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Thousands of Catholic men meet in Detroit to get fired up about faith

Santiago Esparza / The Detroit News

DETROIT -- Thousands of men packed Calihan Hall at the University of Detroit Mercy on Saturday, not for a basketball game but to get closer with God.

A key part of the fifth annual Catholic Men's Conference was for participants to dedicate themselves to religion and family the way they would to their favorite team or sport.

"Being a Christian in so many eyes of the world is not cool," said John Morales, a former Fox sportscaster who has made a movie about Catholic baseball players and was a speaker at the conference. "This fires them up. Sports have become a religion."

About 3,000 people were expected to have visited the conference by the time it ended with a 2:30 p.m. Mass. The event featured workshops and speakers.

The late Pope John Paul II's push for such evangelization has been given priority by church officials seeking to make Catholics more outgoing sources of inspiration, church leaders have said.

"It was perfect. They talked about things we could all relate to," said 14-year-old Dominic Zack of Warren as he ate lunch with 15-year-old buddy Michael Waldrup of Madison Heights. The teens worship at the Shrine of the Little Flower Catholic church in Royal Oak.

One workshop dealt with getting young people involved with the church.

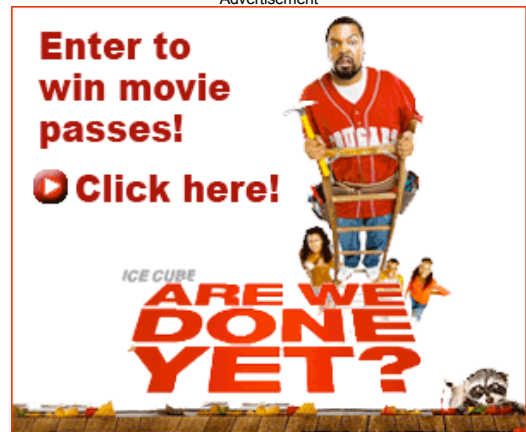
"You see other young people and you get more comfortable," Michael said.

Jim Stephanoff of Livonia brought his adult sons, Tom and Nick, to the conference as a chance to bond.

"It gave us something to talk about afterwards," Jim Stephanoff, 49, said.

Nick Stephanoff, 22, and his 21-year-old brother Tom enjoyed the conference. They worship at St. Gerald Catholic Church in Farmington.

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"It is always good to refuel the fire," Tom Stephanoff said. "You get excited again about trying to be a good person."

You can reach Santiago Esparza at (313) 222-2127 or sesparza@detnews.com.

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