

## [New Vocations Week helps St. Paul area youth answer God's call](#)

In a materialistic and secular world, young people rarely ask "What life does God want for me?"

However, [Camp St. Louis](#) is helping them answer that question for more than three decades. The July 14 – Aug. 18 camp attracts as many as 300 young Catholics from St. Paul and surrounding area. Its mission is to grow the Catholic faith in young people through activities like sports, music, Mass and nightly campfires. Youth between the ages of seven and 18 attend.



Rev. Jhack Diez speaks to young people at Camp St. Louis. Diocese of St. Paul file photo

As part of the summer camp's schedule, Vocations Week is a new effort meant to inspire the campers in whatever purpose God has for them – whether that's to parenthood or religious life – through various guest speakers.



Maximilian Spiess

“Who knows? This might plant the seed for the next generation of priests,” said Maximilian Spiess, a high school graduate from Vermillion, about 100 kilometres southeast of St. Paul, who will be attending the camp this summer.

“It’s something that’s become very important to me lately, but for many people that question might not seem vital right now. They’re young. They’ve got a few more years of school. But this will give them some sort of basis and introduction to consider what God is calling them to.”

Above all, Vocations Week is about encouraging more calls to priesthood from within the [Diocese of St. Paul](#), says Deacon Ryan Sales, the executive director of Camp St. Louis. Of the 22 priests in the diocese, only two are originally from the area.



**Sam Skuban**

Sam Skuban, a 17-year-old high school student, says the social pressures around dating in particular have turned his generation away from religious life.

“In high school there is this sense that you have to have that significant other in order to be happy. If you want to fit in, you need to be with that person,” said Skuban, who lives in Westlock, northwest of Edmonton. This summer Skuban will be attending Camp St. Louis for his second time.

“I feel like that creates a big challenge. A lot of teenagers look at a life of celibacy and think ‘That’s not the fun life.’”

Preparing for his final year of high school, he hopes the camp can help guide him in his future calling. As a devout Catholic, Skuban is open to religious life, but it’s a path he’s still considering in prayer.



Camp St. Louis played a key role in Rev. Andrew Shoenger's journey to the priesthood. Kyle Greenham, Grandin Media

Rev. Andrew Shoenger attended the camp in 1998. Camp St. Louis played a key role in his journey to the priesthood, leading to him being ordained 12 years ago.

It was at camp that his heart opened to religious life. He had lost interest in faith for most of his teenage years, but found it again through Camp St. Louis.



In this file photo, Missionaries of Charity sisters visit Camp St. Louis. Diocese of St. Paul

“At that time, I had no idea where I was supposed to be going with my life,” said Father Schoenberger. “But I knew that God is good, God is all knowing, and with that God’s plan for my life has to be better than whatever plans I have in mind.”

“As I prayed, I felt God calling me to be a priest – there was just this sense. Then I entered the seminary right after high school. But if you had told me a few months before that summer that I’d become a priest I would have laughed at you.”

Father Schoenberger has been pastor to the [St. John the Baptist Church](#) in Fort McMurray since 2015. His advice to young Catholics is to not let worldly desires take the place of God’s call.

“Today’s world can be all about the self-made man and the self-made woman,” Schoenberger said. “But anyone who really discerns and listens to God’s call is not going to regret it. They’re going to be blessed beyond measure.”



Aaron Debusschere and his Christina Shawshuk met at Camp St. LouisSubmitted

For much of his young adult life, Camp St. Louis program director Aaron Debusschere was torn between a call to the priesthood and a desire for a wife and children. After four years of seminary, he determined that he was meant to serve God not as a priest, but as a husband and father.

It was at Camp St. Louis that Debusschere met his future wife Christina Sawchuk. Now the couple will return to camp and give their testimony on the vocation and sacredness of marriage.

“It’s not just this emotional experience of being in love. The fullness of love

is in that decision to love, and to let that love grow through whatever challenges and hardships you face,” said Debusschere, 27.

“It’s not something that just takes place in the wedding ceremony, it’s a lifelong sacrament. It takes place in every act of giving to my spouse.”

With the testimonies of people who discovered their life’s purpose through Camp St. Louis, Schoenberger said it’s important the campers know God has a plan for them – no matter their circumstances or past experiences.

“God created us for a purpose and that purpose is for our good. And it’s not just for the good in this life,” he said. “Our vocation will come with its difficulties and its crosses. But there’s no resurrection without the cross.”