was that He loved. Since every single person (other than Mary) whom He loves in the world has committed sin which causes pain to His heart, we can say that 100 percent of His love is undeserved. This means that it takes the form of mercy, which is love that is given *not* because the other is deserving of it, but rather because the one doing the loving makes a choice to bestow their love on the other.

To love like Jesus means to love in a merciful way, and the less deserving someone may be of our love, the more Christ-like it is for us to choose to love them.

At this point someone may say: "Well that sounds nice Father, but it's *sooo* hard!" And I'd reply by saying that Jesus never complained that the cross was too hard!

His love and His mercy were poured out on the cross for sinners. He didn't die for us because we had proved ourselves, which is why St. Paul tells us: "God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." He even cried out for forgiveness from the cross for those who were putting Him to death, much like the people who do similar actions today.

Let me say again that the love that Christ has for you and for me comes in the form of mercy. While we may not be performing the actions that you listed in your question, we aren't perfect either, yet Jesus loves us! At what point would any of us draw the line? At what point do sins become too big to want to forgive?

In the end whatever answer you come to is a moot point because Jesus through His words but especially through His actions declares that no line will be drawn and that *all* are free to receive His mercy.

And that brings us to point number two: Christ calls you and me to love everyone! So how do we do this? How do we find room in our hearts to have mercy for them?

Well, I think it begins with finding forgiveness which is a vital component of mercy. What we need to do is to try to view these people through the lens of the eyes of God rather than through the lens of their grave sins. We can say that we don't want to love them because we see them as hardened sinners, but when God looks at them He sees His son or daughter. Nothing can change that.

The question that remains is this: How will you view them? As a big time sinner or as a child of God?

That my friend is the key in being able to love others no matter what they've done. We need to view them in light of who they are in God's eyes and not in light of their sins.

Again, I've never killed anyone, but I still don't want to be viewed by my sins. I'm glad for God's mercy for me so even though it's hard to pass on, I know that I need to do the same for others. Let's all pray for each other so that we can do our best to love others especially when it's hardest to do so!

This month's YO Father question is answered by Father Keith Romke. Send your questions to youngobserver@rockforddiocese.org.

VOCATION CORNER

Love and the Trinity

Sunday's feast of the celebration of the Holy Trinity is a beautiful opportunity to delight in the love that God has for us. The reason I say this is because of the beauty of who God is: **God is Love.**

In order to have love, we have to have one who loves and one who is loved. All of this is present in God Himself. God the Father loves the Son, the Son loves the Father and the love that exists between them is the Holy Spirit.

In God Himself there is so much love, and love of its very nature desires to share itself, which is why God created.

He began with the sun and the moon, the earth and the sea, followed by all of the animals. At this point God had something to love but nothing that could love Him in return, which is why He created

us. We are capable of receiving His love and loving Him in return.

What does this have to do with vocations? Everything! From the beginning of creation God planned a particular way in which He desired you to receive His love and a special way for you to love Him in return. Your calling is a desire within the life of the Trinity! This is a big deal!

God gives you a mission and a task because He loves you and wants you to live in a relationship of love with Him. I know that I want to do my best to live this out and I hope you do too! Keep this relationship in mind and saying yes to God becomes a joy rather than a burden!

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