

Autumn: St. Damien, Teen Summit, Thanks

For one weekend in October the joy and depth of our faith was on display before audiences large and small.

On Oct. 24, we saw Wayne Messmer present the one-act play “Damien” before a middle-age and older crowd at the Nordlof Center in downtown Rockford.

Attendees, predominately from Rockford, with one

Charitably Speaking



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from Milwaukee and one from Dubuque, gathered to socialize, eat and experience the moving, sometimes somber but always hopeful recounting of the life of St. Damien of the lepers.

Three days later, more than 1,000 teens from every corner of the diocese gathered for the annual Youth Summit at Rock Valley College.

Every year’s gathering seems to outdo the prior year, and every year the students leave with positive messages about why their Church values them so deeply, and how their futures are united within the whole diocese.

The venues were drastically different; the numbers only distantly related; car pools and school buses for one; nearby parking lots or ramps for the other.

One featured a complete day of travel, box lunches, upbeat music, games and the availability of confession

from committed priests for hundreds of attendees. An evening of catered dinner, subdued jazz and lyrical Irish music and, among other Damien themes, the longing for confession in the heart of one 19th century Belgian missionary in the other.

Whether attended by an older demographic or younger audience, that weekend guided two groups along different paths to appreciate and express the faith and future that is Catholic. The bright lights, guitars and “Family Feud” of one event contrasted beautifully with the subdued theater lighting and a single sung line of one verse of one traditional Catholic hymn at the other.

Yet at each the participants found substance. They found expression. They found others who, Catholic or otherwise, valued the importance of being “faith-filled.”

The two events’ juxtaposition highlighted a clear expression for and appreciation of the term “one, holy, Catholic and apostolic” that routinely rolls off our tongues during the Mass’s profession of faith.

On the 10th anniversary of St. Damien’s canonization, people came together to venerate, celebrate and learn about the patron saint of lepers, AIDS victims and forgotten outcasts. Three days later, throngs of young people came to loudly proclaim their Catholic beliefs in response to Jesus saying, “Let the young people come to me.”

Next year, the youth summit will welcome new students and grizzled veterans to Rockford to nurture and deepen their faith as maturing Catholics. It’s important they make that faith journey in pilgrimage to an event that honors the past and sets the present in the ever changing home of the diocese. It is their future.

And next year, Catholic Charities will travel to Aurora to deliver our message of presence in all parts of the diocese and how we want to participate in the 11 counties that make up our community of service. That is our future.

Happy Thanksgiving from your Catholic Charities.

never see
what has
been done. I
only see what
remains to be
done.

— Marie Curie
