

Fort Smith young adults unite for daily Lenten rosary

written by Maryanne Meyerriecks |



Young adults at Immaculate Conception Church have begun praying the daily rosary as a small church community during Lent.

They meet virtually — some at 6 a.m. and others at 4 or 5 p.m. Ava Earnhart, a member of the young women's weekly Bible Study, is leading the program.

"I attended the Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis last July with a group of friends, and Daniela (Hernandez, who leads the weekly Bible study) and I both wanted to pray the rosary more often. During the congress, thousands of people prayed the rosary together each day. It was so powerful, and I felt so much peace praying it."

At the beginning of each week, Earnhart posts a schedule listing the times the group will get together each day and the mystery that will be prayed. She posts daily Zoom invitations on her Facebook page (Ava Earnhart) and Instagram (@avaearnhartmusic).

"Everyone is welcome to join us," the 24-year-old said. "We have about 10 to 15 participants, both men and women. My friend's 10-year-old sister prays with us and, when asked by her teacher what she was doing for Lent, said, 'I'm praying the rosary with my sister's friends every day.'"

Earnhart begins each session by opening up the meeting for intentions and says that through their collective prayer, many prayers have been answered. She gives a brief introduction to each mystery, and the group recites the Prayer to St. Michael afterward. Each session lasts approximately 20 minutes, depending on what is shared.

Earnhart, who grew up in 15 different foster homes before being adopted, has been devoted to Mary since early childhood.

"Before I was adopted at age 9, I can only remember one foster home that treated me well, disciplining with love," she said. "They were Catholic and introduced me to the Mass and Mary. When I didn't have a mother, Mary really stepped in, and I met and knew Jesus in a way you couldn't have told me would happen. I wanted to receive Jesus in the Eucharist so much, and after my little brother and I were adopted, I was able to become baptized and receive Communion."

Through her adoptive parents' love, she began to recover from the trauma she endured from her drug-addicted mother and the constant uprooting that came with foster care, sometimes in abusive and neglectful environments. When she was 16, she picked up her sister's guitar and began composing and singing her own music. After graduating from high school, she received a music scholarship to the University of Arkansas-Fort Smith, planning on studying music therapy, but after the pandemic, she felt God leading her in a different direction.

"During COVID, I was able to write a lot more songs about my foster care and heal through music," she said. "By performing at The CALL (a foster care and adoption recruitment ministry) banquets, Catholic Campus Ministry, the Shane Bailey Foundation and IC's 412 youth program, I was able to reach people and lead them to seek healing. Sometimes, I work informally with young people who have experienced some of the traumas I have. By sharing my story through music, I encourage them to use music, creativity and prayer to recover from their pain."

Earnhart feels blessed to be able to support herself through gigging at different local restaurants and venues. She has recorded some of her songs at a local studio and is considering visiting Nashville to bring her healing message to a larger audience.

"My music isn't exclusively Christian because I met Jesus, just me and my guitar, through country music, and he spoke to me like that," she said.

Her Instagram and Facebook pages contain some music, but she made a conscious decision to step back from music during Lent.

“I decided to sacrifice more of my secular music to show my faith more to others through the virtual rosary,” Earnhart said. “After Lent, I will continue the virtual rosary, maybe twice a week, but I will continue to pray my daily rosary individually.”