



**In Jesus' Footsteps** – Youth group members in St. Catherine of Siena Parish, Farmingdale, practice for their April 15 performance of Mary's Way of the Cross, a reenactment of Jesus' road to Calvary as seen through the eyes of his mother. The play has helped the young actors gain a new appreciation for Christ's Passion. Ken Falls photos



**Authentic Experience** — Performers use real railway spikes to simulate the nailing of Jesus to the cross during the performance.

## Performance helps youth connect to Christ's Passion

By **David Kilby** | Correspondent

The pain Jesus went through on his way to the Cross has become more of a reality to the youth of St. Catherine of Siena Parish, Farmingdale, after rehearsing for Mary's Way of the Cross, a unique presentation of the Stations of the Cross.

The performance, which youth group members will present in the parish April 15, will focus on what the Virgin Mary might have been thinking as she watched her son on his way to Calvary. After Mary's comments, the youth will read passages that connect each station to their own personal struggles, and between each

station the Stabat Mater (or "Sorrowful Mother") will be sung.

Mary's Way of the Cross was originally written by Redemptorist Father Richard G. Furey, but the slightly customized version that will be performed in St. Catherine of Siena combines the text of the original with additional words written by the parish's own Deacon Vincent Rinaldi, said Dan Sakowski, St. Catherine of Siena youth minister, who is directing the performance.

"I wanted to do (the Stations) because I wanted (the youth) to feel what it must have been like when Jesus went through his suffering

and torture," Sakowski said. "I hope they feel what those around him felt so they can appreciate more why he died for their sins."

Deacon Rinaldi got the idea to organize Mary's Way of the Cross after serving at the Papal Mass in Yankee Stadium in 2008. Deacon Rinaldi had previously directed a version of the Living Stations of the Cross in the parish for many years before passing the job on to Sakowski.

In years past, Deacon Rinaldi directed the Way of the Cross in several different ways. The first version at the parish had the stations performed as a silhouette of shadows

behind a screen, and in the second version all of the stations were performed in one spot.

In this third version, the youth walk the Stations of the Cross in the church and perform each station as they come to it. This version also has certain "special effects" such as bells and lighting arranged particularly for the performance, Deacon Rinaldi explained.

Garrett Flott, who plays the role of Jesus, carries a wooden cross, and the guards and followers of Jesus wear robes similar to those worn in the Middle East in the first century A.D. To add to the authenticity, the nails that will be used to simulate Jesus' crucifixion are real railway spikes that Deacon Rinaldi acquired from a friend who works for New Jersey Transit, he said.

The cast said the Passion of Christ has become more real to them after rehearsing for their performance.

"I learned how much (Jesus) had to go through for all of us, and it made me more appreciative," Flott said.

"I learned Mary also went through a lot, not just Jesus," said Danielle Sakowski, 13, who will play the part of the Blessed Virgin. "You understand more how Jesus' mother felt."

"I felt like I was there (at the Crucifixion)," said Klaudia Sliwa, 13, who will play the part of St. Veronica. "I could imagine it better."

Additional performers in the production include Patricia Prioli and Dawn Hanvey as the voice of Mary; Sam Reilly, Joe Ventura and Colin Kneucker taking turns as readers of the Stations and reflections; Brendan Griffen as Pontius Pilate; Andrew Touhey as Simon of Cyrene, and Briana Raso and Jennifer Echols portraying the Roman guards. Terry Kelly will sing the Stabat Mater.

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