

An Abundance of Blessings

Special to the Arkansas Catholic by Paul Vitale

It was a little over a year ago when I first met Bob Sullivan on the campus of Rollins College located on the outskirts of Orlando, Florida. Our first meeting was as informal as the next. "Sully", the Youth Minister for the past five years at Holy Name of Jesus Catholic Church in West Palm Beach, Florida, had brought a group of students to listen to speakers present various topics as part of a four-day Leadership PowerCamp sponsored by M.A.D.D. I was there as one of the speakers.

It wasn't until I completed my first of two presentations that I stumbled into "Sully" while walking back to my room; located right next to his, in one of the college dormitories we had both been assigned to. Our initial conversation was brief, but over the course of the next couple days, one discussion led to another. We discussed a variety of topics stemming from his responsibilities as a Youth Minister — the importance of the Catholic Faith and then his incredible experience as one of the *LIFETEEN* leaders in his parish.

"Leading Teens Closer to Christ," he explained, when I asked what the purpose of this high school youth group known as *LIFETEEN* was all about...and he didn't stop there. He educated me on the different community service activities his teens take part in; the weekly gatherings before and during Mass; and LifeNights, which consists of food, fellowship and fun. That conversation was the beginning of sharing an abundance of blessings,

not only with those in his Diocese, but also with many in ours.

The Journey to Little Rock

On a subsequent speaking engagement in another part of Florida, "Sully" and a few of his adult volunteers transported a small group of teens to listen to a talk on being the best that one can be, which was specifically geared toward young people. After that talk, "Sully" and I spoke of an idea for the gang from Holy Name to come to Arkansas for some fun and games during the summer of 2006. "Sully" was all for it — with one condition — "If you can hook us up with some community service in Little Rock, we'll make the trip happen." And so the plans



began.

We picked one of the hottest times of the year for 13 Floridians to travel to our Diocese to volunteer for whatever needed to be done. The last weekend in July, to be exact. When "Sully" and I started discussing the idea of bringing a portion of his *LIFETEEN* group to Arkansas, we

never really talked about the weather. He just wanted to provide his teens the opportunity to work within our community to serve Christ. We'd soon discover, once his group completed their four-day mission trip to Little Rock; that is exactly what had transpired. Nine students, ages 14 to 18, and four adult chaperones boarded a plane for a first-time trip to Arkansas, and journeyed to our State to help clear fence rows, feed the homeless and take part in a day of reflection.

The Many Blessings

It didn't take long for this eager group to get started after arriving and settling in at Fletcher Hall on the grounds of the Diocese of Little Rock.

Thanks to the wonderful cooperation of many at the Diocese, the group found their accommodations to be quite comfortable. Our Lady of Good Counsel was the first stop, where the *LIFETEEN* group began their day participating in a Communion prayer service before tackling the job of clearing away brush and debris from a fencerow stretching the length of a football field. A team of volunteers from Good Counsel brought the

rakes, shovels and other tools and the kids brought the manpower. After five hours in the afternoon heat, the job was complete and the fencerow was clean. Thanks to a well-organized plan, a lot of water and a few bottles of Gatorade, a great deal was accomplished.

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After a little rest and a brief period of time to take in some of the natural beauty surrounding Pinnacle State Park, the group was on to its next stop. Volunteers at Our Lady of Holy Souls prepared a hot meal for delivery and distribution to those individuals residing at the Our House Shelter, located off of Roosevelt Road. What a wonderful blessing the *LIFETEEN* group received, when they were given the opportunity to deliver the hot meals and serve them to those in need. The lasagna, salad and vegetables seemed to go over quite well as many came back for seconds. The homemade brownies probably didn't hurt either. Once all the trays were cleared and the tables were cleaned, a tour was provided to the kids so they would have a better understanding and appreciation of all the Shelter provides. In the end, the

incredible experience bestowed on the minds and souls of these young people seemed to be of great value. *The Many Thanks*
The many blessings would have never happened without those who deserve many thanks. Toward the end of the mission trip, the *LIFETEEN* group attended Mass at Holy Souls where not only did Monsignor Royce Thomas make it a point to welcome the group, so did many other parishioners. This was the type of spirit that made their last day an amazing day of reflection. The kids not only opened their souls to Christ, they opened their minds to one another. Knowing that some have shared the same background growing up while others haven't, the teens meshed together while each shared a part of themselves with the others. "Sully," along with the other adult chaperones, was extremely pleased with the continued spiritual growth evident in the souls of the kids. Thanks to much prayer, various open discussions and a great deal of reflection, the nine students not only

left a mark on Little Rock, a mark was also left on them.

To the volunteers at Our Lady of Good Counsel: Craig Provost, John Breen, Marty Kallenback and Bob Dare; to the Men's Club at Our Lady of Holy Souls and the wonderful cooking of Pete and Cindy Stabnick; and to Liz Tingquist and Dennis Lee for the great deal of help with the accommodations at the Diocese of Little Rock—I thank each and every one of you for making the *LIFETEEN* group from Holy Name Parish, some 1100 miles from home, feel welcomed. And to the kids: Krystel, Monica, Jamee, Lindsay, Nic, Andrew, Jean-Paul, Pete and Kevin—thanks for making the journey. And last but not least, to "Sully," Gina, Eddie and Maria—thank you for caring so much about the future of our children. For it's journeys like these that truly do enable an abundance of blessings.

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