News



Scott Kieffer, a parishioner and staff member of St. Joseph the Worker Catholic Community in Maple Grove, Minn., paddles out on Medicine Lake in Plymouth to pray the rosary. In 2017, Kieffer made it a goal to kayak and pray the rosary on every lake in the Twin Cities urban metro area. (OSV News/Josh McGovern, The Catholic Spirit)

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Maple Grove, Minnesota — August 19, 2024

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Scott Kieffer, the director of discipleship for St. Joseph the Worker Catholic Community in Maple Grove, Minnesota, is 29 lakes away from completing his endeavor to pray a rosary in the 250 to 300 lakes in the Twin Cities urban metro area.

Kieffer set out to accomplish this goal in 2017, looking for ways to connect with nature while praying. Eventually, this endeavor became good rest for Kieffer, who described the experience as a personal spiritual retreat.

"I had learned that creation or nature might be one of the pathways to help me connect a little bit more with my faith and open up more easily in prayer," Kieffer told The Catholic Spirit, newspaper of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis.

He began kayaking in the lake behind his house and praying there. But when he went to a different lake, he thought he might as well pray there, too. "Then I started going on a few more and thought, 'It's kind of fun going and trying out new lakes, trying out new spaces and knowing I've prayed on each one.'"

Kieffer doesn't usually bring a physical rosary out onto the lake because that means having to stop in the water for long periods of time. Instead, Kieffer uses his fingers and counts each bead by applying pressure on the oar with each subsequent finger. This way, Kieffer can continuously paddle and move.

As a youth minister, Kieffer finds himself working retreats or away from home for extended periods of time. But as a self-acknowledged introvert, Kieffer uses kayaking to refresh and regain his spirituality when he returns home.

"Youth ministry is a very extroverted job," Kieffer said. "I'm not that much of an extrovert. So, it's been a really nice thing to have this."

"I think when you're out in nature, that's God's world," Kieffer said. "I think God wants every one of us to have a good, rich relationship with him and relationship with our faith, so I just hope that people don't settle for doing the same thing they've always done, if there's something more they can do to really enhance that."

In the future, he'd like to incorporate praying while kayaking into his youth ministry.

Kieffer said he started researching the number of lakes in the Twin Cities in 2017. He found about 60 lakes, which didn't seem like enough to him.

"But if I did the 13 metro counties, that was going to be something like 3,000 lakes, and well, that's too long," Kieffer said. "It'll take me until I'm 70. So, I settled on a map of the urban metro area and said, 'This looks like it'll be somewhere between 250 and 300 lakes."

Kieffer said he liked the challenge because it would help him stay disciplined with his prayer. It became a project he would do a couple times a week to reconnect with his own faith and God.

Now with only 29 lakes left, Kieffer is feeling a plethora of mixed emotions.

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"When I realized last summer that there's a chance I could finish it, there was a part of me that was kind of bummed and thinking, 'OK, what am I going to do next?'" Kieffer said. He explained that though he may be wrapping up his own goal soon, he plans to share his lake experiences with his family.

Kieffer is more than just a two-year employee at St. Joseph the Worker. The church is his original home parish, where he was baptized and raised. Now that he's back, his home is coincidentally the church's old rectory.

"I didn't move here because of that, it just matched the search criteria of what I was looking for," Kieffer said. "The realtor was showing us the house and we got to the laundry room and we're like, 'Why is there a switchboard in here for like 50 phone lines?' The realtor looked at the sheet and said it's owned by (St. Joseph the Worker). Like, yeah, this is where I was baptized."

Though Kieffer doesn't use an actual rosary, his endeavor is sometimes noticed by strangers, which leads to questions about what he's doing. Kieffer tells them he's set a goal to kayak and pray in every lake in the Twin Cities. Though not everyone he runs into is necessarily Christian, Kieffer has received praise and support from the strangers he's talked to. He's also received generosity, including when the only

access to certain lakes is via residents' private property.

"I tell them why (he wants to access the lake) and they say, 'Oh, cool. Go through my yard, I don't care.' … That's been nice because it's probably an extra four or five lakes I've gotten to do just from people being like, 'Well, that sounds cool. Go ahead and park in my driveway and go through,'" he said. "Which is nice to see a little bit of that."

Kieffer said he has also faced dangers when kayaking and claims that when it comes to working on his faith, those dangerous moments provided a "different level of testing" and relying on God.

The worst, Kieffer explained, was on Lake Minnetonka when he was crossing a 2-mile-wide section of the lake. Suddenly, halfway across the water, a storm brewed so quickly there was nothing Kieffer could do. The pouring rain began filling his kayak and the waves were rocking him with cold, October water.

"I actually went down," Kieffer said. "The kayak was going to capsize, so I made sure to get all my stuff secured. I keep my phone in a waterproof case. I started praying Psalm 23, my favorite psalm, and then started praying louder and louder."

Kieffer called 911 while in the water and helped the sheriff's boat navigate to him in the lake because he was difficult to find in such a large lake. Kieffer was in the water for over half an hour.

Kieffer said moments like that have strengthened his faith. When he couldn't see a way out, he said, "(I) just started praying and asking God for help and every time, he sends a way."

For Kieffer, it's all about having faith. He encourages others to always be open to new ways to enhance and expand their Catholic faith through prayer and connection with God.

"I think there's really good ways for us to connect with God more easily that we might not have discovered," Kieffer said. "I love all other types of prayer I've been doing for years. I love being at Mass, adoration, everything. But it enhanced my life and my prayer life so much to realize that there's some more unique things that really strike me."

Keiffer said he hopes his experiences inspire others.

"I hope … that they'll try something out, especially if they're feeling like their prayer life is stagnant. Just get outside and try something different."