

Ignite Your Torch conference held at St. Catharine



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Participants of the Ignite Your Torch conference prayed the rosary across the street from the EMW Women's Surgical Center, where abortions are performed, June 29. The Catholic youth conference took place June 27 to 30 at St. Catharine College in Springfield, Ky.

(Record Photos by Jessica Able)

By Jessica Able, Record Staff Writer

SPRINGFIELD, Ky. — More than 200 teenagers from across the United States were told to stand up for their faith at the Ignite Your Torch conference held at St. Catharine College here.

That's the message Simon Michalak, 15, took away from the Catholic youth gathering.

"We are called to ignite our torch, to be conquerors for Christ," said Michalak, who is a student at Immaculata Classical Academy in Louisville. "We need to stand up for our faith and not be afraid."

In its ninth year, the Ignite your Torch conference has gradually gained momentum. Attendees traveled from as far as Belgium in order to attend the four-day retreat this year.

A diocese in Washington state sent representatives to take part in the conference, too. They plan to host their own Ignite Your Torch conference later this year.

"This is the first year we are branching off," said Tamara Cesare, president of Catholics United for Life and coordinator of Ignite Your Torch. "We are seeing if we can go coast to coast. About 200 are already signed up" for the Washington conference.

Organizers of the Ignite Your Torch conference aim to "foster well-formed Catholic youth in a fun youth-oriented environment," Cesare said. "We want to give young people a sense that they are not alone in a world that is becoming more and more hostile to Catholic values."

This year 234 teen participants and an additional 115 or so adults, priests and women and men religious took part in the Catholic youth conference. About half of the teens were from the Archdiocese of Louisville and the other half came from elsewhere in the country.

The participants had the opportunity to take part in the sacraments, talk with priests and men and women religious and share their faith in small discussion groups, Cesare said.

“They have high ideals and want what is good. They want a better world; that’s what amazes me about the youth,” Cesare said. “They have more idealism and a greater sense of goodness than the adult world does.”

The teens heard presentations from priests and men and women religious about living like Christ, the sanctity of life and marriage and vocations. There also was time for prayer, including a Holy Hour, rosary, Benediction and eucharistic adoration.

Jacinta King, 16, said she thought the conference was well structured and said she enjoyed the talks she heard, especially one about the dangers of the Internet. King, who is originally from central Kentucky, traveled with her family from her home in Belgium to attend the conference.

“The Internet can make people self-centered about what they want,” King said. “I learned that you got to be careful about what you post.”

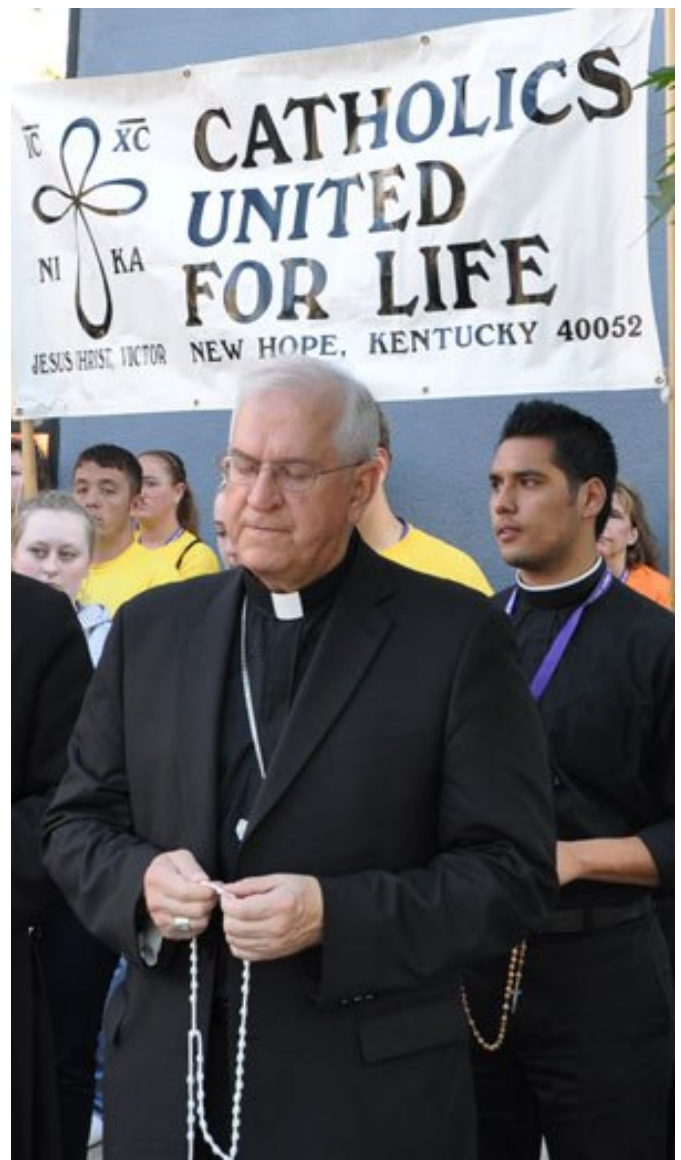
On Saturday, the Ignite group traveled to downtown Louisville to pray the rosary across the street from the EMW Women’s Surgical Center, where abortions are performed. Archbishop Joseph E. Kurtz joined them in prayer.

Cesare said, “By bringing them to an abortion center, I hope it opens their hearts to all. As harsh a reality as it is, I hope it fosters a particular love for the unborn.”

She said her main hope with the teen conference is that the teens understand they matter in the world.

“Pope Benedict talked about how the youth contribution is vital to the world,” she added. “I hope they don’t think their contributions of idealism and enthusiasm are lost in this world. I hope they believe goodness can exist.”

The Ignite Your Torch conference is sponsored by Catholics United for Life and the St. Martin de Porres lay Dominican community in New Hope, Ky.



Archbishop Joseph E. Kurtz joined the Ignite Your Torch participants in prayer June 29.