

Sample Bishop's Appeal Testimonial from St. Clare Parish, Wrightstown

Good Morning,

My name is Sarah Heimerl. I am the Youth Minister and Religious Education Coordinator here at St. Clare's. Three years ago, God placed a calling on my heart to return home after graduation to bring the vibrant Catholic faith to the young people of our parish. I was hesitant at first. Knowing that my passion for ministry was what was driving this new adventure, I was not quite sure I had enough education and background to be a resource for others.

With the help of the Green Bay Diocese I began meeting with Diocesan directors to teach me about the material and information I needed to know to do my job of serving our youth.

They have provided numerous opportunities to meet other people in the field where we can share ideas and collaborate on efforts to create more meaningful events for our youth. A group of our middle school students have been attending monthly Faith on Fire nights because of these efforts. They enjoy themselves while at the same time learning more about what it means to be Catholic and what we are called to do as Christians.

This network of local parishes offers our high school students opportunities to hear some great speakers. This past fall, 45 of our students listened to the captivating Jason Evert talk about relationships. They were surrounded by over 1,000 other students from other local parishes as they were moved by his words of wisdom and compassion. I have never seen so many students in one place be almost completely attentive for an hour and a half. Students raved about the night and demanded he come back next year, many felt badly for their friends that were not able to make it.

In addition to social networking, there are leadership days and days of reflection that allow me to deepen and strengthen my own faith so that I can be a better witness to the youth. These sessions introduce faith sharing from different angles so that I can bring them into the classroom and reach a broader range of students. Over the past two years, students have learned how to pray in many different ways including music, meditation, Scripture reading, reflection, Adoration, Eucharistic Celebration, laying on of hands and the list goes on.

Currently I am enrolled in the Commissioned Ministry Program for Lay Persons. After taking only two classes, I have already deepened my appreciation of my own faith. The more I know about the faith, the easier it is to understand what that means to me. We are constantly thinking and applying ways the material we learn in class will apply to our ministry in our parish.

In addition to this program, I have taken advantage of the many Adult Faith Formation opportunities in our parish and in other parishes in the greater Green Bay Diocese. One that many of you attended was the class on the United States Catholic Catechism for Adults given by Rosie Bartel. This series provided

us with a much better understanding of the Church teachings. We also had the option to become certified in Catechesis. If you recall, there was no charge to attend and receive this certification. The Bishop's Appeal funded this and many similar sessions to people all over our Diocese—from Manitowoc to Marinette. Our leaders are better equipped to teach in the classroom because of opportunities like this.

One very heart-warming way this education and support has made a difference is in the lives of our Confirmation students. This year our confirmation candidates were exposed to different ways to think about their faith and different ways to pray. What really stuck with them was the retreat they had attended. Many students were not excited about going on this retreat. They thought it was going to be boring and a waste of their time. Within the first half hour, you could already see the transformations happening. The students were able to open up with their faith, regardless of where that actually was. The students truly felt the presence and Love of our God. After meeting with them one on one in their interviews, more than 90% of the students said the retreat changed their lives—they started to pray more, some for the first time have actually started praying—picking up a Bible and reading Scripture. There was a handful that admitted they only attended Mass on holidays, however, after the retreat they have not missed one weekend of Mass.

The retreat left them yearning for more. Students continually come forward looking for more ways to deepen their faith. This is happening not only here in our parish, but throughout our area and throughout the world. The Bishop's Appeal helps to prepare our leaders of faith to better serve our youth and that is why I support the Bishop's Appeal.

Before I go, I want to leave you with this thought—God doesn't call the abled, He enables the called.

I strongly feel that through the Diocese of Green Bay, with the support of the Bishop's Appeal, I am better able to serve you, your children and your families. If you have already made your gift to the Bishop's Appeal, I sincerely thank you. For those who have not given or have never given, I would like to challenge you this year to make a gift to the Bishop's Appeal. Take a few days to pray about it. Please consider the difference you could be making in lives of the children of our parish and our local parishes. These are not the children of our future; they are the children of today. Let's create the best environment we can to allow their faith to blossom.

Thank you for your time and consideration of the Bishops Appeal. Have a wonderful day.