

# Fatima Bonilla: 15 Catholic young adults who inspire us

written by Arkansas Catholic Staff |

## FORT SMITH

After Fatima Bonilla finishes her day teaching fourth graders in the Fort Smith School District, her day of teaching isn't over.

After graduating from UA Fort Smith, she chose to teach in public schools in low-income areas to show poor children God's love and compassion and to see the lightbulb moments when students see new possibilities for their lives.

"When I grew up I didn't have any teachers who looked like me, and I know it makes a difference," she said.

The lifelong member of Immaculate Conception Parish is the second-oldest of five children. When she was 9, her parents divorced, and for several years she attended church on her own.

"When things were falling apart," she said, "I held on to God."

Her parents have returned to Church, and her father is remarried, giving her four more half- and step-siblings. "The biggest gift God has given me is the grace to forgive," she said.

At Immaculate Conception Church, Bonilla is the altar server coordinator for the 2 p.m. Spanish Mass and an RCIA instructor for children who are entering the Church or who began PRE classes at a later age. She helps Surrenah Werley, director of religious education, by teaching occasional confirmation classes and helping with the confirmation retreat.

## If you could go on any pilgrimage, where would you go?

"When I was confirmed, I chose Our Lady of Fatima, my namesake, as my patron. I often pray the rosary at the adoration chapel and would love to visit the site of her apparitions to the children in Portugal."

More stories will appear in our 15 Young Adults Who Inspire Us 2024 Section as they are posted online.