

St. Pius X youth among those honored at Eagle of the Cross ceremony

By Elizabeth Lowe

elowe@CatholicReview.org

It wasn't until Mariellen Kemp attended a public high school that she recognized how important her Catholic faith was to her – and that she was not as involved at her parish as she wanted to be.

"Once I went to a public school I realized my faith was being challenged," said Kemp, who attended first through eighth grade at St. Pius X School in Rodgers Forge. "There were students from all walks of life and different religions. Being a Catholic and living as a Catholic teen was something that was really important to me."

The 17-year-old parishioner of St. Pius X was one of 27 youths who received Eagle of the Cross medals this year from the Archdiocese of Baltimore's Division of Youth and Young Adult Ministry. The youths were recognized for their contributions June 12 at Church of the Resurrection in Ellicott City.

The award celebrates outstanding apostolic mission, Christian leadership and moral integrity.

Kemp is a lector and has been a contemporary choir member, confirmation peer and religious education teacher. She has participated in service events and helped start the parish's youth group.

In 2012 she attended the High School Leadership Institute, an annual program that works to enhance the teens' leadership skills and help them to be church leaders, and last summer served as a peer leader there.

Kemp, a recent graduate of Carver Center for Arts and Technology in Towson who will attend Towson University, was surprised that she was selected to receive the award.

"I was really honored that I was being recognized for my service," she said. "It seems so small when you're doing it, but when you put it on paper it looks bigger. It's a really big honor."

Mae Richardson, director of children's and youth ministry at St. Pius X, said Kemp has a genuine faith.

"She is one of the most authentic people regarding her faith that I have met in a long time," she said. "There is a joy and a happiness that shines through."

Mark Pacione, a confirmation program coordinator at St. Pius X and associate director of the Office of Research and Planning for the archdiocese, said Kemp deserves the award because of the way she lives out her faith.

"She lives her faith in a way that is very believable to her friends and her peers," Pacione said. "It's a great grace for all of us who call her 'friend.' She is, I think, for her peers someone who is a person of faith and I think her peers look at her as approachable. She understands the kinds of questions that other young people have as they prepare for confirmation."

Kemp described her faith as her rock, on good days and bad.

"Whatever life throws at me I know that I have a higher power there to watch over me and help me out," she said.

"That's something I wouldn't trade for the world. I wouldn't be the same person if I didn't have my faith."

Kemp credits her parents, Marvin and Amy, with helping her live as a Catholic teen.

"They're really great about being there 100 percent for my faith journey," she said.

Kemp's father has a special place in her faith journey. Mariellen made her first Communion a decade ago, the same day Marvin was received into the church.

"I don't think I appreciated it as much at the time as I do now," she said. "Ever since, my Dad and I have had an easy time talking about our faith."

Kemp's parents both received the For God and Youth Award, which honors adult leaders in youth ministry. They were among the adults recognized at the ceremony.

Eagle of the Cross recipients

Carmela Barbo, St. Mary Parish, Annapolis;

Sarah Bateman, St. Stephen, Bradshaw;

Hannah Bittner, St. Mary, Pylesville;

Steve Bullen, Calvert Hall College High School, Towson;

Mary Kate Cassidy, Church of the Resurrection, Ellicott City;

Michael B. Comer, Archbishop Spalding High School, Severn;

Bethany Edmondson, St. Mary's High School, Annapolis;

Melissa Emery, Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish, Essex;

Kristen Englert, Our Lady of the Chesapeake, Lake Shore;

Alexandra Galindo, Mount de Sales Academy, Catonsville;

Heidi Hellmuth, St. Timothy, Walkersville;

Eric Jones, Holy Family, Davidsonville;

Mariellen Kemp, St. Pius X, Rodgers Forge;

Kristen Lamb, St. Mark, Fallston;

Meg Lawrence, St. Francis of Assisi, Fulton;
Sarah Lilly, Our Lady of the Chesapeake, Lake Shore;
Abigail Messaris, St. Margaret, Bel Air;
Matthew M. Moore, St. Mary, Pylesville;
Courtney Nellies, Sacred Heart, Glyndon;
Alexis Nong, Institute of Notre Dame, Baltimore;
Dana Sauro, St. Michael, Poplar Springs;
Justin Smith, St. Cecilia, Baltimore;
Gabriella Sottile, St. Maria Goretti High School, Hagerstown;
Ashley Tolino, St. Joseph on Carrollton Manor, Buckeystown;
Victoria Tully, Holy Trinity, Glen Burnie;
Erica Wheeler, Our Lady of Mount Carmel School, Essex;
and Amandi Wilson, The Seton Keough High School, Baltimore.

Also see:

'We had to do something': Westminster parish launches 12-step program after parishioner overdoses

Baltimore's newly ordained priests radiate joy