

# Activist to teens: Jesus' mercy is available after abortion

written by Special to Arkansas Catholic |



Jack Smith, a member of the diocese's Youth Advisory Council and St. Jude Church in Jacksonville, leads an icebreaker in which he acts like he is riding a roller coaster and the

audience has to follow his moves, to open the Weekend for Life for high school students Jan 21, the night before the annual Eucharistic procession, Mass and March for Life in Little Rock. (Chris Price photo)



Members of the diocese's Youth Advisory Council lead an icebreaker to get teens up and moving at the beginning of the Weekend for Life for high school students Jan 21, the night before the annual eucharistic procession, Mass and March for Life in Little Rock. (Chris Price photo)



Gillian Lachowsky, co-chair of the diocese's Youth Advisory Council and member of St.

Mary Church in Altus, addresses high school students from youth groups across the state at the Weekend for Life Jan 21, the night before the annual eucharistic procession, Mass and March for Life in Little Rock. (Chris Price photo)



Members of Team Jesus, a teen band based at Christ the King Church in Little Rock, provided music before the keynote speaker at the the Weekend for Life Jan 21, the night before the annual eucharistic procession, Mass and March for Life in Little Rock. (Chris Price photo)



Youth Advisory Council member Zach Ellis (right), a parishioner at Our Lady of Holy Souls in Little Rock, encourages Psalm Wistrand and Hudson Vacca, members of St. Agnes Church in

Mena, to participate in icebreakers to open the Weekend for Life Jan 21, the night before the annual eucharistic procession, Mass and March for Life in Little Rock. (Chris Price photo)



Youth Advisory Council member Ismael &ldquo;Izzy&rdquo; Contreras, a member of Our Lady of Good Counsel in Little Rock, prays during the opening of the diocese&rsquo;s Weekend for Life Jan 2, the night before the annual eucharistic procession, Mass and March for Life in Little Rock. (Chris Price photo)



Youth Advisory Council member Hailey Hogan, a member of St. Paul the Apostle Church in Pocahontas, helps girls from the youth group at Immaculate Conception Church in Fort Smith

learn the dance moves for an icebreaker at the Weekend for Life the night before the annual eucharistic procession, Mass and March for Life. (Chris Price photo)



Youth Advisory Council member Ismael &ldquo;Izzy&rdquo; Contreras, a parishioner at Our Lady of Good Counsel in Little Rock, flips during the &ldquo;Bust a flow&rdquo; icebreaker during the opening of the diocese&rsquo;s Weekend for Life in Little Rock Jan 21. During the game, someone demonstrates a dance and the crowd is supposed to replicate the moves. Needless to say, Izzy was flying solo. (Chris Price photo)



Julia Holcomb Misley, who as a teenager became pregnant and aborted Aerosmith singer

Steven Tyler's child and later converted to Catholicism and became an anti-abortion activist, was the keynote speaker at the diocese's Weekend for Life for teenagers in Little Rock Jan 21. (Chris Price photo)



Even the adults, like Clare Doss, a chaperone for the youth group at St. Anne Church in Berryville, had fun at the diocese's Weekend for Life for teenagers in Little Rock Jan 21. (Chris Price photo)



Teens from the youth group at Immaculate Conception Church in Fort Smith lean in with full attention as Julia Holcomb Misley, who became pregnant and aborted Aerosmith singer Steven

Tyler's child as a teenager and later converted to Catholicism and became an anti-abortion activist, gives her testimony at the diocese's Weekend for Life for teenagers in Little Rock Jan 21. (Chris Price photo)

[Previous](#)

[Next](#)

Sex, drugs and rock and roll are surefire ways to get teenagers' attention, but it's the repercussions of those activities that can have a lifelong impact.

That's what 300 Catholic teenagers and adult chaperones who packed the DoubleTree Hotel in downtown Little Rock learned during the return of Weekend for Life Jan. 21-22.

The overnight "lock-in" event for high school students focuses on right-to-life issues through a teen perspective and includes icebreakers, praise and worship music by Team Jesus, a teen band based at Christ the King Church in Little Rock, keynote speech, prayer, skits and dance.

"In normal day-to-day life, you don't see a lot of people that are really on fire for their faith, but just being able to come here and see just how many people there are just in your state alone who really love God and love life and just want to show that love, it's really great," said Zachary Ellis, 16, of Little Rock.

It was the first time since 2020 that the diocesan Youth Ministry Office was able to host the event after it was canceled because of COVID-19 pandemic precautions the past two years.

This year's featured speaker was Julia Holcomb Misley, who, in 1973, as a 16-year-old became a girlfriend and eventual ward of Aerosmith singer Steven Tyler, then 25, so that he could take her across state lines when his band was on tour. During their relationship, she became pregnant, but he convinced her to have an abortion.

Once she did, she discovered Tyler was seeing other women and their relationship ended. Soon after, she met and married Bradley Misley, her husband of 40 years. She converted to Catholicism and became a mother of seven and a staunch pro-life activist.

"I hope these teens are encouraged that life is a treasure and a gift that they should protect and guard and that the Church is a wonderful strength and a force for good," the 65-year-old told Arkansas Catholic after her speech. "I also hope that they will never forget that in their weakest moments, when they need mercy the most and they're the most afraid to ask for it, that Jesus is there and he loves them and he forgives them. I want to encourage women and men who have committed serious sins to never fear to approach the sacraments or to return to Christ. He's merciful and loves us."

Gillian Lachowsky, 18, co-chair of the diocese's Youth Advisory Council and member of St. Mary Church in Altus, was inspired by Misley's message.

"It's insane that any of that even happened to her, and the fact that she was able to take all the bad things that have happened and use it for good in this kind of setting is just amazing," she said. "It's awesome what God can do in such a bad situation. It just really helps to have these kinds of events that you can go to and have people praying with you and for you and have speakers that have really experienced issues in that area."

Zachary Ellis, 16, a member of Our Lady of the Holy Souls Church in Little Rock, said he knows people who have gone through the struggles of whether or not to get an abortion. Being at Weekend for Life with like-minded teens is reassuring and comforting, he said.

“Each life is sacred from in the womb to on the deathbed, and I don't think it's right for any of us to take that away,” he said. “In normal day-to-day life, you don't see a lot of people that are really on fire for their faith, but just being able to come here and see just how many people there are just in your state alone who really love God and love life and just want to show that love, it's really great.”

On Jan. 22 the teens and chaperones attended the Eucharistic Procession and Mass for Life at the Statehouse Convention Center.

Liz Tingquist, director of the diocese's youth and campus ministry offices, said at its peak Weekend for Life attracted 600 teens each year, but that number had slipped to about 400 before the pandemic. Because previous attendees have graduated, encouraging teens and their youth groups to attend was a challenge.

“Now that they have experienced a wonderful Weekend for Life, they will go home and talk about it and more will want to participate in our statewide events in the future,” she said. “Some are already talking about how they just haven't had these experiences and they want to do this again. They're ready to come to the annual Catholic Youth Convention in April.”