

Annual Report, 2006: **Youth Ministry**

In the Name of God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and Peace.

It's very easy to view the youth in our midst in terms of "the future"—a particularly bright one, given the great wealth of intelligence, spiritual depth, and openness to new friends and experiences that has been demonstrated at forums, at youth group events, and on mission trips. But it is imperative that we acknowledge that these bright minds, discerning souls, and open hearts are not only the future of the church, but its *present*, as well. Youth at St. Mary's are one of the most active demographic groups in our parish life. This can be observed, not only in terms of specifically-targeted "youth events", but also with ministries that span the entire scope of the parish life.

In 2006, youth from our parish were acolytes, lay readers, prayer leaders, preachers, choir members, instrumentalists, chalice bearers, Sunday School helpers, and Children's Chapel leaders. Independent from the various youth-ministry-organized "service projects", some served at SOME on Monday mornings; others aided St. Joseph's ministry; still others volunteered as office helpers at various points during the year. Sixty-five youth, from grades six to college went on mission trips during the summer and fall of 2006. *Sixty-five!* And, of course, we must be thankful for all of those who do all the small, unrecognized things that keep things (relatively) sane, such as putting tables away and cleaning up trash after events, or opening a door for someone who has their hands full, or saying a prayer when someone is sick. None of those things are written down anywhere, but youth and adults alike have been doing those sorts of things in this parish, and it's a tremendous gift.

Some youth group events from the spring included ice skating (a kickoff event that attracted about twenty-four youth), the yearly ski trip, numerous service projects, and, of course, the second-annual "Peeps Party", which typically involves extensively creative use of the fluffy Easter treats. We heard from various speakers, including a senator, members of our armed services, and our good Rector. Sunday mornings found our Jr. and Sr. High Forums to be well-attended and spirited; youth performed the reading of the Passion in Children's Chapel on Palm Sunday. It is also most notable that the spring Confirmation class numbered about thirty-five youth—about a 50% growth from the previous year! The season ended with a youth-led service that included not only youth readers and musicians, but also a Sr. High youth in the pulpit.

The summer kicked off with the Parish Retreat at Shrine Mont. One of the residences was set aside for the Sr. High Youth—waking up for breakfast by accordion and guitar, Senior High v. 20's and 30's capture the flag, and Techno dance parties were just some of the fun in the youth Shrine Mont house. (Come next year to enjoy the fun!) It was also announced at the retreat that St. Mary's would be hiring a new full-time youth minister! Aside from the retreat, and a few activities, such as a trip to Six Flags in Maryland, the balance of the season was devoted to mission work.

In June, July, August, and December 6 mission programs saw parishioners reach out to people in various states of need—many of these programs being new, or at least new to St. Mary's. Nine youth and five sponsors journeyed to Honduras, a nation where poverty is pretty much a way of life. In August, nineteen youth participated in the first-annual Outreach Camp, a day-camp devoted to enabling Jr. High youth to see and help with poverty in our own backyard. Fifteen youth in Jr. and Sr. High participated, along with four adult sponsors, in the Summer Action Series at the Heifer Ranch in Perryville, Arkansas—a combination of work, global poverty awareness, and sustainable-resource training. The tenth-annual Towel Mission Trip to Valle Crucis, North Carolina

enabled nine youth and four adult sponsors to not only witness, first-hand, a situation of great need in our own country, but to do something about it. Twelve parishioners from St. Mary's and St. Patrick's, Falls Church (including eight college students) had a similar opportunity among the recently-hurricane-devastated communities along coastal Mississippi. A second trip to the Gulf Coast, in December, had nine members, five of them college students.

The more than seventy youth and adults that participated directly in mission work weren't, however, the only ones to make a difference. Youth missionaries raised over \$9,000 in mission shares and hosted over one-hundred donors at the first-annual shareholder dinner.

Fall, 2006 began with a bang—the lock-in saw an attendance of over seventy youth, and put a staff of 20 parents and young adults to work, driving and chaperoning the event. The new school year also saw three additions to leadership: a new, full-time lay youth minister, two new delegates to Diocesan Youth Ministries, and a newly-expanded youth council, consisting of two adults, six senior-highs, and two junior-highs. Sunday forum attendance saw more than 70 youth faces in the fall, as well as 9 parents volunteering as dedicated teachers. The Fall Confirmation class had 31 students, and, combined with those from the spring and several adults, our largest confirmation of 69 St. Marians was celebrated in November. A rockin' party ensued. Youth group activities included a Mystery Bus Ride, a Pool Party, Brunch Bunch, Caffeine and Conversation, and a new Wednesday-night program, Pizza with a Purpose. Additionally, several service projects, such as stocking-stuffing for the troops, a Thanksgiving food-bag race, and Rake 'n Run peppered the Fall Schedule.

As the youth look into the coming year, we have a potential for some great things to happen in the Name of the Lord. The Confirmands are preparing for their pilgrimage to the UK with fundraisers, and youth missionaries on four, possibly five upcoming summer trips are already preparing to sell shares. The youth council has established specific goals of increasing participation, fostering personal relationships, and continuously challenging us to engage in community service. Youth involvement is visibly growing, not only with “youth events”, but also in terms of participation in liturgy, music, outreach, and basic leadership.

Taking a last look at 2006, parents deserve special recognition for their willingness to continually give of their time to the youth programs at St. Mary's. This is not only valuable in practical terms—many hands making light work—but more importantly in terms of closing the gap between what it means to be a Christian child and what it means to be a Christian adult. St. Paul, in the First Letter to the Corinthians, commended us to remember that just as the human body has many parts, with many varying strengths and weaknesses—and is yet one body that must work together—so it is with us, the Body of Christ. Parents, you have done an excellent job of not only leading our youth, but also walking beside them as they grow and learn to fit their roles as inheritors of the adult life of the Church.

Faithfully yours,

Matt Presson, Youth Minister,
The 2006-2007 Youth Council, and
Jennifer Strawbridge, Associate to the Rector