JPII Model UN Team Celebrates a Decade of Solving the World’s Problems

Paul Saboe
November 19, 2012
The Herald on the Hill

The Pope John Paul II High School Model United Nations (UN) Team made it a November to remember by participating in back-to-back Model UN Competitions, attending the 9th Annual Vanderbilt Model UN Conference the weekend of November 9th and the 47th Annual Arkansas Model UN Conference the weekend of November 16th. Between these two conferences, the team earned 26 awards, raising their ten year total to 354 awards.

This semester the JPII Model UN Team has taken several steps to continue to grow and excel. First, the team developed student officer positions with senior Zach Pelka serving as President and juniors Caleb Pracht and Lucas Pulliza serving as Vice-Presidents. Second, the team sponsored its first own Model UN competition, JPIIMUN, in September to provide hands-on training for new and returning members. Third, the team recruited a membership of 67 members or about eleven percent of the student body to compete in its fall competitions. With these 67 members, 470 JPII students have now participated in Model UN over the past decade.
“The thing I enjoy most about Model UN is how spontaneous and unique, yet enjoyable every conference is,” reflected Lucas Pulliza. “One weekend, I might be arguing Iran’s position on women’s rights and the next I’ll be arguing the United Kingdom’s views on international refugees. Every topic is always up to date and helps open my eyes to the reality of how different every country truly is in today’s world.”

On November 9th, 34 delegates attended the Vanderbilt Model UN (VUMUN) Conference where they competed against over 280 students from thirteen high schools from Tennessee, Florida, Alabama, Kentucky, Missouri, and North Carolina. After days of debating, the JPII students were rewarded for their efforts with eight awards, the third most awards among the schools competing. Zach Pelka was selected by the conference staff to receive the top individual honor with a Best Delegate Award. Miranda MacNaughton and Rob Dedman received Outstanding Delegate Awards while Lucas Pulliza, Collins Brown, and Mary Margaret Blum received Honorable Mention Delegate Awards. In addition, Allie Smith and Regan Givens were each recognized with a Verbal Commendation. Especially impressive was the fact that Miranda and Collins earned awards as freshmen at their very first conference.

“It was shocking and unexpected,” said Collins regarding his selection for an award. “I didn’t expect to win an award at my first MUN conference, but was helped by the guidance of older MUN team members, research for position papers, and tips from Model UN Advisor Mr. Saboe while researching for the conference.”

The next weekend, 44 JPII delegates traveled to Conway, Arkansas to participate in the Arkansas Model UN (AMUN) Conference sponsored by the University of Central Arkansas, Hendrix College, Harding University, and the University of Arkansas. This year’s AMUN conference was the largest ever with over 450 students from 27 high schools from Arkansas, Florida, Mississippi, Oklahoma, and Tennessee. The AMUN students were lead by Head Delegates Taylor Wallace (Bulgaria), Luke Price (Denmark), Anna Reding (Dominican Republic), Grant Gonzalez (Finland), Sam Knieri (Hungary), Zach Pelka (Iran), Gina Botsko (Iraq), Annalea Wilson (Japan), Lucy Cook (Latvia), and Ilinca Sipos (Mongolia).

This conference marked the tenth anniversary of the team’s very first conference and for the last three years, the JPII students have won the coveted Best Delegation Plaque, the conference’s top award. Consequently, the JPII students had a distinguished track record to defend and were the focus of intense competition from the other schools. However, the JPII students proved resilient and won 18 awards, more than any other school.

Pope John Paul II received five awards for Best Position Papers, more than any other school. JPII countries recognized for this achievement included Bulgaria (Taylor Wallace, Olivia Hooper, Natalie Semrow, Christina Yi, Cathleen Humm, Olivia Zimmer, Frank Hernandez), Dominican Republic (Ally Jenkins, Mary Parrish, Collins Brown, Anna Reding, Avery Glenn), Iraq (Gina Botsko, Helen Shaw, Dylan Pederson, Robert Davis, Logan Frost, Andy Motz), Japan (TJ Johnson, Annalea Wilson, Rob Dedman, Miranda MacNaughton, Raina Patel, Morgan Kennedy), and Mongolia (Ilinca Sipos, Sarah Link, Emily Shipley, Taryn Wallace).
Three students were selected by their fellow committee members for the prestigious award of Rappoteur or Best Delegate, including Zach Pelka, Allie Smith, and Lucas Pulliza. These students accounted for three of the eight students recognized at the conference with this honor, more than any other school. Each received a special engraved gavel and gave a report before the entire General Assembly regarding their committee’s progress during the conference.

“While I have won multiple delegate awards, this is the first one where I was selected by my peers rather than adults, which is such an honor,” said Zach Pelka. “I am extremely proud of our whole school and our progress in the past ten years.”

Numerous students were recognized individually for their public speaking skills by the conference administrators. Zach Pelka earned an Outstanding Delegate Award and an engraved gavel while Allie Smith, Caleb Pracht, Miranda MacNaughton, Lucas Pulliza, TJ Johnson, Rob Dedman, and Zach Abdo accounted for JPII’s seven Outstanding Delegate Honorable Mention Awards.

In addition, Pope John Paul II earned an Honorable Mention Best Delegation Award for Japan (TJ Johnson, Annalea Wilson, Rob Dedman, Miranda MacNaughton, Raina Patel, Morgan Kennedy) and for the fourth year in a row earned the highest conference honor, the Overall Best Delegation Plaque, for Iran (Lucas Pulliza, Allie Smith, Zach Pelka, Caleb Pracht). No school has ever won the Best Delegation Plaque four years in a row, which is a testimony to the continued skill and professionalism of the JPII team over the years.