

Leading the FLOCK

BY BISHOP DANIEL E. THOMAS



“What does the Eucharist mean to me?”

That was the question posed for school age youth this past October, when our Diocesan Department of Catholic Education asked principals, teachers, directors of religious education and catechists to invite and encourage all parishioners in grades K-12, including all students in Catholic schools, in parish religious education programs, and homeschoolers throughout the Diocese of Toledo, to participate in a diocesan wide contest as part of this diocesan year of the National Eucharistic Revival.

Our children and young people throughout our 19 counties were invited to reflect on and answer the question, “What does the Eucharist mean to me?” by writing an essay of one thousand words or less, or by creating an original piece of art, music, poetry, or short video. The responses were overwhelming! Over 500 students participated either individually or as part of a small group by submitting creative entries which included wonderful videos, innovative works of art (including paintings, drawings and sculpture), inspiring poems, and many heartfelt reflections about their experience of the Lord in the Eucharist. Their works captured what the Eucharist means to them! Their works are an inspiring testimony to their faith in and love for Jesus!

The students’ entries were divided into age groups: primary students (kindergarten to second grade),

intermediate students (third to fifth grade), middle school students (sixth to eighth grade), and high school students (ninth to twelfth grade). The multimedia projects or essay projects were judged based on their creativity, content, and aesthetics. It was a very challenging process to determine three finalists in each category to be recognized for their outstanding work, but with the help of multiple “graders” from the Catholic Education Department, Mrs. Pat Odey-Murray, the Chair of our Diocesan National Eucharistic Revival Team, and yours truly, every one of the submissions were reviewed and appreciated.



On May 4, 2023, in a special evening event, we honored the three finalists in each category, and their families by inviting them for a tour of Our Lady, Queen of the Most Holy Rosary Cathedral, followed by a pizza party in the Monsignor Bernard E. Smith Auditorium celebrating their work, and the announcement of the winners. Every finalist received an age-appropriate book about Blessed Carlo Acutis, young patron of the National Eucharistic Revival. Third place winners also received a holy water font, second place winners also received a Diocesan rosary blessed by Pope Francis, and first place winners also received a framed image of the Eucharistic Revival Logo or of the Lord’s Supper, together with a modest monetary gift.

Madi, a senior from Bishop Hoffman Catholic School, was the grand prize winner. Her vibrant painting is featured here, and she also took home a hand-painted plaster relief of the Last Supper to celebrate her splendid depiction! It was truly an evening of palpable Easter Joy!



To view the finalists' entries and others from around the Diocese, visit toledodiocese.org/eucharist and look for other students' work on our Diocesan social media pages.

The winners of the contest include the following young people from across our diocese:

Multimedia Project Winners

- Primary (Grades K-2): 1st Place: Abigail, Grade 2, St. Rose Parish School, Perrysburg; 2nd Place: Second Grade Parish School of Religion, Holy Trinity Parish, Bucyrus, 3rd Place: Caleb, Kindergarten, St. Michael, Findlay.
- Intermediate (Grades 3-5): 1st Place: Grade 4 Class, St. Mary Parish School, Edgerton, 2nd Place: Grade 4 Class, Immaculate Conception Parish School, Port Clinton; 3rd Place: Libby, Grade 3, Tiffin Calvert School.
- Middle School (Grades 6-8): 1st Place: Aliyah, Grade 8, St. Aloysius Parish School, Bowling Green; 2nd Place: Grade 6, St. Charles Parish School, Lima; 3rd Place: Charli, Grade 8, St. Rose Parish School, Perrysburg.
- High School (Grades 9-12): 1st Place: Madi, Grade 12, Bishop Hoffman Catholic School, Fremont; 2nd Place: Scott, Grade 11, Resurrection Parish,

Lexington; 3rd Place: Aniyah, Grade 10, St. John the Evangelist, Defiance.

Essay Project Winners

- Intermediate (Grades 3-5): 1st Place: Ryder, Grade 3, St. Mary Parish School, VanWert; 2nd Place: Ivy, Grade 3, Tiffin Calvert School; 3rd Place: Devon, Grade 4, Divine Mercy Parish School, Paulding.
- Middle School (Grades 6-8): 1st Place: Ella, Grade 7, St. Joseph Parish School, Maumee; 2nd Place: Simon, Grade 6, Divine Mercy Parish School, Paulding; 3rd Place: Evelyn, Grade 6, Sandusky Central Catholic
- High School (Grades 9-12): 1st Place: Zac, Grade 12, Lima Central Catholic; 2nd Place: Megan, Grade 11, Sandusky Central Catholic; 3rd Place: Emma, Grade 10, Lima Central Catholic.

As you can see, the winners are representative of every area of our diocese, and I could not be more delighted by their participation, and by the encouragement and interest given by their parents and guardians, their teachers and principals, their catechists, their parish families. Kudos and congratulations to all the winners and thank you to all the young people who participated!

For me, participating in the judging process was not only an inspiring and life giving exercise, but a source of grace as I was privileged to see, from the perspective of our children and young people, what they believe about the Holy Eucharist, not "what" but "who" they receive, and a source of pride in their witness to us of the simplicity and depth of their belief in the Body and Blood of the Lord!

With this column, while I'm not inviting you to submit an entry for a contest, I am inviting you to take time to reflect on that same question, not in paint or essay or video, but in your heart, mind and soul! I pray your responses, while they won't be winning any prizes, may lead to a deeper understanding of, love for, and living out of the Holy Eucharist. Ask yourself the question: "What does the Eucharist mean to me?" Here's hoping your response will be as inspiring, as genuine and as joyful as those of our young people!

+ Daniel E. Thomas

Most Rev. Daniel E. Thomas
Bishop of Toledo
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