

High-LI has lasting impact for participants

By Elizabeth Lowe

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SPARKS - Kristin Rupprecht's experience at the High School Leadership Institute as a 16-year-old in 1986 has come full circle.

"I saw High-LI as a great benefit to me," said Rupprecht, 43, the youth and young adult minister at St. Margaret in Bel Air. "It taught me great leadership and communication skills. I didn't have confidence in my ability to get up and speak in front of groups. It was eye-opening to see the strength of the staff and the other people that came. It laid the groundwork for what eventually became my adult faith."

Now, 27 years later, Rupprecht served as one of 12 staff members at this year's High-LI.

"It (Rupprecht's story) is a 'wow,' that God is awesome and it makes it all worthwhile," said Margaret Brogden, the Archdiocese of Baltimore's coordinator of youth ministry formation and High-LI coordinator. "It says a lot for the content and the process ... that it works."

The annual program, held July 7-13 at the Monsignor O'Dwyer Retreat House in Sparks, works to enhance the teens' leadership skills and help them to be church leaders. The high school-aged youths hail from across the archdiocese.

Founded in the late 1970s, High-LI is sponsored by the Division of Youth and Young Adult Ministry. The program costs youths \$690 and scholarships are available, Brogden said.

The 41 youth participants were in three groups: "Acts 29," which works to bolster parish and school leadership skills; "Emmaus," which emphasizes peer ministry; and "Source and Summit," which prepares young people for liturgical roles at church or school.

On July 8, Rupprecht - utilizing the public-speaking skills she began to develop as a teen - taught youths on the Emmaus track about leading ice breakers.

"Literally, you're warming up, you're breaking the ice," Rupprecht said. "They should always have a purpose."

During the week youths planned and participated in daily Masses and prayer services and presented speeches about their faith, among other activities.

"It (High-LI) has strengthened my faith in God because I cannot do any of this without him," said Katherine DeBroeck, 16, a parishioner of Sacred Heart in Glyndon and participant in the Source and Summit track. "Faith is an essential part. You can't just have faith in yourself - you have to have faith in everyone else."

DeBroeck called Rupprecht's faith journey inspiring.

"That's a good sign - this works and it lasts," DeBroeck said. "She's kept her faith." Claudaya Hood-bey, 17, a participant in Acts 29 and a former parishioner of St. Thomas Aquinas in Hampden, said High-LI is "very rewarding."

"We all have gifts," said the senior at The Catholic High School of Baltimore. "God gave us those gifts and we need to use them."

Rupprecht's story is a testament to High-LI, Hood-bey said.

"This program really incorporates the idea that youth can change the world," she said.

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