

# Teen girls learn about discernment at vocations camp

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SPARKS – Witnessing religious sisters enjoy a good belly laugh as they joked and swapped stories was eye-opening for 15-year-old Alyssa Buchheit.

“I learned that nuns aren’t just grumpy, elderly women,” said Alyssa, a parishioner of St. Peter the Apostle in Libertytown. “They are joyful, beautiful women who are called by God.”

Alyssa was one of 21 teens who participated in the Fiat Days vocations camp, a first-of-its-kind overnight camp for young women held June 23-25 at the Monsignor O’Dwyer Retreat House. Ranging in age from 15 to 17, most of the participants were from the Archdiocese of Baltimore, with four hailing from other dioceses. Three young adult volunteers also participated.

“Fiat” is Latin for “Let it be done,” and is taken from the Blessed Virgin Mary’s response to the angel Gabriel when she was asked to become the mother of Jesus.

Participants listened to religious women from a variety of orders share their vocation stories. They also participated in daily Mass, prayer, eucharistic adoration, confession, Stations of the Cross and fun activities such as basketball and volleyball.

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Bishop Mitchell T. Rozanski celebrated a Mass June 25, and the teens also heard talks about married life and chastity.

In sharing how she decided to enter religious life, Sister Denise LaRock compared becoming a sister to falling in love and marrying. As a young woman, she spent much time with the Daughters of Charity, attracted to their life of prayer and outreach.

“It’s a process of finding that connection – a deep connection, where you don’t want to be anywhere else,” said Sister Denise, vocation director for the Daughters of Charity. “You find that your soul is at home.”

Sister Denise wanted to become a religious sister, she said, because she saw it as a way of “radically” following Christ by turning her entire life over to him.

“There was that sense that I was so blessed by others in my life that I wanted to be a blessing for others,” she said.

Sister Maria Pio Wiggins, a member of the Franciscan Sisters Third Order Regular of Penance of the Sorrowful Mother, told the teens she had made all the wrong choices as a young adult. At 33, she had an awakening when her sister invited her to go to Easter Mass. She reluctantly attended, she said, only to be surprised to feel God's overwhelming mercy at the liturgy.

"The Lord saw a crack in my heart that wanted a little bit of him in my life," said Sister Maria Pio, who recalled crying throughout the Mass. "He swooped in with the Holy Spirit and just started burning truths on my heart."

Sister Maria Pio, who had been away from church for years, started to go to daily Mass. Soon, she had a hunger for the Scriptures and was reading everything she could find about the saints. She became involved in a Catholic young adult group in Catonsville and was powerfully drawn to religious life.

"I was looking for a place where I could be the bride and he could be the bride groom," she explained.

Many of the sisters encouraged the teens to pray and ask God to show them his will for their lives. They recommended visiting a variety of religious communities if they are thinking about entering religious life.

Don't expect God to send a billboard spelling out a vocation, Molly Jameson told the teens. The 24-year-old former parishioner of St. Ann in Hagerstown and postulant in the same order as Sister Maria Pio said God's call can come as a subtle tug on the heart.

"Whenever you find your vocation and begin to live it, it brings life," she said.