

Mass celebrates Scouts' devotion to their faith

By Keith Meisel

Special to the Review

WOODLAWN - "It is a terrible feeling, not to know where one is," Archbishop William E. Lori said during his homily on the Gospel parable of the Prodigal Son at St. Gabriel Church March 6.

The occasion was the 82nd annual Archdiocesan Scout Mass, where Archbishop Lori honored the efforts of youths to remain on the path of their faith, and some of the adults who have helped guide them.

"For Scouts who have spent all this time earning religious emblems, this is what the kids can show to the other kids," said John Hash, an adult leader with Troop 456 at St. Mark in Catonsville whose son, Joseph, was among those honored. "It's recognition for the extra time and effort they have put in."

Troop 456 served as the host troop for the Mass, and its members received their religious emblems from the archbishop. While St. Gabriel does not sponsor a Scout troop, its pastor, Monsignor Thomas Phillips, is chaplain for the archdiocesan Catholic Committee on Scouting.



Scouts salute March 6 at St. Gabriel in Woodlawn. (Kevin J. Parks/Special to the Review)

Catholic Scouts from other troops received their religious emblems at their respective parishes.

Asked the significance of the Sunday afternoon celebration at St. Gabriel, Joseph Hash said, "It's a completion of getting all the religious emblems."

A senior at Calvert Hall College High School in Towson, Hash received the Pope Pius XII emblem, as did Andy Rudrow, a fellow member of Troop 456, and Jack Draper of Troop 306, also based in Catonsville.

The Pope Pius XII emblem is for Boy Scouts and Explorer Scouts ages 14-18. The other emblems bestowed were the Light of Christ (ages 6-7), Parvuli Dei (8-10) and Ad Altare Dei (11-13).

Hash, Draper and Zach Jones of Troop 456 earned the Pillar of Faith Award for having earned all four religious emblems.

The St. George Emblem, which goes to an adult volunteer who promotes the

religious emblems program, went to Deacon Joseph Knepper. While assigned to St. Paul Parish in Ellicott City, he helps guide Scouts there and at Troop 456.

"Pope Pius helps Scouts - sophomores, juniors, seniors in high school - who are at that time in their life when they are going off to college," Deacon Knepper said. "It gets them to think about the future: Where is God calling them? It gets them thinking about the choices they can make."

He described small discussion groups where conversations are confidential and often personal.

"They're talking about all sorts of life states, life choices, all sorts of things," he said. "You decide where God is calling you and go in that direction. It gives them something to think about."

Knepper and his wife, Colleen, are the parents of four, ranging from age 16 to 25. As a young Scout, he did not advance past Webelo.

"He's enthusiastic about the meetings and retreats," Joseph Hash said. "He makes the retreats fun and entertaining."



Deacon Joe Knepper receives recognition from Archbishop William E. Lori. (Kevin J. Parks/CR Staff)

While Deacon Knepper works with the older Scouts at Troop 456, fellow adult leader Sheila Wheltle helps guide the younger boys.

"We're a package deal," she said. "I love working with the excited, younger Scouts. "A couple of years later, when they've matured and gone further in their faith, then the fun begins. The Pope Pius program is a way to talk about being Catholic and a Scout in a very secular world. For older kids who are serious and want to deepen their faith, (it) is a way to talk about being Catholic and a Scout in a very secular world."

Wheltle's two sons became Eagle Scouts, and her two daughters received the Girl Scouts' prestigious Gold Award.

Bronze Pelican adult awards were presented to Dennis Kast, chairman of the archdiocesan Catholic Committee on Scouting; Deacon George Kraus, like Deacon Knepper assigned to St. Paul; and Conrad Dominguez-Urban, a Scout leader at Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Ellicott City.

"It's tough, awards for adults," Dominguez-Urban said. "You can't get a book and read for them. You have to be nominated to be recognized for your service."

Kast also received a special award from the Jewish Committee on Scouting.

For Deacon Knepper, the real reward is helping Scouts find their way and stay on their path.

"God puts us in a certain place for a reason," he said. "It gives you joy to see young

men growing.”

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