

Annunciation, St. Andrew teens to be on DVDs released nationwide

(Publication Date: 03-05-2008)

By Amy Kotlarz/Catholic Courier

Soon, people across the country could be watching DVDs featuring youths from the LIFE TEEN program at Church of the Annunciation and St. Andrew parishes in Rochester.

A film crew from Chicago spent Feb. 19- 21 filming interviews with teens, while in the background their friends were participating in such activities as making dinner, ice skating and shooting pool.

The film will be used in a variety of future DVDs distributed for free to more than 3,000 parishes nationwide by the Catholic film company Outside da Box, which is based in the Chicago area.

“It’s a wonderful opportunity for our teens to express themselves and what their faith is like,” said Father Michael Mayer, pastor of Annunciation/St. Andrew. “(LIFE TEEN) adds a lot of excitement and energy to our teens.”

Outside da Box first heard about the LIFE TEEN group at Annunciation/St. Andrew after receiving an e-mail from Amy Dorscheid, the parishes' youth minister/faith-formation coordinator.

Dorscheid had received the company's free vocations DVD, which she screened with the thought of using it in discussions with her LIFE TEEN group. However, she found it wasn't diverse enough to be relatable to her urban LIFE TEEN members. So she wrote the company a note thanking them for the DVD but expressing disappointment that she wouldn't be able to use it.

“She really called us to reflect on the fact that what we created was not representative of all races,” said Outside da Box



Seventeen-year-old Jessie Johnson (center), a member of the LIFE TEEN group at Church of the Annunciation/St. Andrew parishes in Rochester, is interviewed by producers from the video-production ministry Outside da Box during a LIFE TEEN outing at the RIT ice rink Feb. 20. (Courier photo by Mike Crupi)

President/Executive Producer Eric Groth.

He said the company appreciated the constructive criticism so much that a staff member immediately e-mailed back, asking to film Dorscheid's LIFE TEEN group. The teens will appear in several DVDs, including an election-themed campaign for Jesus DVD, in which people tell why they support Jesus as a leader.

"I'm really excited about them being here, and they really did take what I had to say seriously," Dorscheid said.

She noted that one thing that sets her LIFE TEEN group apart is that its main focus is on outreach to teens in the neighborhood who may or may not be Catholic. As part of that, the group three weeks ago started a teen drop-in program for neighborhood youths, who are invited to hang out at St. Andrew from 3:30 to 6:30 p.m. Friday evenings.

Outreach to others also is one of the main focuses of Outside da Box, a nonprofit ministry that sends DVDs to parishes for free. DVD discussion materials also are available for a small fee, which is used to offset DVD production costs.

"We don't want anybody to say no because they couldn't afford it," Groth said of why the DVDs are offered for free.

Groth, who has been involved in filming since he became a youth minister, said the company evolved when it was clear that there was a need for Catholic videos and DVDs that could be used in youth ministry. The company released its first DVD in November 2006, and last year produced five DVDs and sent 10,000 of them for free.

Outside da Box's lead producer George Pfeiffer said he loves his job, which he said has helped him grow in his faith.

"There's obviously sacrifices, especially being a ministry where we are giving what we do away for free," Pfeiffer said.

Yet, feedback on some of the company's poignant DVDs has helped spur them along, he noted.

"I love being able to work in an area where I feel I'm called to be and have an impact on young people's lives," Groth remarked.

The teens said they enjoyed their own time in the spotlight.

"It's a little weird seeing the camera there out of the corner of my eye, but it hasn't changed anything," said Stephanie Cummings, 15, a sophomore at Eastridge High School.

"I think it's great that we'll actually be able to be part of this,"

said Ian Scheil, 15, a sophomore at Bishop Kearney High School. "More people will be able to understand what LIFE TEEN is."

"It's really cool that somebody's actually taking the time to come in and see (the LIFE TEEN) group," said Aaron Ajegba, 16, a junior at McQuaid Jesuit High School.

EDITOR'S NOTE: For details on Outside da Box, visit www.outsidedabox.com or call 877-640-0700.

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