

# Reconciliation before confirmation

written by Submitted Information |

In November, nearly 100 young junior-high-age students from four Little Rock area parishes attended a pre-confirmation retreat at the 4-H Center in Ferndale.

The sacrament of reconciliation was an integral part of the retreat, and three wonderful local priests bravely volunteered to assist: Fathers Erik Pohlmeier and Tom Marks from Our Lady of the Holy Souls, and Father Josh Stengel from Our Lady of Good Counsel. Additionally, three of our retired priests living at St. John's Manor were invited to help: Msgr. John O'Donnell, Father Ed Graves and Father Tom Keller. My job was to deliver these three to the 4-H Center safely and on time. Easier said than done considering what turned out to be poor navigation skills; but with only one or two wrong turns, and a few quick "Hail Mary's", the three senior padres made it to the retreat.

The first hint that something amazing was about to happen came about when I casually mentioned on the way over that there were approximately 100 young people at the retreat. Silence in the truck. They had no idea the number was so large. After they caught their collective breath (and displaying a total lack of fear and angst), my three charges buzzed with excitement and delight about helping to hear Confessions from so many young people.

"What a great opportunity," said Msgr. O'Donnell.

"I am absolutely happy to help," said Father Graves.

"Really looking forward to it," said Father Keller.

After a (very) quick dinner, I shuttled the three to the main hall and they donned alb and stole in preparation for the night's adventure. About two hours (and eight dozen kids) later, *consummatum est* — they were finished. My daughter Sara helped me to bundle them up and get them to the family truckster for the drive home. And here I witnessed the most remarkable thing: although a bit tired, all three priests *were absolutely on top of the world*. After nearly two hours of hearing confessions (*from teenagers, no less*) the reverend fathers were *ready and willing for more*.

"What great young people", said Msgr. O'Donnell.

"The kids were all very respectful and sincere," said Father Graves.

"I think that went spectacularly well," said Father Keller.

During the 40-minute ride home, they talked about all they had seen & heard: great kids, wonderful music, outstanding adult supervision, Eucharistic Exposition, great kids (emphasis this time on "great"), etc. To tell the truth, their undisguised delight at being part of something so important and so significant as confirmation preparation touched me deeply. I thought to myself: *what fine men of God*.

How lucky we are to have so many good, holy, humble, manly priests serving our diocese. What great examples of love and service they bring us. And even in their most-deserved retirement,

our priests still yearn to be of service and rejoice in the opportunity.

Afterward, my Sara told me that the Saturday evening service with confession was the high-mark of the retreat. "The kids just loved having the priests in attendance and available," she said. "Many had not been to confession in some time. What a difference the priests made *just by sharing their evening with us.*"

As I dropped the retired priests off at St. John's Manor, I thanked them once again for their service. It had been a long evening; they were slowly starting to fade. But they weren't quite ready to throw in the towel.

"It was my pleasure and privilege", said Msgr. O'Donnell.

"I'm so glad I was invited", said Father Graves.

"Wouldn't have missed it for the world," said Father Keller; "although I'll be up most of the night now just thinking about how great it was ..."