High-schoolers focus on the Eucharist at seminarian-led Mount 2000 retreat

EMMITSBURG – For more than 20 years, the men studying for the priesthood at Mount St. Mary's Seminary have been entrusted with leading Mount 2000, a Eucharist-focused retreat for high school students.

Tyler Kline, a third-year theology seminarian for the Archdiocese of Baltimore whose home parish is St. Philip Neri in Linthicum Heights, chaired this year's gathering, Feb. 9-11 at Knott Arena.

"The heart of (the retreat)," Kline said, "is the Eucharist."

That was evident Saturday night, when two transitional deacons from the Diocese of Wichita processed around the field house with the Eucharist aloft in a monstrance, illuminated by a spotlight. As they moved around and through the crowd, Deacons Derek Thome and Nic Jurgensmeyer blessed the faithful, many of whom were moved to tears.

More than 1,300 high school students gathered over the rainy weekend, with Archdioceses of Baltimore and Washington supplying more than half that total.

Each parish and school group (some split because of their size) is paired with a seminarian for the entire retreat. The men share meals with their small groups and lead them in discussion.

All of the approximate 150 seminarians studying at the Mount are involved in the planning and execution of the retreat, with a core team of about 15 at the forefront.

"A lot of time, a lot of effort, a lot of prayer goes into making this event work," said David Keyes, a third-year theology seminarian studying for the Diocese of Madison who coordinated marketing for the retreat.

"Live the Drama" served as this year's theme and the focus of the witness talks, given by a variety of leaders and positive role models. The theme spoke to the importance of, rather than getting wrapped up in personal drama, knowing that you are a part of something bigger, and seeking your part in the drama of life and discipleship that God has created.

Rounding out the retreat were Masses; prayer; an Adoration Chapel; and a small expo for different religious groups and shops.

Hallways are lined with confessionals, allowing up to 25 confessions at a time. By the end of the retreat, more than 1,000 confessions had been heard.

During Sunday morning Mass, which was celebrated by Archbishop William E. Lori, there was a "Vocations Call." Everyone discerning a vocation to the priesthood or religious life was recognized and received "To Save a Thousand Souls," a book on discernment by Father Brett Brannen, a graduate of the Mount seminary.

"This experience normalizes vocations," Kline said. "It puts a human face on priests and religious vocations."

Peter Rubeling, a second-year theology seminarian for the Archdiocese of Baltimore, attended Mount 2000 during his high school years, when he was a parishioner of St. Peter the Apostle in Libertytown.

"Not only is it a testament to my vocation," said Rubeling, whose brother, Father Michael Rubeling, was ordained for the archdiocese in 2016, "but in feeling the call toward something more."

Approximately 40 religious women encouraged personal interactions with the girls participating in the retreat. Two Nashville Dominicans brought students from Mount de Sales Academy in Catonsville, including ninth-grader AnnaMae Georgieff, a parishioner of Sacred Heart of Mary in Graceland Park.

Georgieff said that through the small groups, she learned about how the sisters she sees regularly answered the call from God to a religious vocation. She also was impacted by the people she met over the weekend.

"Everyone is so nice and sweet," said Georgieff, who twice found help when she found herself lost on the rural campus.

Keyes said that the retreat provides an opportunity for the participants to meet others who share in their faith, especially for those not attending Catholic high school.

Kline said that the seminarians often wonder why they are trusted with such a large-scale event, but the longstanding success of Mount 2000 is a testimony to their readiness.

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