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Hook, Line and Catechism: Young Evangelists Champion the Church

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ST. PAUL, Minn. — All newly confirmed Catholics in the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis get a copy of the Catechism, but the bishop doesn't have to pay for them or pass them out himself. Corpus Christi Catechism Fund, a group of young adults at the University of St. Thomas, do that for him.

Corpus Christi co-founder Jason Adkins, 24, remembers how the initiative got started — with a student prayer group.

"One of the statistics that kept coming up in our prayer group was that the largest Christian group in the United States is Catholic, but the second-largest is ex-Catholics," he said. "We thought: What's going on with that? From personal experience, we saw the effects of poor catechesis and thought this would be a great step toward possibly remedying the situation."

Give them an "A" for enterprise and industriousness. After securing Auxiliary Bishop Frederick Campbell as episcopal overseer of the project, the students worked out a deal with the publisher of the Catechism to obtain the books at a reduced cost. This year they distributed 8,300 copies at 40 confirmation ceremonies; now they're in the process of raising private funds to pay for them and continue the project next year.

Reassuring Resource

The group's motto is "Renewing the body of Christ, one member at a time." The members' hope is to see their movement spread across America and expand into other evangelization projects.

Corpus Christi caught the atten-

tion of the St. Paul Catholic Defense League, which honored the three founders — Adkins; Annamarie Cumpston, 25; and Stephen Maas, 24 — with its Catholics of the Year award in April. Cumpston had just celebrated her one-year anniversary of entering the Catholic Church. She said the Catechism played a key role in her conversion.

"I couldn't believe that there was a physical presence of the Church, that I could just look up a subject and find out what the Church teaches on it," she said. "I started reading it and it spoke to me unlike anything I had ever read before. It is totally enriching for anyone who wants to pick it up."

Merlyn Scroggins, president of the Catholic Defense League, said it's refreshing to see a group of young people so positive about their Catholic faith. "It's wonderful that they're putting the Catechism into the hands of the newly confirmed," Scroggins said. "It's a marvelous reference and gives you the ability to respond to almost anything in life. People who don't see a need for it haven't thought it through too much."

Adkins said he has great hope for the future of the Church, even during the current crisis, which he terms "purgation."

"No one like us is getting quoted in the paper," he said. "My sense is that the media may think they are doing a public service, but the faith is alive and people are excited. The Church offers something else than the popular culture and people are hungry for it. We really fundamentally want to invigorate authentic Catholic culture."

The Fire of Faith

Adkins attributed his inspiration to the Center for Catholic Studies at St.



From left, Stephen Maas, Annamarie Cumpston and Jason Adkins were awarded Catholics of the Year by the Catholic Defense League in St. Paul, Minn., shown with CDL's president, Merlyn Scroggins. (Photo courtesy of Catholic Defense League)

Thomas, where he and Maas are doing graduate work. The program includes one entire semester on the Catechism.

This gives him a deeper appreciation for the relevance of Catholic teachings to today's problems, he said, adding that there are about 30 or 40 young adults in their network at the university who are interested in evangelization efforts.

"A lot of young adults in this area are really on fire with the faith," he said. "There's really a surge of young adults around the diocese who are involved with a lot of things. It's springtime in the Church, but it's just the seeds."

Dr. Don Briel, director of the Center for Catholic Studies, said that after 21 years at St. Thomas, he clearly sees a difference in this generation of young Catholics.

"A certain percentage of them are largely indifferent to their faith, but there's a significant and increasing percentage who are highly committed, very bright and very engaged," he said. "In some cases, their formation has not been very strong, but they are deeply interested in recover-

ing it. So I think that's a great sign of hope for the future."

Adkins, who said he grew up in a typical suburban Catholic parish "where they don't teach anything," never missed Mass on Sunday. "But I was searching intellectually," he recalled. "Fortunately, I had some good people guiding me that got me into the faith."

Maas, too, said he was raised in a "solid Catholic family" and knew of the Catechism before he was confirmed. He has a multimedia background and has been reflecting lately on how to use modern media as a tool of evangelization. He worked with the Human Life Alliance to develop its outreach materials for college campuses. He also completed a documentary video based on World Youth Day 2000 titled "Don't Turn Back" and would like to produce a DVD on contraception that would target Generation X-ers.

New tactics will help bridge the generation gap, he said, and win the battle for the minds of the youth. "We are just faithful," he said. "The Lord takes it where he wants to take it."