

Norwalk

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St. Philip's youth group teens extend hunger experience with trip to Africa

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NORWALK — A lesson that started in the gymnasium of the former St. Philip School on France Street has turned into a trip that will take four teenagers from St. Philip Church's Youth Group thousands of miles across the globe.

The four teens, who will join nine other teenagers from across the country on a trip to Malawi, Africa, as members of a study tour sponsored by World Vision — a Christian humanitarian organization — are more familiar with hunger than most their age.

For the past four years, the St. Philip Youth Group has spearheaded a 30-hour famine in which members forgo eating in order to call attention to the crisis of world hunger and raise money for World Vision and Manna House Soup Kitchen in Norwalk. In the past four years, St. Philip has raised more than \$38,400 for World Vision and more than \$7,600 for Manna House.

More than 100 teenagers in Norwalk participated in the 2007 famine Feb. 10 and 11, making it hard for Kali DiMarco, the adult coordinator of the youth group, to choose just four to go to Africa. In the end, DiMarco said, the choice was made based on commitment to the project, funds raised and participation.

The four youth representing St. Philip are Adrienne DiMarco, Michael Pappa, Devan Yoder and Brendan Giolitto. Jill Yoder will be chaperoning the trip. The teens leave on July 8 and return July 18.

The trip to Africa will add another dimension to an experience that has already changed the way in which the teens think about and view world hunger.

"This year they will get to complete the cycle and bring it full circle," DiMarco said. "In the past, they've worked so hard at raising the funds. Now, they will bring the food and medicine to the people themselves so not only will they have heard about the lives these people lead, but they will see firsthand who they are helping by participating in the famine. I think emotionally it will be a big challenge to see what they'll see, how bad it is. But on the other hand, they'll see what a difference they've made and whose lives they've saved."

Devan Yoder knows that the benefits will far outweigh the cost but admits she is a little nervous about the trip, too.

"At first I was really happy (about going on the trip), and then I got a little scared because I'm afraid of flying for long distances, but I know it's a really good opportunity," she said. "I'm really looking forward to meet the people we raised the money for and to see up close why we're doing what we're doing (with the famine)."

For the Rev. Michael Boccaccio, pastor of St. Philip Parish, this is a proud time and one that he hopes will change not only the lives of the four teen travelers but the lives of his parishioners as well.

"I think this will strengthen the ties between youth and the rest of the parish because when the parishioners witness what these young people are doing, I think they will be inspired," Boccaccio said. "I also think this will make the globe shrink a little bit for all of us as our young people will be



Contributed photo

St. Philip Church's Youth Group members gather for the 2007 30 Hour Famine in this file photo. Participants forgo eating to bring a spotlight on world hunger and raise funds to support World Vision and Manna House Soup Kitchen in Norwalk.



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On Feb. 10 and 11, teens participate in the 2007 30 Hour Famine in the gymnasium of the former St. Philip School on France Street in Norwalk.

directly in touch with another continent and alerting the rest of us to a world beyond ourselves."

Boccaccio said that through this trip the teens are really living their faith.

"There is certainly a spiritual dimension (of this trip) in terms of

representing and living the Gospel of Jesus as these young people share of his life and light with those they meet in Africa, not in a pressuring way but in the way that our faith invites us to reach out to others," Boccaccio said.

The parish is also supporting the teens through an African-themed,

send-off dinner on Friday, June 1. The dinner will help defray the cost of the trip, which is approximately \$2,000 per teen.

For more information on the dinner, or about making a donation to the World Vision trip, call (203) 847-4549.