

Hearts on Fire retreat for young adults comes to Ellicott City

When Father Erik J. Arnold heard that Hearts on Fire, a Catholic young adult retreat program, was looking for a home in Baltimore, the pastor of Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Ellicott City enthusiastically opened the doors to his church.

"I looked at the website and it looked like a great opportunity to bring our young adults into a deeper relationship with our Lord," said the Howard County pastor.

Father Phil Hurley, a Jesuit priest with Baltimore ties, is the national youth and young adult director of the Apostleship of Prayer, a Jesuit association leading the Hearts on Fire retreats.

Father Hurley, who grew up in St. Joseph, Sykesville, and is a 1992 graduate of Mount St. Joseph in Irvington and a 1996 graduate of Loyola University in Maryland, said the retreat hosted by Our Lady of Perpetual Help and supported by the Archdiocese of Baltimore's Division of Youth and Young Adult Ministry will take place July 8-9. Individuals can register online at <https://apostleshipofprayer.org/heartsonfire.html>. The retreat begins at 6:30 p.m. July 8. Participants return home overnight, and the event will culminate July 9 with a Vigil Mass.

"It's a crucial time for people in their lives," Father Hurley told Catholic News Service, "they are at a place in their life that they can make decisions soon and take action on it right away and make a big difference."

Father Hurley explained that the retreat, which is open to young adults ages 18-39, married or single, is focused on trying to connect faith to everyday life. Participants learn about the Apostleship of Prayer's idea of making a morning offering, living the Eucharist throughout the day and ending the day with an evening review.

The retreat also leaves time for young adults to socialize with one another during meal times and a coffeehouse social.

"We have these different groups of young adults and we're trying to reach out to them and not just engage them, but we want to be able to pull them more deeply into the whole life of the church," Father Arnold said.

He said some 65 young adults are already registered from parishes such as St. Casimir in Canton, Ss. Philip and James in Charles Village, the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen, Homeland, as well as young people from Ellicott City and Bowie.

"At the heart of it, what I really hope and pray will happen is the very thing that inspired the mission," Father Arnold said. "The impetus behind this whole thing is Pope Benedict XVI saying if we simply teach our young adults how to pray and put them in a place where they can encounter the Lord, then through that encounter, they are going to discover their vocation in life and receive the grace to live it out."

The pastor said his 1,500-family parish was happy to pair with the Division of Youth and Young Adult ministry for the event. Father Arnold said when he shared his desire with the Our Lady of Perpetual Help pastoral council, he received their support.

At a June 17 Hearts on Fire retreat in Washington, Father Hurley spoke to a group of young adults about competing loves in life, such as hobbies, family, God and work.

"How do we get those different things ordered in our life so that our hearts really are on fire?" he asked the audience.

"When I read about this I thought, 'That's exactly what I'm looking for,'" said college student Amanda Ussak, who hoped to gain "a better sense of how young people like myself could better incorporate prayer and spirituality into my everyday life, not just that once a week, on Sunday at Mass."

Sarah Yaklic, coordinator of young adult ministry for the Archdiocese of Washington told CNS, "One of the goals of young adult ministry, especially in the Archdiocese of Washington, is to connect them (young adults) to their parish communities."

Nathan Castellanos agreed with Yaklic, saying he feels young adults should be treated like "normal members of a parish."

"I don't like this whole separation into this weird category of young adult," he said. "I feel like, as a young adult, no one asks very much of me, and I find that a little bit frustrating. You know, I have talents, I have skills, and I don't find people asking to use those skills."

Father Hurley told CNS he believes it is important for parishes to have a young adult ministry group, but also to incorporate young adults into the larger parish community by providing leadership roles.

"Young adults have particular needs but also have a unique perspective to offer," he said.

In addition to Baltimore, Hearts on Fire will be holding retreats this summer in Philadelphia, Charlotte, N.C., Richmond, Va., and more locations are expected.

Catholic News Service contributed to this article.