



All Are Welcome

by Katie Muller, MA, Theology

*Graduate of Echo Faith Formation Leadership Program,
University of Notre Dame*

*Director of High School Youth Ministry for St. Paul
Catholic Church and Middle School Religion Teacher, St.
Petersburg, Florida*

If someone had asked me when I was younger what I wanted to be when I grew up, I guarantee that even the most obvious hinting and prompting would not have elicited the response, “I want to work in a parish!” I grew up as a Mass-attending, Catholic-school-educated “cradle Catholic.” My family was involved in the life of our parish, but mainly through the school.

In high school and college I continued my involvement in the Catholic schools I attended. I participated in campus ministry retreats, I served as a liturgical minister, and I went on service trips. Still, it wasn’t until my junior year of college that I considered a career in ministry and switched my major to theology. Even then, I was determined to work at a Catholic school. Parish ministry never crossed my mind.

During my senior year of college, I heard about a program called Echo at the University of Notre Dame. Echo is a service-learning program that offers a

two-year apprenticeship in parish ministry, the opportunity to live in an intentional faith community, and academic formation to earn a master of arts degree in theology. The Holy Spirit was moving in my life. Before I knew it, I was working at St. Paul Catholic Church in St. Petersburg, Florida, and spending my summers studying theology at Notre Dame.

I went into Echo with low expectations of being a parish staff member. I suppose I didn’t really know *what* to expect. During my two-year apprenticeship I worked mostly with youth ministry, Confirmation preparation, and the RCIA program. Since completing my apprenticeship and graduating from Notre Dame, I have stayed at St. Paul as the director of high school youth ministry for the parish and the middle school religion teacher for the school. While working at St. Paul, I have discovered a passion for parish ministry, particularly for bringing young people into the life of the Church.

I relish opportunities to help teens and young adults recognize how greatly their presence is needed in our parish communities.

Parish ministry offers an opportunity for people of all ages to come together and learn from one another in a way that I have not witnessed in any other environment. I have learned just as much from my co-workers' wisdom as I have from the innocence of my students and teens. When we are authentically living as the Body of Christ, we can recognize the beauty of shared wisdom, the blessing of serving others with our gifts, and the humility that comes from allowing ourselves to be served by others.

In my work I have seen adults moved to tears through the witness of

teenagers. I have used the gifts of technology-savvy young adults to improve the ways we communicate with our parishioners. I have had middle school students envision and implement service projects in response to local, national, and global causes. I have been inspired by adults' hopes and prayers for young people. *This is the New Evangelization.* The Holy Spirit is awakening the faith of our parishioners in unexpected and incredible ways through the witness of all people—young and old—who have the courage to put their faith into action.

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