

'Francis factor' inspires Baltimore youths

By Paul McMullen

pmcmullen@CatholicReview.org

Somewhere in Glen Burnie this week, a man with no fixed address put on clean, new socks.

They were pulled from a gift box distributed by Happy Helpers for the Homeless. Hundreds of those boxes were organized and packed in November, at the Baltimore Youth Catholic Conference (BYCC) in Ocean City, using items that had been collected at parishes throughout the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

And where did the inspiration for that service project originate?

"Pope Francis," said Margaret Brogden, coordinator of youth ministry formation for the archdiocese. "The fact that he has called us to put our faith into action, all that he has said about being one with the poor ... we have to be a part of that."

Nick Olivella, a parishioner of St. Charles Borromeo in Pikesville and senior at Pikesville High, was among the members of the Archdiocesan Youth Advisory Council at the forefront of the service project.

So was Emma Kehrman, a parishioner of St. Mark in Catonsville and junior at Catonsville High. She was part of the archdiocesan contingent at the 2013 National Catholic Youth Conference in Indianapolis, but something about this year's pre-Thanksgiving weekend gathering of her peers was different.

"The service project was a nice way to take a break and look outside," Kehrman said. "The (BYCC) retreat isn't about just thinking about our faith, but growing in that faith and acting upon it."

Kehrman has been active in the St. Mark youth group since her freshman year of high school.

"I was looking for something with a communal feel," she said. "At my high school, I'm surrounded by a lot of people with different beliefs, but (through St. Mark) I'm able to be with people who practice my faith."

Archbishop William E. Lori celebrated the closing BYCC Mass Nov. 23, the feast of Christ the King, when his homily reiterated the retreat's theme, "Joy cannot be contained, it must be shared."

"The way people are won over to the Lord and to the church is not by threats," the archbishop said, "but instead by joy, by the deep happiness of those who opened their hearts to Jesus and who are willing to share his love with others, especially the poor. His love makes us more sensitive to others."

Also see:

Advent takes on new meaning for family preparing to join the church

Our Lady of Guadalupe Mass reminds Frederick parish of its missionary vocation