

## STUDENTS REFLECT ON 8TH GRADE RETREAT



**THEY BONDED,  
LAUGHED,  
...AND THEY'LL  
ALWAYS  
REMEMBER**

The morning of September 13th dawned sunny and bright as 8th graders boarded the bus and set out for the Sisters of Notre Dame Retreat House in Ipswich, MA. There, they were warmly greeted by Sister Bernadette Turgeon and then donned their nametags. While they already knew each other, Sister Bernadette had cleverly affixed a variety of colored stickers to the nametags and instructed the students to break into groups by finding those classmates with the same nametag sticker. In this way, Sister Bernadette hoped to encourage the students to mingle with those they might not know as well.

The six teams then came together to win challenges and complete activities. One of the activities was dividing a sheet of paper into quarters. Students then made lists of things related to Jesus including: his friends, family, personal characteristics, and what he did for humanity. In fact, one of the main topics of the day was WWJD "What Would Jesus Do." As Eric Vadenis describes it, "We discussed what Jesus would do through our decisive teenage years and throughout life."

Another project was creating a class quilt. Each person received one square for the quilt and was instructed to write things on it that would reflect their personality. Some wrote why people like them, what their favorite season was, and the names of their best friend or longest friend. This activity helped students to come together as a group and to learn more about one another as the school year got underway. "I thought working together in group activities was great for everyone

because they learned more about each other," notes Derek Lawton. Participants then learned that, upon their return to the Academy campus, this quilt would be displayed at all of their major events throughout the year. As one student recalls, "This definitely strengthened our bond as a class."

A mid-day break provided some casual time and, of course, an opportunity to take photos of the Class of 2010 by which to remember the day.

Returning to the retreat house, the groups assembled again and played a spelling bee game. Their teachers, Mrs. Beth O'Connell, Mr. Spencer Riley and Mrs. Lisa Zolkos, kept track of points achieved by each team and, again, teamwork was essential to being successful.

Together, teams then wrote prayers of Thanksgiving and wishes for the coming year, goals they hoped to achieve, and especially for those in need. The prayers were read during a candlelight prayer service, a calm time during which to unwind and listen to all of the various groups' prayers. Lindsay Saracco states, "My group was praying for our family and friends, the troops overseas, sick loved ones and deceased members of our families." At the end of this sharing experience, Sister Bernadette gave the class the candle used during the prayer service as a symbol of the day, and their class.

According to Sarah Studley, "We learned more about each other, came together as a team and strengthened the relationships that we will have throughout our last year at the Academy. The retreat really opened my eyes to the spirituality we all have inside us and that through simple things, such as teamwork and hard work, we can bring that out to the world. We can also share our love toward others during these retreats."

Nicole Burke explained, "I now realize that this retreat is all related to being part of the Academy community because, just like Jesus, we have to be there for one another and be willing to listen, love and learn." Sarah Glasheen added, "A new sense of closeness was felt after only a few hours under Sr. Bernadette's guidance. And then, as we stood on the small hill of grass, arms around one another, we took one of the last pictures of the Academy of Notre Dame eighth-grade class of 2010."