



(Photo provided)

YOUNG OBSERVER

Teens spend day in Chicago

Forty teens and adults from St. Patrick Parish in St. Charles spent a day in Chicago, Dec. 29. Father Kyle Manno celebrated Mass at Holy Name Cathedral to start off the day, which included stops at Water Tower Place, Hershey Town and Ghirardelli Chocolate. On the trek back to the train station, the group stopped at St. Peter Church in the Loop to view the its interior and relics. The group was joined by a small group from St. Gall Parish in Elburn, including Father Christopher DiTomo

From - Pope Francis - to you

My Dear Young People,

I am pleased to announce that in October 2018 a Synod of Bishops will take place to treat the topic: "Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment." I wanted you to be the center of attention, because you are in my heart. Today, the Preparatory Document is being presented, a document which I am also entrusting to you as your "compass" on this synodal journey.

I am reminded of the words which God spoke to Abraham: "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you." (Gen 12.1). These words are now also addressed to you. They are words of a Father who invites you to "go," to set out towards a future which is unknown but one which will surely lead to fulfilment, a future towards which He Himself accompanies you. I invite you to hear God's voice resounding in your heart through the breath of the Holy Spirit.

When God said to Abram, "Go!" what did he want to say? He certainly did not say to distance himself from his family or withdraw from the world. Abram received a compelling invitation, a challenge, to leave everything and go to a new land. What is this "new land" for us today, if not a more just and friendly society which you, young people, deeply desire and wish to build to the very ends of the earth?

But unfortunately, today, "Go!" also has a different meaning, namely, that of abuse of power, injustice and war. Many among you are subjected to the real threat of violence and forced to flee their native land. Their cry goes up to God, like that of Israel, when the people were enslaved and oppressed by Pharaoh (see Ex 2:23).

I would also remind you of the words that Jesus once said to the disciples who asked Him: "Teacher ... where are you staying?" He replied, "Come and see" (Jn 1:38). Jesus looks at you and invites you to go with Him.

Dear young people, have you noticed this look towards you? Have you heard this voice? Have you felt this urge to undertake this journey? I am sure that, despite the noise and confusion seemingly prevalent in the world, this call continues to resonate in the depths of your heart so as to open it to joy in its fullness. This will be possible to the extent that, even with professional

guides, you will learn how to undertake a journey of discernment to discover God's plan in your life. Even when the journey is uncertain and you fall, God, rich in mercy, will extend His hand to pick you up.

In Krakow, at the opening of the last World Youth Day, I asked you several times: "Can we change things?" And you shouted, "Yes!" That shout came from your young and youthful hearts, which do not tolerate injustice

See story on page 1 to learn how you can be heard.

and cannot bow to a "throw-away culture" nor give in to the globalization of indifference. Listen to the cry arising from your inner selves! Even when you feel, like the prophet Jeremiah, the inexperience of youth, God encourages you to go where He sends you: "Do not be afraid ..., because I am with you to deliver you" (Jer 1:8).

A better world can be built also as a result of your efforts, your desire to change and your generosity. Do not be afraid to listen to the Spirit who proposes bold choices; do not delay when your conscience asks you to take risks in following the Master.

The Church also wishes to listen to your voice, your sensitivities and your faith, even your doubts and your criticism. Make your voice heard, let it resonate in communities and let it be heard by your shepherds of souls.

St. Benedict urged the abbots to consult, even the young, before any important decision, because "the Lord often reveals to the younger what is best." (Rule of St. Benedict, III, 3).

Such is the case, even in the journey of this Synod. My brother bishops and I want even more to "work with you for your joy" (2 Cor 1:24). I entrust you to Mary of Nazareth, a young person like yourselves, whom God beheld lovingly, so she might take your hand and guide you to the joy of fully and generously responding to God's call with the words: "Here I am" (cf. Lk 1:38).

With paternal affection,

Franciscus

Given at the Vatican, Jan. 13

VOCATION CORNER

Two minutes

This past weekend I was helping with a high school retreat for the youth group at my parish. At one point our youth minister came up to me and said that in just a bit we'd be having a session in which each of the leaders would be getting up and giving two-minute talks on various topics.

We kept it to two minutes (and even had a timer up on a big screen!) because this meant that the teens would get the info in bite sized nuggets. But at the same time it meant that we have to distill our wisdom and make sure the words counted!

I was asked to speak on discernment. I thought about all of the things that I could say in regards to "How to Discern" but right before I got up for my chance to speak I quickly tossed aside all of the tools and tips on how to discern because it hit me I only had time to say one thing. And I knew what that one thing was.

I got up and I simply explained that if we really want to discern God's will and to figure out what it is, then the very first step, the foundation of everything, is being open to every possibility that God may be calling us to.

The key is openness!

I say this because I can have all of the wisdom and the tools in place to be able to discern if a certain thing is what God is calling me to do or not to do, but if I'm not open to the one thing that God calls me to then I'll never actually do God's will!

So trust in God and be open to whatever He may be calling you to do!

— Father Keith Romke, Diocesan Director of Vocations, kromke@rockforddiocese.org



(Photo provided)

Boylan state scholars

Illinois State Scholars from Boylan Central Catholic High School in Rockford are (front, from left) Amy Englund, Gianna Vicari, Anna Wojciechowski, Hannah Rehfeldt, Madysyn Smith, Delaney Appino, Maria Emmanuelle Domingo, (second row) Alexis Ivanic, Maria Schmidt, Anabel Nosek, Megan Hendricks, Sophia St. Angel, Kaleigh Brauns, Nicole Lisek, (third row) Gretchen Murray, Benjamin Caceres, Aidan Keefe, Connor McGarry, Bridget Bishop, Joseph Feggstad, Benjamin Calkins, (back row) William Andersen, Bryce Grennan, Max Farson, Ronan Jansen, Elliott Peterson, Jacob Lickliger, Lydia Trautmann, Margaret Grady and (not pictured) Tyler Pidde.

Helping

IN ROCKFORD



Boylan Council Helps Center

Boylan Central Catholic High School Student Council members delivered more than 400 boxes of food, toys and household items for 48 families to St. Elizabeth Catholic Community Center in Rockford on WedDec. 14. The students loaded the truck at noon and arrived at St. Elizabeth's about 1:30 p.m. to unload.

LEFT: Seniors Hanna Bergstrom, Ali Kosek, Julie Caliston, and junior Lily Johnston help unload the truck.



(Observer photos/Lynne Conner)

Senior Alex Kaplanes (left) and junior Adam Johnson (right) were among student council volunteers.

YO FATHER

Q Is it okay to listen to secular music with bad lyrics? I just listen to it because of the beat.

A This is a great question that I get asked a lot. I think that the best way for me to answer it is to begin with a little story.

You see, when I was in seventh grade I remember that something had happened at school that I wasn't happy about, and although I don't remember many of the details, what I do remember is that my frustration was aimed at the teacher because I felt that he wasn't being fair.

Later in the day, when I got home from school and my mom asked me how my day was, I told her exactly how it was, and this description included my calling this teacher a bad name! My mom immediately asked me if I knew what that word meant and even though I told her "No" I still got my mouth washed out with soap!

I share this story with you because I think that it will help answer the question from two different angles. But before I even go into an explanation, let me just flat out say that the answer is "No!" It's not ok!

The first reason is listening to bad lyrics puts bad words into our vocabulary.

We may never intend on using them, and

we may think that we have such great self-control that these words will never slip out. But I learned the hard way that they can and probably will slip out, even if you don't know what they mean.

Let me add too that I never listened to music with bad lyrics nor was I allowed to watch TV or movies that used rough language, so I can't even tell you where I heard the word that slipped out. But I must have heard it from somewhere!

The more we listen to these words the greater chance we give ourselves to let them slip out because they get engrained more in our memories. So too, over time we can become desensitized to bad lyrics to the point that they become so common to us that we no longer think of them as being bad lyrics, and this is a very dangerous thing!

The second reason becomes apparent when you think about the circumstances under which I slipped up back in middle school.

It wasn't as if I was happy and having a great day and I suddenly let a bad word slip out. No, I was frustrated and angry! And when I was frustrated that was precisely when this word made its way into my mind and out of my mouth.

The bottom line is that more often than not, bad language, when used in lyrics or any sort

of media, comes across as violent, angry, negative, or at the very least demeaning and degrading of others.

I can't remember the last time that I heard a peaceful song that used bad lyrics or a movie or TV show in which someone who was smiling and demonstrating self-control let out a stream of bad words. It just doesn't happen!

And unfortunately what we bring in and consume in our lives is precisely what is going to come out.

What I mean by this is that listening to music with bad lyrics sets us up to have our very moods changed. My guess would be that if you take a moment to reflect upon how music with bad lyrics affects you (even music with the best beats ever), you'll probably discover that you don't feel uplifted and peaceful afterwards but instead you probably feel somewhat amped up, maybe on edge, or possibly stressed out. Bad lyrics simply don't produce peace!

I hope that you can see how both of my reasons demonstrate how bad language or bad lyrics truly affect us and do make a difference in our lives.

I want you to be happy! Which is why the answer is no!

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



(Photo provided)

St. Edward state scholars

Eleven students named Illinois State Scholars at St. Edward Central Catholic High School in Elgin are (from left) Sebastian Mozdzen, Anna Skog, Isidore Nottolini, Amanda Drobek, Eric Stapanovic, Andrew Shepley, Allison Kraus, Isaac Nordan, Alexi Linneman, Kyle Brown and John Paul Pagulayan.



(Photo provided)

Rosary athletes sign letters of intent

Six Rosary High School athletes signed letters of intent in November to pursue their sport at the college level. They are (from left) Meegan Hart, volleyball for Iowa State University in Ames, Iowa; Julia Gauthier, volleyball for Indiana University in Bloomington, Ind.; Alexis Yager, swimming for the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, Tenn.; Martha Konovodoff, volleyball for Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wis.; Sarah Willman, softball for St. Ambrose University in Davenport, Iowa; and (not pictured) Erin Burke who will play volleyball for Rollins University in Winter Park, Fla.