

Teen chosen to perform NCYC theme song is grounded in her faith

INDIANAPOLIS - As she talked to the elementary school children, Francesca "Chessie" LaRosa could have focused on how she is scheduled to sing in front of 25,000 young people who are expected to come to Indianapolis in November for the 2011 National Catholic Youth Conference.

Instead, the 18-year-old singer-songwriter chose to share a defining moment from one of those tough, soul-searching times that most teenagers eventually face - a time when she had to decide what really mattered in her life.

It happened during the summer of 2008, a season of excitement, uncertainty and change before her freshman year at Roncalli High School in Indianapolis.

For most of her years at St. Barnabas School in Indianapolis, LaRosa didn't have many friends. She often considered herself as "weird" to her classmates and viewed herself as "shy," "awkward" and "not good enough." But that perception began to change in her eighth-grade year when she wrote a song called "We Are" that became her class' theme song.

People began to see her in a different light. She found confidence and new friends. Soon, she also found herself facing a choice.

"A lot of people were telling me to be a certain way - to dress a certain way and act a certain way - to be popular," LaRosa said. "I was really frustrated. It was killing me. I just really wanted to be with God and be for God. I started to realize my goal was to get to heaven."

So LaRosa did what she has done most of her young life. She poured her heart into the lyrics of a song, writing one called "Who I Want to Be."

"It's reaching out to the girls and guys who feel they aren't good enough," LaRosa told the students at St. Roch School in Indianapolis during a program about her music inside the parish church. "It's about being who God wants me to be instead of

who other people want me to be.”

Then LaRosa sat at the piano in the church and sang the song in the same way that she encouraged the children to live their lives – sharing from the heart and staying focused on God.

“The world is telling me that I should change the color of my hair,

“And everything about me

“I’m supposed to wear the tight shirts, the short skirts

“And change my personality

“Why is the world so caught up in all this vanity?

“Why can’t I just be me?

“Lord, help me be who I want to be

“Teach me how to live

“My life the way you did

“Help me put away

“The things that take away from giving my whole life up to you

“Oh, Lord, just help me be who I want to be.”

Everyone who knows LaRosa says she has always wanted to be involved in music.

Her mother, Chris, said her daughter could literally sing before she could talk. LaRosa started to play the piano when she was 4.

By the third grade, she was singing at Masses at St. Barnabas Church with her father, Joseph. She also began filling notebooks with song lyrics. And she had completed her first professionally produced CD of her music by her freshman year at Roncalli.

She also was chosen recently to sing the ballad version of “Called to Glory” – the theme song for the 2011 National Catholic Youth Conference in Indianapolis Nov. 17-19.

“I was really, really excited,” LaRosa said. “Singing brings me close to God. I can feel him when I sing. I feel embraced by his love.”

Her selection also thrills Kay Scoville, the archdiocese's director of youth ministry.

"I feel a sense of joy for the archdiocese to have such a witness of our faith be chosen for such an important role," Scoville said. "And the fact that it is a young person who felt called to evangelize in this manner affirms that we need to continue to reach out to our young people, and encourage them to share their gifts with the church."