

# PARISH SPOTLIGHT

## ST. CATHERINE OF SWEDEN - WILDWOOD, PENNSYLVANIA

For most people, Appalachia conjures up the sound of folk music flowing beside the river, echoing through endless mountains. For the teens and parishioners of St. Catherine of Sweden in Wildwood, Pennsylvania simpler images come to mind: a neighbor in need of small to major repairs on his home; teens and adults serving side-by-side; children at play pulling someone from a task only to discover the essential task at hand, the children. With images like these, you can imagine that words spoken by St. Paul to the Galatians would create a powerful mission trip focus: "Let us not grow tired of doing good, for in due time we shall reap our harvest, if we do not give up." (Gal 6:9) And giving up is not in youth minister Tom Franzak's vocabulary. It is this drive and passion that has led Tom and the St. Catherine's community to implement the Life Teen program in their parish. They are planning on kicking off this fall.

Galatians 6:9 are words that Tom will need to repeat on days

when starting Life Teen is full of twists and turns; words that will challenge the adults of the parish as they begin reaching out to high school teens through a weekly Life Teen ministry. What started with a handful of people going down to West Virginia on mission to do some repair work became bigger year after year. Their approach to starting Life Teen will be similar: take a handful of people (or more) and go out to do some repair work, but this time the work isn't on homes or buildings. This time the work is on building teens' relationship with Christ.

St. Catherine already has a lot in place to be successful in this new mission; a community connected to their youth, trust in one another, encouraging, servant hearts and an understanding of the sacred. "Every year the mission trip is from Sunday to Sunday," said Tom. Of course you get the usual people questioning if they can come late or leave early but "it's important to keep the week sacred". This commitment to a full week of service and the sacrifice involved is what strengthens the community that gathers to serve. They pray that this understanding of the sacred will translate into their youth Mass and Life Nights.

At the end of the week witnesses are shared that are as awe-inspiring as an Appalachian sunset. One adult recalled how teens ministered to him and took care of him on the work site. Another adult shared how much he respected the young people. No longer do adults see teens as the Church of tomorrow. "The Church of tomorrow is ministering to you right now." Adult and teen teams create a unique brotherhood and sisterhood. They have a shared experience beyond the walls of a Church, outside the context of Mass. "It is what Church is supposed to be."

Tom knows that "Church is messy and it can be hard



St. Catherine of Sweden Mission Trip