

Teen group at DeSales defends life

By Sean McNamara
Freelance writer

GENEVA — Fifteen students from DeSales High School have decided to put their words into action, forming a Teens for Life group to forward their pro-life opinions.

"We're doing this so people can get educated about what we're trying to say — that abortion is wrong," said the group's secretary Heather Otis, a sophomore at the Catholic high school.

Although the group is only a few months old, it has already made plans for several fundraisers and demonstrations. The students plan to sell cookies at school bingo games in addition to sponsoring a car wash and flower sale.

The theme of the flower sale this Sunday, May 13 — which the group is symbolically holding on Mother's Day — will be "Give to the woman who gave you life," Otis said. Proceeds from the fundraisers will help pay for pro-life videos and books for the school's library.

Teens for Life also plans to protest at Geneva General Hospital, a facility where abortions are performed. Some group members already voice their concerns by picketing in front of the hospital on Saturdays.

"It's good to protest at the hospital. It lets other people know that youth really care about this issue," said freshman Amy Hickey, who is vice president of the group.

That concern is only natural, said Kathy Peters, a member of Geneva's adult pro-life community. Peters is the advisor for Teens for Life. "It's understandable that they are involved," she said. "They have peers who are having abortions."

Peters said she admires the teens for their willingness to take a stand on the abortion issue. "At this age, it is very tough to take a stance on any issue, and they have," Peters said.

Some members of the group believe it is their duty to speak out against abortion.

"People think we are very courageous in forming an anti-abortion group," said Sara Hovey, a DeSales senior and the group's public relations director. "Because of our concern about the abortion issue, we have to voice our opinions," she explained.

The group's shared opinion, according to sophomore and treasurer Chris Marturano, is that "nobody, not even a mother, has the right to take a life. It is not the Christian way to be." The group's members, however, took different paths in



Enthusiastic teenagers carry the March for Life banner past the Supreme Court building in Washington Jan. 22 at the 17th annual rally and march protesting the court's decision legalizing abortion. Members of DeSales High School's newly formed Teens for Life group in Geneva plan to attend next year's event.

coming to that opinion.

"At first I was a middle-of-the-roader," Hovey said. "I accepted abortion in some cases. Finally, I decided I was against abortion except for life-threatening circumstances. The massive number of babies aborted each year changed my mind."

Otis said her stance was crystallized by pro-choice demonstrations she witnessed last summer in her hometown of Seneca Falls. The abortion-rights demonstrations had an opposite effect on her, reinforcing her pro-life view. She had also seen the effects of teenage pregnancy at Mynderse Academy, where five of her former classmates became pregnant.

"If you can't practice abstinence, use protection. Don't use abortion as a form of birth control," she now advises her peers.

Each member of the Teens for Life would tell a pregnant friend not to get an abortion, adding that they would strongly advise parental involvement in the situation.

"I would tell her to go to her parents. You can't do anything without them," Otis said.

Teens for Life is predominantly female — only one of its members is male. Members said they haven't received any opposition at school. Otis suggested that students with a pro-choice stance "are afraid to come out in a Catholic school."

Peters tried to start a DeSales chapter of Teens for Life four years ago, but had little response. She said that the group had to hold meetings after school, which may have kept some students away. The chapter

now meets Tuesdays during the students' lunch period.

One of the group's most recent activities was a letter-writing campaign to members of Congress. Students were lobbying against passage of legislation, known as the "Mexico City Bill," that would expand American foreign aid to include financial support for abortions, Peters said. Students also plan to attend next year's March for Life in Washington, D.C.

Such political activity, Peters said, is healthy for the teens. "If you involve them

this young, they'll probably be involved the rest of their lives," she said.

Hovey said she hopes to continue speaking out for pro-life causes. "I would like to carry this on at college. Maybe I'll even form my own group," the DeSales senior said.

The result of the group's activities, Hickey explained, is increased exposure for their pro-life views. "I definitely know that our side is getting heard more than it was before," she said.

Our Lady of Mercy High School:

Should men have a voice on abortion?

Tiffany Burney, sophomore:

Yes, I think men should have some input, but basically it should be a woman's decision. It's her body. The women have the baby inside of them. It's a different type of experience.



Tiffney Carter, junior:

Yes, because they feel as if they should be involved because they helped create the child. Men should have some input because it's their child also. Women feel that it's their decision alone, and it is not.



AS TEENS SEE IT



Cristine Tisa, sophomore:

I think sex makes a difference because men have never had to go through the actual birth and everything. They don't know all the things that go into the decision-making process and what's right for the woman. They're looking at it from the perspective that it's murder, not from what we go through.



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