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## Rally presenters hope youths are open to Christ's direction

By Celine Klosterman

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Fittingly for two Catholics who belong to a music duo called Oddwalk Ministries — which will perform at the Davenport Diocese's junior high youth rally March 20 — they formed the group after taking an unexpected journey.

In the early 2000s, Shannon Cerneka was happily giving solo guitar performances at youth events and coffeehouses and serving at St. Peter Parish in Jefferson City, Mo. as director of youth ministry — a job he still holds. Meanwhile, Orin Johnson was satisfied in his position as coordinator of music and liturgy at the National Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows, in Belleville, Ill., where he still works.

But as Cerneka continued receiving invitations to perform, he felt he needed to offer more than just his voice and guitar. So he began inviting along Johnson, a keyboardist and singer he knew from the National Shrine, where Cerneka had once worked.

Johnson joked that Cerneka's invitations were more like "insistence." So he started accompanying the guitarist, neither one of them intending — or imagining — they'd form a long-term duo.

But Cerneka realized that the more the musicians performed together, the more they could offer as a pair. Johnson "is pretty good onstage, good to bounce things off of; he's funny, quirky and smart."

So, tired of being billed as simply "Shannon/Orin," in 2004 the Catholics decided to make their ministry "more intentional" — starting with a name. They took inspiration from a story in the Gospel of Luke in which two disciples traveling to Emmaus encounter the risen Jesus, then reverse course to Jerusalem to spread the Good News.

God set the disciples on a new path — an "odd walk." "You have to be open to letting Christ change you and direct you on the Christian journey," Johnson said.

"Maybe as few as seven or eight years ago if you'd asked, 'Did you know you'd be doing this ministry?' I'd have given you a very funny look."

But he and Cerneka said they appreciate the opportunities they've received to share the Gospel and entertain people, which they've done at Catholic conventions, youth rallies, diocesan events and other gatherings throughout the United States.

At the junior high youth rally March 20, Oddwalk Ministries' keynote presentations will offer storytelling, activities, humor and selections from the roughly 100, often Scripture-inspired songs Johnson and Cerneka have written.

The presentations — guided by Oddwalk Ministries' themes of community, participation and mission — also will include opportunities for audience interaction. "Our faith is not a spectator sport," Cerneka said. "We try to model that in our show and get people as engaged as we can. We could do a concert, but that's not what we feel called to."

He hopes audience engagement helps give youths a small taste of "ownership" in the Church. "I look back on my own time as a student, and I can't remember one thing a speaker said at a youth event or the songs we sang. But I remember as a whole thinking how wonderful it was — how alive the Church seemed ... There's an exciting element to being Catholic, not only being children of God, but having an opportunity to go on the great adventure of Christianity."

Johnson wants students to be open to that adventure. "I hope students leave the rally with the sense they need to allow Christ to change them and set them on a new direction. Every day, you must be open to hearing him say, 'We need you over here now.' You may not know where that is or who will be there, but if Christ is leading you, have faith. It's about saying, 'Here I am, Lord; I come to do your will.'"

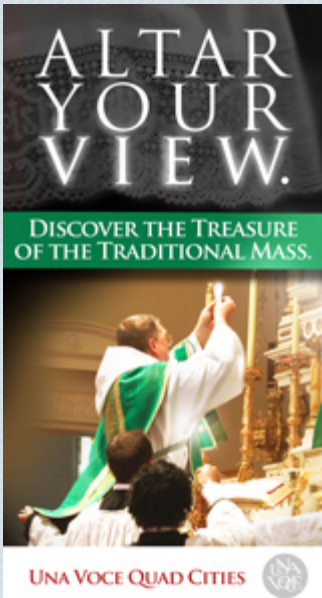
### Junior high youth rally details

The Davenport Diocese's fifth annual junior high youth rally, with the theme of "Peace Love Jesus," will take place March 20 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Regina Catholic Education Center in Iowa City. The day will include two keynote presentations from Oddwalk Ministries, faith-related workshops, music from Christian band 1 of 12, Mass with Bishop Martin Amos, prayer, a skit by the Diocesan Youth Ministry Committee, lunch and time for a dance and fellowship.

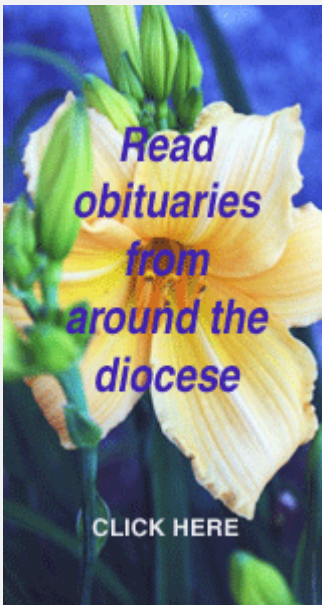
To register, students should contact their parish youth leader. For more information, visit [www.davenportyouth.org](http://www.davenportyouth.org).



Shannon Cerneka, left, and Orin Johnson make up Oddwalk Ministries.



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## Rally gets students 'fired up' about faith

By Celine Klosterman

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Wednesday, March 23, 2011 10:31 AM CDT

IOWA CITY — When Orin Johnson was 4 years old, he thought he found the answer to how he should pray.

At Mass one day, he saw an image in a missalette of a person with raised arms accompanied by the words, "Here I am, Lord; I come to do your will." So he went home, threw his arms up and prayed those words — and waited for a response.

When no voice came from the heavens, he tried again. Eventually, he gave up, but the unsettling experience lingered in his memory for years.

After growing older, "I realized maybe I was looking for an answer in the wrong spot," he told about 450 people at the Davenport Diocese's junior high youth rally March 20. Instead of waiting for a voice from above, look to the community of faith around you, he said. God dwells in those people. "Our challenge is to see in them what God sees."

Johnson and Shannon Cerneka, who make up music duo Oddwalk Ministries, spoke, played instruments and led youths in song during two presentations at Regina Catholic Education Center during the rally, whose theme was "Peace, Love, Jesus." The day also included 14 options for breakout sessions for youths on faith-related topics; a skit by the Diocesan Youth Ministry Committee (DYMC); stories from DYMC members who'd found peace, love and Jesus; Mass with Bishop Martin Amos and music from the band "1 of 12."

Catholics must trust and rely on God as much as children trust and rely on their parents, said Cerneka, a husband and father. "We must be willing to surrender control and say, 'Here I am, Lord; I come to do your will.'"

Later, in the morning breakout session "Praying in Color," about 30 students drew images surrounding the names of people needing prayers. Sometimes, it's easier to pray through art than with words, said Pat Sheil, who led the workshop and serves as faith formation director at St. Joseph Parish in DeWitt. Other breakout sessions, several of which were led by DYMC members, explored topics including how to spread the pro-life message, finding peace, the saints, modesty and strengthening your relationship with God.

The Lord can use us despite our flaws, Johnson said in an afternoon presentation. He shared the story of a man who knowingly used a leaking pot to carry water to his village. "Why do you still use me, as imperfect as I am?" the pot asked. The man then showed it all the flowers and plants that had grown along his path — thanks to water they received from the leaking vessel. "I, the master, see much more than you do with your own eyes ... I can use you in ways beyond your imagination."

The incompleteness of human judgment also came up later in the breakout session "Coping with Cliques," during which about 25 youths explored the differences between cliques and friendships. After an exercise in which students also discussed social hierarchies at their schools, they voiced distaste for labels. But some students confessed to judging people based on their appearance.

"We're not perfect," said breakout leader Mary Orman, a member of St. Patrick Parish in Ottumwa. She said she still remembers the names of mean boys and girls from her middle school decades ago. "That tells you it matters how we treat other people."

Pay kindness forward, Orman said. "When you start treating people respectfully, it will come back to you."

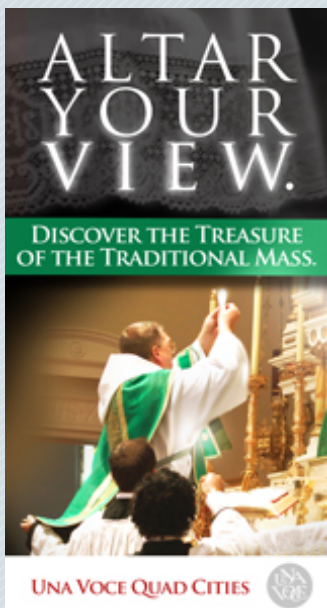
The rally offered many suggestions for building a relationship with God, said student Caitlyn Oliger, a member of Sacred Heart Cathedral in Davenport. "It doesn't just get you fired up about your faith here, but shows you how to go home and keep living it out."

Her companion Precious Bradley, who is going through the Rite of Christian Initiation of Children at the cathedral parish, especially enjoyed Oddwalk Ministries' interactive presentations. "The rally is a lot of fun, and you get to learn more about God."

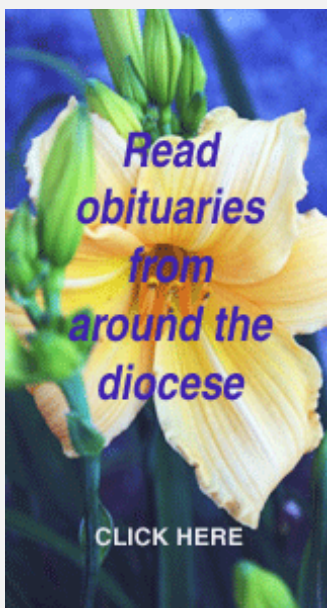
Audrey Simpson, a member of Prince of Peace Parish in Clinton who's interested in missionary work, said she was inspired by a breakout session on DeWitt parishioner Mitchell Lincoln's year in Rwanda. The rally "was a good opportunity to be with other Catholic Iowans," she said.



Diocesan Youth Ministry Committee members clap to a song performed by Shannon Cerneka, left, and Orin Johnson of Oddwalk Ministries during the Davenport Diocese's junior high youth rally at Regina Catholic Education Center in Iowa City March 20.



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