

Young adults recognized for contributing to parish and community life

SCRANTON — From volunteering as altar servers and lectors, to serving as religious education teachers, and assisting at parish festivals, the young adults of our community make a profound difference through their service.

This year, more than 500 students in 8th and 12th grades were honored with the Bishop's Youth Award during three special Masses held on consecutive Sundays in Lent.

Each Mass filled the Cathedral of Saint Peter to capacity as family and friends gathered to celebrate the outstanding contributions of these dedicated young people.

"It truly just demonstrates how many extraordinary young kids there are that demonstrate their faith very well," Sienna Simmons, an eighth-grade award recipient from Saint Peter Parish in Wellsboro, said.

Since 1996, the Bishop's Youth Award has been presented to students who have demonstrated exceptional dedication to their faith through volunteer service in their parish, Catholic school, or community.

"It's a great honor to be here today to be recognized by the church and by the diocese as a hard-working young individual



Sienna Simmons, an eighth-grade award recipient from Saint Peter Parish in Wellsboro, receives her Bishop's Youth Award on March 23, 2025.

that likes to take part in their parish community," A.J. Piestrak, a twelfth-grade award recipient from Holy Cross Parish in Olyphant, added.

The Most Rev. Joseph C. Bambera, Bishop of Scranton, presided over all three Masses, and took the opportunity on each occasion to express his gratitude to the recipients.

"We honor and recognize these young men and women for their commitment to live their faith and to respond to the invitation that the Lord Jesus gives to us all to walk as His disciples, to serve one another, and to provide hope to our world," Bishop Bambera said.



Young adults and their families from parishes in the northern region of the Diocese of Scranton filled the Cathedral of Saint Peter in Scranton to capacity on April 6, 2025, to celebrate the third and final Bishop's Youth Awards Mass of this year. (Photos/Mike Melisky)

During each Mass, the homily was given by a priest currently serving a parish in that region.

During the first Mass on March 23 for the eastern and western regions of the Diocese, Father Thomas Augustine, Administrator *Pro Tem*, Saint Brigid Parish, Friendsville, spoke about life being a journey.

"You are not walking alone. You are walking with Jesus. He is walking with you," Father Augustine said. "The love of God, the power of God, as long as it's with you, you'll never lose anything. God always will be with you, and he will give you every grace to find true success."

During the second Mass on March 30 for the southern region of the Diocese, Father Philbert Takyi-Nketiah, Administrator, Holy Spirit Parish, Mocanaqua, called on the students to be ambassadors for Christ.

"Each of you, in your actions, your ways, in your choices, have the responsibility to reflect God's love, God's compassion, and truth to the world around you," Father Philbert stated.

During the final Mass on April 6 for the northern region of the Diocese, Father Cyril Edwards, Pastor, Mary, Mother of God Parish, Scranton, told



Damen Fox, a 12th-grade award recipient from Queen of the Apostles Parish in Avoca, receives his Bishop's Youth Award on March 30, 2025.

are your family. You may not be blood-related, but you are family."

As each Mass concluded, Bishop Bambera offered a final word of encouragement, urging them to continue serving their community, loving one another, and "being witnesses of Jesus Christ in all that you do."

Ella Carroll, a 12th-grade recipient from Saint Joseph Parish in Matamoras, took those words to heart.

"God is always the answer to the issues that you're having. Practicing your faith as a young person will help you develop and use that faith in your future as an adult," the Pike County teenager said.



Luke Zipprich, Kali Harvatine, and Albert Davis, award recipients from Saint Patrick Parish in Nicholson, participate in the Liturgy of the Eucharist during the Bishop's Youth Award Mass on April 6, 2025.



Father Thomas Augustine, Administrator Pro Tem, Saint Brigid Parish in Friendsville, delivers the homily during the first Bishop's Youth Award Mass on March 23, 2025.



During this Jubilee Year of Hope, we talked with several recipients of the Bishop's Youth Award about how they are involved in their parish or Catholic school, and most importantly, what they get from serving others.



Ava DeMichele
Saint Therese Parish,
Shavertown

"I have been altar serving since I was in elementary school and I try my best to go to Mass every week ... Having a relationship with God is so beautiful and such a special thing. I try to talk about my faith and show people the best I can that it's a really wonderful thing."



Ella Salak
Saint Eulalia Parish,
Roaring Brook Township

"I volunteer as a catechist for the kindergarten class in religious education and I'm also a part of the welcome weekend receptions at my church. Seeing my students is the best part of my weekend because I know that I'm making an impact on them."



Antonio Ingargiola
SS Anthony & Rocco
Parish, Dunmore

"Right after First Holy Communion, being able to altar serve was the most exciting thing ever. I also volunteer at our picnic to help out with the kids' games, and I am also a sacristan ... It is always such a joy on the weekends to be able to help my parish any way I can."



Eve Corazza
Saint John Bosco Parish,
Conyngham

"I help in the faith formation program in my church. I've been helping out since 9th grade but I've been helping with Vacation Bible Camps since middle school ... I think it's really rewarding to see the kids grow up and go through each level and eventually get to Confirmation and it's just really rewarding to see how much they grow and to know that you have a part in that."



Benjamin White
Prince of Peace Parish,
Old Forge

"I've been an altar server since third grade. I normally take the Cross up every single week and I think doing that has really defined my faith. It is beautiful. I love it. I will probably go for Eucharist Minister training soon. I want to do that."



Nico Warhola
Our Lady of the Rosary
Parish, Carbondale

"I am a lector for Saint Rose Church and have been for almost two years now. I like to read at Mass in school (Holy Cross High School) whenever I get the opportunity ... I think it's important to be the example of the church now."

Diocese of Scranton
CATHOLIC
 SCHOOL SYSTEM
 FAITH • ACADEMICS • SERVICE

The Diocese of Scranton is committed to educating our students in an environment that is academically excellent and facilitates the development of moral judgment and Christian decision-making. We are proud to share the following successes of our students in the classroom and in their service to others. Each day, our schools are fulfilling their mission of preparing today's youth and young adults to become tomorrow's faith-filled leaders.

Using the little boy from the Loaves & Fishes gospel reading as an example, the Most Rev. Joseph C. Bambera, Bishop of Scranton, recently shared with students and faculty at five Diocesan schools how their commitment to serving others is how miracles happen. "We are called through the Eucharist to love, feed, forgive and care for one another and become what we receive — the Body and Blood of Jesus," explained Bishop Bambera.



Good Shepherd Academy, Kingston



Saint Jude School, Mountain Top



Notre Dame Jr./Sr. High School,
East Stroudsburg



Saint Clare/Saint Paul School, Scranton



Notre Dame Elementary School, East Stroudsburg



Students and teachers from **Holy Redeemer High School in Wilkes-Barre** made a Jubilee Year pilgrimage to Saint Nicholas Church in Wilkes-Barre to fulfill the requirements needed to receive an Indulgence for the Jubilee Year. The school journeyed as pilgrims to this designated location to attend Mass, pray, and receive the Eucharist. Attendees will receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation within 20 days of this visit, which is the third step. They had already completed the fourth component needed for the Indulgence by saying prayers for our Holy Father, Pope Francis.



Kindergarteners at **Saint John Neumann Elementary School in Williamsport** have learned why Jesus was named the "Good Shepherd" in their religion class.



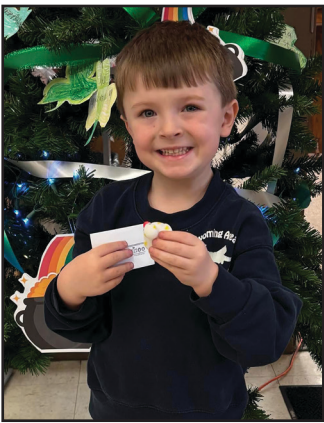
Students at **Saint Nicholas/Saint Mary School in Wilkes-Barre** began preparing for Holy Week with a presentation of "The Living Stations" to family and friends alike.



Students from **Saint Agnes School in Towanda** clicked their heels and were magically transported to Kansas and the Emerald City during an April weekend, performing “The Wizard of Oz” youth edition to the delight of theatergoers.



Each year, students at **Epiphany School in Sayre** host a Lenten food drive to help the less fortunate in their community. Third graders are pictured standing proudly next to the 472 cans of fruit they helped sort and count.



Bryson O'Donovan, pre-k student at **Wyoming Area Catholic School in Exeter**, stands in front of the school's Saint Patrick's Day tree holding his “Lucky Duck,” which made him a winner in the PTG's March contest.



As a thank you for sending cards to the station and always supporting the department, Chief Derek Fozard and Officer Jason Krawczyk from the Jessup Police Department visited and deputized students at **La Salle Academy in Jessup**.



J.J. Rupprecht, a sixth grade student at **Holy Rosary School in Duryea**, designed special t-shirts for the class to wear as they celebrated Pi Day 2025.



Showing students that reading can be fun and exciting, the team at **Saint Mary of Mount Carmel School in Dunmore** energizes students with “Flashlight Friday Reading.”



Students from **All Saints Academy in Scranton** had the privilege of a “blue dress down day” in support of Autism Awareness.



On a beautiful spring day, students at **Saint John Neumann Jr./Sr. High School in Williamsport** soaked up the sun while soaking in knowledge with time spent in an outdoor classroom.