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On the road for Christ

Kathy Loney

It is not a mission for the faint of heart: living out of a suitcase for a year and traveling from town to town to bravely face crowds of teenagers every day to talk about God. But for 110 young adult Catholics, this is exactly what they had in mind when they left their careers and colleges behind.

This mission is the work of National Evangelization Teams Ministries, based in West St. Paul, Minn. Since 1981, the nonprofit organization has sent more than 1,900 young adults around the country and abroad to lead retreats for Catholic teens.

Each year, NET accepts and trains 110 young adult volunteers who will work in teams of 10 to 12 members and share their experiences of God with thousands of sometimes skeptical youth.

"There are a lot of young people who were born Catholic, raised Catholic, but who have never made some sort of internal decision to follow Christ," said Mark Berchem, NET's founder. "We're trying to help these teens take a look at the faith they've inherited and make it their own."

NET Ministries began as an extension of a retreat program at the Catholic Youth Center in St. Paul, Minn. Observing that young people have a need to hear a clear proclamation of the Gospel, the youth center staff sent out a one-month pilot retreat team of college students. After receiving an overwhelming response to this pilot project, NET Ministries was formed and the first September to May team was commissioned in 1981. Since then, NET teams have led more than 25,000 retreats and ministered to more than 1.6 million young people.

After raising sponsorship money from their home communities, NET team members receive five weeks of training in prayer and Scripture, content of the Gospel message, Catholic identity, Christian character, evangelization and retreat ministry skills.

The peer ministry method is key to the success of NET. "When you are ministering to people of relatively the same age, it's easier for the youth and the NET team members to understand each other," said Matt Karr of Kansas City, Mo., who served with NET for two years. "What I realized as a NET team member is that you've dealt with a lot of the same issues that the youth are now facing, since you're from the same generation. That makes you an effective minister and also a credible witness of faith in the eyes of the youth."

From Nov. 10 until Nov. 23, the NET team will be available to give retreats in the Diocese of Fargo. If you are interested in providing this exciting retreat experience for your young people, we have a couple of dates left for you to book the NET team to give a retreat at your parish.

For more information on NET Ministries, contact Kathy Loney at (701) 356- 7902 or kathy.loney@fargodiocese.org.

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