

UNITED IN *Life and Faith*

Couple shares God's love with youth ministry group.

Story by **KAREN A. AVITABILE** | Photos by **AARON JOSEPH**

Every Thursday evening, Amanda and Miles Mortali meet with teens from St. Matthew Parish in Forestville and St. Gregory the Great Parish in Bristol to help them grow in faith and remain connected with God.



▲ Amanda and Miles Mortali on their wedding day, Feb. 19, 2022. The couple were married at St. Matthew Parish, Forestville, with EDGE students in attendance.

“We share God’s love through being with them,” Amanda says of teens in the program. “We accompany them by hearing about their day so when something hard comes up, we can pray for them.”

In January 2019, when Amanda was the director of youth ministry at St. Matthew Parish, she started EDGE, a youth ministry group. Since then, the group has been expanded to include students in sixth through 10th grade at both St. Matthew and St. Gregory the Great. Amanda now serves as director of youth ministry and religious education for both parishes.

After the Bristol residents met through a Christian dating app and hit it off, the pair began spending time together. Their relationship led Miles to stand alongside Amanda and to facilitate EDGE together.

“It’s been such a gift to serve with him,” Amanda says, referring to her husband.

Dating led to an engagement and the couple married on Feb. 19, 2022, in St. Matthew Church in the presence of EDGE participants.

“We were so happy to see students and families at our wedding Mass, and to have their prayers as we entered into our vocation,” Amanda says. “We love serving in this community, and are so grateful to be part of it.”

EDGE, which meets year-round, is part of a national Eucharist-centered movement called Life Teen. Its mission is to help teens develop a deeper relationship with Jesus and the Church.



▲ The day before their wedding, Amanda and Miles Mortali of Bristol took part in a Holy Hour at St. Matthew Parish.

Some past EDGE participants now serve as leadership mentors to the current group of students.

During meetings, held at the St. Gregory CCD Center, students have the opportunity to become disciples through reading Scripture, praying together and partaking in conversations about God. The evenings also include activities, a snack, writing in journals, listening to worship music, team-building activities and a check-in/question-and-answer period about their week.

“We also remind them of their identity,” Amanda Mortali adds. “They are the beloved son or daughter of God.”

While a theme is chosen in advance, the weekly meetings are guided by topics raised by the students. Occasionally, the teens are divided into smaller groups to explore an issue more in-depth.

“Some teens ask questions about God, Catholic principles and Church teachings,” Amanda says. “Or something like, ‘Who goes to heaven?’”

The couple say they enjoy getting to know the teens of both parishes and supporting them in their spiritual journey and onward to adulthood.

“I wish I knew how much God loved me as a kid,” Miles says. “It’s cool to see them be received.” **CT**

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'Why is God important to you?'

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EDITOR'S NOTE: About two dozen teens from St. Matthew Parish, Forestville, and St. Gregory the Great Parish, Bristol, gather on Thursday evenings for EDGE, a youth ministry program. During this time, they have an opportunity to grow in faith with their friends, pray together and ask questions about God and their Catholic community. The *Catholic Transcript* posed a question to the teens, "Why is God important to you?" Over the next three pages, take a look at their responses and see pictures of activities the teens participate in. For more information about EDGE, email Amanda Mortali at youthministry@stmatthewrcc.com.

Photos by Aaron Joseph

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ISABELLA CADOGAN
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God is important to me because he gave me life. He gave me a family, friends and a personality. God is important to me because he gave me people that care about me and love me. He gave me a house, he gave me a home and he gave me a parish to belong to and to thank him for everything he's done for me. He is important to me because he made me who I am today and he made me a follower of Jesus.

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JULIA ROZMAJZL
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God is important to me because I'm a miracle in his eyes. In the hospital while being born, I stopped breathing for a few seconds. My mother prayed until her prayers were answered. He has been in my life since I was a baby. He has taught me so much. There have been so many instances where I have seen God in my everyday life, and he has guided me through hard times. If I'm being totally honest, he has shaped me into who I am as a person!

► Amanda Mortali greets teens and chats with them as they arrive to EDGE. The teens share things that happened during their day and catch up with their friends.





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MAJA SERWINSKI
 High School Leader

Praying is a big thing I like to do. It gets my mind off hard things in my life, and Jesus is someone who is always there for me, no matter what I'm going through.

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SABINA SERWINSKI

▲ Each teen shared a rose, bud and thorn (something good, something they look forward to and something difficult) followed by a game they call “Signs” to introduce discussion about prayer and listening to the Holy Spirit.

God is important to me because he created me and everything else in the world. He made us because he loves us. He is also important to me because he made me how I am. I thank him for the way he made me. Most of all, I love him because he taught us how to pray. I like to pray because I get to tell God what I need and how thankful I am for him.

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EMILY DWYER
 High School Leader

God is important to me because he is always there when I need him. Whenever I have a bad day or a tough decision to make, I look to God for comfort and direction. During the good times, I know God shares in my joy; in the bad times, I know he is there to comfort me. It helps me to know that, no matter what, God will always love and care for me. Also, through my faith in him, he has allowed so many quality people to enter my life, who will help me grow closer to him.

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CAITLYN CAREY

God is important to me because he is our all-loving Father. God loves us and will always forgive us. We can always rely on him when we are upset, in a bad situation or just need a friend. God is the person to talk to when you're scared, or afraid to talk to someone. And, trust me, he always listens to our prayers. He would never present us with an event we can't handle. God is the person you can trust, and he will love us for eternity. He will never give up on us.



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KARA SERWINSKI



◀ Members of EDGE, a youth ministry program at St. Matthew Parish, Forestville, and St. Gregory the Great Parish, Bristol, meet once a week at St. Gregory CCD Center to grow in faith with their peers. The evening starts with games, such as Gaga ball, led by Miles Mortali, an EDGE volunteer.

God is important to me because he created me as a person in his own image. He gets me through my day.



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OLIVIA LAVAN

▶ While half of the group plays Gaga ball, some teens and the youth ministry director, Amanda Mortali, catch up and play volleyball.



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JOHN NELSON
High School Leader

God is important to me because he is always there for me.

▶ After games and catching up, the group gathers in the Teen Room to discuss the topic of the night: prayer. They consider the need to rely on the Holy Spirit and how to PRAY: Praise, Repent, Ask, Yield. They close with prayer consisting of quiet praise, worship music and journaling, a time when students write letters to God and reflect on the night.

God is important to me because he is there for me when I need him most. He helps me find my way through the day and get what I need to succeed.



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AGATHA ZETTERVALL

God is important to me because he is my Creator. He made this beautiful earth for us to live where we can spread the good news and fulfill our duties as Christians under God. He gave his only begotten Son to save us from sin and bring us to everlasting life. ☺