

Frederick County youth leads through service, faith

MIDDLETOWN – People often ask James Bongard why he is so happy.



Faces of Faith

His secret?

Knowing Christ personally and striving to do the things that bring him closer to Christ while also drawing others into a deeper relationship with Jesus.

“That’s just who I am,” said Bongard, a 16-year-old parishioner of Holy Family Catholic Community in Middletown, whose personal motto is to always be positive.

That positive spirit is noticed in his parish community, and caught the attention of a choir-mate’s mother, who serves as the parish’s director of mission.

She asked Bongard to write a reflection for the parish bulletin in December. Along with tips for living a life with Christ, he included memories of how prayer guided him during his father’s U.S. Army deployment to Afghanistan.

Before Bongard’s dad left, the family attended a service, where he was given a prayer coin. He was told to carry it with him to pray for his father.

“I carried it in my pocket with me every day until dad got back,” said Bongard, a 

junior at Middletown High School.

His father was gone for more than nine months, but was home in time for Bongard's birthday and Christmas. While his father was away, his son tried to stay upbeat.

"I knew that my dad was serving our country and I was so proud of him," he wrote in his parish reflection, "but I struggled during that year so many times. Luckily, I had Christ. This experience truly solidified my relationship with Christ and, although it was a real adverse experience, I feel that it helped me grow in my faith tremendously."

At Holy Family, Bongard is an altar server, trumpeter and singer. He is also a member of the parish youth group, which spends bi-weekly meetings discussing current issues and faith topics.

As a member of multiple clubs at his school and a Boy Scout for 12 years, Bongard hardly has a free weekend. One upcoming will be dedicated to assisting with the parish community's confirmation retreat.

His love for service is exemplified through his work in the Boy Scouts, leading him to his attainment of the Eagle Scout honor.

Placing 28 recycled-plastic mile markers along trails in Middletown satisfied the Eagle Project (the service project required for the Eagle Scout distinction) and benefited his community while giving a nod to his active lifestyle and love of the outdoors.

Bongard's time of service has no end in sight - after graduation in the spring of 2019, he wants to follow in the footsteps of his father and grandfather, and trade in his Boy Scouts uniform for fatigues and dress blues.

He hopes to begin his career by studying civil engineering at West Point.

"It fits me," Bongard said, "because I love serving other people."

Caroline Rohr, youth minister at Holy Family, called Bongard a "wonderful example of how to live out the faith."

“We love James,” she said. “He’s awesome.”

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