Dearest St. Paul Parishioners & Families,

After completing my first full year as the Director of Youth Ministry, I wanted to take the time to reflect and connect with you all on this past year. I should first begin with saying thank you to all of you, our friars, and the amazing co-workers and staff I have had the privilege of working with these past 12 months. Your warm welcome, support, encouragement, and enthusiasm has truly made this year fruitful for our youth. Your prayers, love, support, donations, and sharing of all our events, has been a blessing to this ministry. When they say the expression, “it takes a village”, most underestimate the value of truly having a faithful and supportive “village” simply because they have not experienced what it means to be a part of this St. Paul community.

As a parishioner, employee, and volunteer, St. Paul’s has been home to me since I was a child and my family first moved to Berlin in 1986. Bringing my family to church here and seeing them grow in faith, called me to help others receive this gift as well. As the Youth Ministry Director, I have been privileged to create many opportunities for kids grades 6-12, and our young adults to dive deeper into their faith, so it grows beyond Catholic faith knowledge, but a true relationship with our Lord and application of our faith in their daily lives. Being a Catholic isn’t a box to check off or a label we get to use. Being Catholic is about whose children we are and how we live our lives so we can enjoy eternal life in heaven. My mission is for our youth to always have somewhere to go where they feel loved, can grow and develop a community in fellowship, and truly get to know the love, goodness, and truth of all God has for them. The world is noisy, busy, and distracting. Our teens (and all of us) need a place to find peace, be with the Lord, and have opportunities to slow down and grow in relationship with Him.

With Youth Ministry, all that is open to them, and we have a little fun doing it too!

This year we dove into the gift of all life and honoring and respecting it, learning how we can share our faith with confidence and love when we are called to evangelize, recognizing the difference of knowing of God and truly seeking to know God in our lives, experiencing the true power of prayer, digging deep into God's word through Bible Study, and spending more time answering the calls God has for us through Adoration, Lenten & Advent Reflection, Confession, and more. Our youth experienced first hand the value of offering our gifts, time, and talents to those in need around us when working on the grounds of the Franciscan Sisters of the Eucharist, providing Baggies of Love with essentials for the homeless, caroling to local seniors at the Bojnowski Manor, spending one on one time at Bingo with our Grandmas, growing in connection with our own St. Paul's community through our Catholic Café, collecting food for the St. Clare's food pantry during our Thankful Turkey Trot, creating care packages for our College Students, teaching our younger "buddies in faith" about the Bible through Bible Story Adventure Week, making baggies of sweet treats for our elderly at the Little Sisters of the Poor, and more. Although we have had so many children come from our Faith Formation program and some from St. Paul's School, we have drawn in friends and family members outside of our parish as well. There has been something for everyone, and yet there is so much more I still want to bring forth in this upcoming year for all our youth and their families too.

Thank You

The gift of faith is something we can't buy or put a price tag on, for it is truly priceless. This gift starts at home with families who open the eyes, ears, and hearts of their children by introducing them to our Father, bringing them to mass, receiving the sacraments, and constantly including faith into their daily lives. Families are busier than ever and are being pulled in so many directions. Youth Ministry, along with Fatih Formation and all our church ministries and events are supplemental to all that is taught and practiced at home. This is why we put so much emphasis on all we do so we can be partners in growing the faith of families and creating a future generation who serves our Lord and makes heaven crowded.

It has been a busy 12 months, but oh so fruitful as well. I look forward to another year of bringing our beautiful Catholic faith alive to our youth, helping them grow in relationship with Jesus, and desiring to live and understand their faith, so it serves as their on-going life's direction and not just a mark on their map of life.

Please pray for our youth, their families, and all who try to help build God's kingdom here on earth with our youth. Thank you for your ongoing love, prayers, and support. May we all hear all the ways God calls us and be ready to answer and serve.

God bless you all,

Suzy Gujda

