

# From youth ministry in Walkersville to South Bend administrator

**By Jessica Marsala**

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Picture several thousand high school students filled with the Holy Spirit standing in a field house.

That is how Lauren Donahue recalls the pivotal moment in her faith journey, at the 2006 Steubenville (Ohio) Youth Conference at Franciscan University, where she experienced Jesus in a “very raw” manner and realized that her future was in ministry.

“I knew that’s what I wanted to do with my life,” Donahue said. “I knew that I wanted to, in some capacity, bring people to experience Christ in that way.”

Donahue, who attended that conference with the LifeTeen youth ministry program at St. Timothy Parish in Walkersville, is well on her way down her career path.

A 2012 graduate of St. Vincent College in Latrobe, Pa., where she earned a bachelor of arts in theology and arts administration. She worked there the last two school years as the assistant director of campus ministry for social outreach, and along the way picked up a master’s in student affairs in higher education from Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

Donahue, 24, began working full-time this month as a hall rector at the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Ind., where she will serve as chief administrator and pastoral leader of an undergraduate residence hall, helping to provide students under her care with support and resources.

At St. Vincent, Donahue helped coordinate events, such as mission trips, that allowed students to combine their faith with service and outreach. She said that her own experiences as an undergrad help her better relate to the college students she has served.

“It became the first time in my life when I had to make more of an active choice,” said Donahue, of her struggle to maintain the “tangible” faith she had in Walkersville, where she lived in a service-oriented home and attended Mass regularly with her family.

Marissa Alspaugh, who has directed the youth ministry program at St. Timothy since 2005, said she could predict Donahue’s future in ministry.

“Lauren displayed wonderful leadership qualities,” Alspaugh said. “She was one of those young people that, as she got older in high school, rather than dropping out, got more involved,”

Father Andrew D. Aaron, now pastor of Holy Family, Davidsonville, was pastor of St. Timothy from 2004 to 2010. He said that youth leaders such as Donahue, by sharing their strong faith and love for the church, give their peers a place where they feel comfortable and loved.

"They have an intuitive talent at reading and working with people, at drawing out the gifts of others (and) at understanding how to lead a group while still listening to others," Father Aaron wrote in an email.

Donahue, who suggested that her love for the LifeTeen program grew as she matured, credits Alspaugh. She described the St. Timothy leader as "on fire for Christ."

Donahue, who attended Walkersville High School, was encouraged to join LifeTeen at St. Timothy by her parents, but eventually did not require any coaxing.

"I continued to participate," Donahue said, of a group that usually numbers 60, "because I enjoyed the community of young adults and the other young people I met in the (arch)diocese that led me closer to Christ."