

Youth who ‘follow path of Jesus’ honored

St. Cecilia parishioner Alexis Gear looked around Archbishop Borders Hall June 1 and wondered how she stacked up.

She was among some of the high school recipients of the Eagle of the Cross Award assembled for a ceremony with Archbishop Edwin F. O’Brien at the Catholic Center.

“It’s kind of intimidating,” Gear said. “You just wonder what the person next to you has done. In the end, it’s all for the common good.”

Indeed, those gathered were honored by the archbishop for their steadfast apostolic action, Christian leadership and moral integrity. The 25 recipients were nominated by their parish or schools and were given the medal in their communities before the June 1 ceremony, when the archbishop gave each a certificate.

In honoring the young people, the archbishop told them they were an inspiration. “It’s a reflection, this gathering, of what has taken place for 200 years in the Archdiocese of Baltimore and what is continuing to take place in our communities through your generosity,” the archbishop said.

He said their good works honor the sacrifices of Jesus, and that living a Christian example for other young people can be difficult.

The archbishop advised: “If the eyes of your soul are focused on Christ, the eyes of your heart will be focused on your neighbor. And that’s the perfect commandment.”

Scott Miller, the director of the archdiocesan Division of Youth and Young Adult

Ministry, said his office sees the Eagle of the Cross as an opportunity to recognize young people who exhibit important leadership qualities in the Catholic Church and community.

“The work of discipleship does not exclusively belong to adults,” Miller said. “Today we celebrated just some of the many young people who are attempting to follow the path of Jesus.”

Honoree Robbie Jefferson, a parishioner of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Essex and a graduate of the parish’s high school, performed 400 hours of community service this year, acted as an extraordinary minister of the holy Communion and served on the parish council.

He expressed surprise and gratitude for receiving the Eagle of the Cross.

“It feels nice to think someone thinks that highly of me,” Jefferson said. “It feels good to do service and make someone else smile. This definitely makes me want to go out and help others after high school.”

Gear started St. Cecilia’s recycling program and is president of the youth group there.

Gear said that she gives back to her faith, “because it comes back around to you. I do believe that. If you give out love to the world, I believe it will come back to you and it’ll be for the better.”

2011 Eagle of the Cross recipients

Kelly Marie Aquilla, Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish, Essex; Sarah Brown, St. Ignatius of Loyola, Ijamsville; Sara Caton, Seton Keough High School; Angela Conti, Holy Trinity, Glen Burnie; Rose Davis, St. Stephen, Bradshaw; Lauren DiGiacomo, St. Andrew by the Bay, Annapolis; Alexis Gear, St. Cecilia; Justin Gough, Calvert Hall College High School; Robbie Jefferson, Our Lady of Mount Carmel High School,

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Essex; Meghin Kendzierski, St. Mary of the Assumption, Pylesville; Shelby Anne Kestler, St. Michael the Archangel, Overlea; Connie Kniesler, St. John, Westminster; Kara Leonard, St. Pius X, Rodger's Forge; Missy Mazzullo, St. Francis of Assisi, Baltimore; Gabrielle McDermott, St. Maria Goretti High School, Hagerstown; Kaitlin McLhinney, Maryvale Preparatory School; Maddie Nissel, Holy Family, Middletown; Nicholas J. Paterowski, Archbishop Spalding High School; Joy Penaso, Mount de Sales Academy; Brian Reynolds, Cristo Rey Jesuit High School; Tyler Ruffo, Bishop Walsh School, Cumberland; Josie Schimminger, St. Margaret, Bel Air; Nicole Souza, Church of the Resurrection, Ellicott City; Laura Strauch, Institute of Notre Dame; Danielle Wilson, Our Lady of the Fields, Millersville.