

Lights for the World shines a light on the personal growth

By Patrick J. Buechi
Staff Reporter

Musician Carrie Ann Ford has added another title to her list of credentials – acorn. She is a seed that has potential for more growth, she explained to the 250 teenagers who gathered together at the 11th annual Lights for the World.

Lights, sponsored by the Diocesan Department of Youth and Young Adult Ministries, serves as a kick off to a new year of youth ministry programs in the diocese. Teens interested in learning about the Catholic faith get the chance to get meet some new friends and reacquaint themselves with old ones.

Keynote speaker Ford shared her own personal journey, as a singer, actress and missionary.

The East Aurora resident often takes walks through the trails of Knox Farms. One time an acorn dropped on her head, causing her to wonder how something so hard can grow into an oak tree.

“You are all acorns,” she said. “You are not yet oak trees. You have not yet become all that God wants you to be. You haven’t arrived yet. I haven’t arrived yet. I’m still an acorn.”

Her path has not always been

smooth. In high school, Ford was clinically depressed, in counseling and taking medication. She once quit going to Church for about 10 minutes, until two Jehovah’s Witnesses came to her house asking if she believed in God.

“Doubting and wondering and questioning are not bad things,” Ford said. “Doubting and wondering and questioning is what gets you to the next step.”

Along with Ford’s presentation, teens participated in breakout sessions dealing with God’s call, finding God in all things, and dealing with stress.

Joe Chernowski, youth minister at St. Gregory the Great Parish in Williamsville, presented a session on values.

Defining sin as “an offense against reason, truth or right conscience, a failure in genuine love for God,” Chernowski showed a clip from the popular film, “Return of the King” showing Frodo Baggins, obsessed with a powerful ring, and unable to think clearly and trust his friends.

“Like Frodo did, we get mixed up with what to say yes to, what to say no to,” said Chernowski.

Focusing on the Holy Spirit, prayer, sacraments and Mass will help to keep one focused.

“There are ways to stay away from

sin. The answer is easy. Doing it is the really hard part,” he said.

For the most part, the teens who came wanted to connect with other Catholic teens and deepen their faith in God.

“(My faith) increases every time I connect with more teens at the workshops and stuff, I get questions answered,” said Zoe Obstarczyk, 16, from St. Lawrence Parish in Buffalo. “I don’t feel alone because there are so many other people doing the same thing you’re doing. You just feel like part of God’s family.”

“(Ford) related to a lot of the problems teenagers are having today



Photo by Patrick McPartland/Staff Photographer

Carrie Ann Ford, keynote speaker for this year’s Lights for the World conference, uses some musical accompaniment to explain how she is a “Nut in a Rut.”

and how she worked through it, not by herself, but with the help of God. That was really touching,” she said.

“I had a lot of fun in the previous years that I’ve been here. I love the experience,” said returning teen David Queeno, 17, also from St. Lawrence Parish.

New Youth Board co-captains plan a year of fun for fellow teens

By Patrick J. Buechi
Staff Reporter

Lights for the World introduced this year’s Youth Board co-captains to the diocese. The two leaders bring with them a desire to raise the voice of young Catholics in the diocese.

Liz Fera, 17, from Holy Spirit Parish in North Collins, served on the board last year and enjoyed planning breakout sessions for the annual convention. Coming from a large family, Fera knows the role “big sister” well and hopes to be that mentor and confidant to her fellow teens.

“Being a co-captain is kind of like being that only with kids my age,” she said.

Her partner, Grace Wach, also 17, hails from St. Bernadette Parish in Orchard Park. This is her first year on the board. She joined to have another outlet for her passionate faith.

“In the past few years I have really grown with who I am and my relationship with Christ,” she said. “I really love to exercise my leadership qualities. I really think youth have a lot to offer, and it’s cool to be chosen to be one of those people who can show off their stuff and really motivate others to be excited about Christ because He is a pretty cool dude.”

Being named co-captain her first year



Photo by Patrick McPartland/Staff Photographer

Grace Wach and Liz Fera will work together as Diocesan Youth Board Co-Captains this year.

doesn’t faze Wach. To her it feels right.

“I’ve come to a point in my faith where I feel called to ministry. This is perfect for me. I’m really open to suggestions and other people’s ideas. I am a good listener. I’m a good gatekeeper. It’s a lot of facilitating. I’m really intrigued by what others have to say,” she

said, adding, “I know when to step back and when to step forward.”

She became a Eucharistic minister this spring, and is involved in a Life Teen group with Nativity of Our Lord and St. Bernadette’s. One of her favorite things is teaching religion to seventh and eight-graders at the parish’s Edge

youth program.

“I get a lot of energy from them, and I like to be with them and explain everything about our faith,” she said.

The Youth Board is made up of more than a dozen teens from parishes across the diocese. Each member must be active in their parish and have participated in the Christian Leadership Institute. Potential captains are nominated and then discerned by the board members. Duties include facilitating board meetings, maintaining Christian community among the board, and delivering speeches at various youth events throughout the year.

The group bonded at a retreat in August, where they also learned unity and developed trust and leadership skills. Already they have begun planning the annual Youth Convention.

They hope to make the breakout sessions personal and deal with issues teens today deal with, such as pressure at school, sex and drugs. They also want to get away from some of the heavy convention themes of late.

“There was one a few years ago, Superheroes of Faith. That was so light and fun,” Fera said. “We’re trying to use that for people who don’t normally go to convention and aren’t into it.”