

Pro-life Day spurs debate at DeSales

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

GENEVA — Students turned into educators for one day at Geneva DeSales High School last week.

Hoping to convey a clear message to their fellow classmates, the DeSales Teens for Life hosted the first-ever Pro-Life Day last Wednesday, Jan. 15, at the school, 90 Pulteney St.

"We just want to have the students better informed about the issues, and the choices they might be faced with," said Amy Hickey, 16, a junior from Geneva and president of DeSales Teens for Life.

During the daylong event, the school's main hallway was lined with booths offering literature from seven area pro-life groups. The school's theology classes that day featured guest speakers Colleen Spelley of Waterloo, who encouraged the teens to practice chastity; and Don Peters of Waterloo, vice-chairman of the Right to Life Party in New York state.

In addition to DeSales Teens for Life, groups helping to sponsor the event included Common Ground of Upstate New York, Feminists for Life, Geneva Area Right to Life, Ontario County Right to Life, Right to Life Party and Finger Lakes Office of Social Ministry.



Don Peters was one of several guest speakers who spoke to religion classes during Pro-Life Day at Geneva DeSales High School last Wednesday, Jan. 15. The day was sponsored by the DeSales Teens for Life.

Erik Kunkel/Photo intern

The booths presented a wealth of facts and figures about abortion. Some displays revealed graphic photos of aborted babies.

Many other attention-grabbing moments were provided by Father Dave Mura, parochial vicar at St. Michael's Church in Penn Yan and St. Andrew's in Dundee. Father Mura conducted a highly charged lecture followed by a question-and-answer session in the morning with the 150-member DeSales student body.

The priest called on students to cling to the values espoused by Jesus Christ, not society — especially when it comes

to issues such as abortion, euthanasia and capital punishment.

"You never hear of anybody trying to get laws passed to kill themselves. It's always to kill somebody else," he pointed out.

"If we're saying, 'Thou shalt not kill,' then we've got to be consistent ... what you want to do is filter the stuff you get from government, and everywhere else, through the word of God."

Not every DeSales student agreed with Father Mura's stance. Miranda Dodd, 15, a sophomore from Newark, told the assembly that she knew a teenage girl who was raped and became pregnant. The girl's parents, who were Catholic, didn't allow her to have an abortion, and she eventually committed suicide during the pregnancy.

"I used to think abortion was so wrong, but now I see that maybe there is a time when you have some gray areas," Dodd said following the assembly. "It's really hard for me to deal with. This girl's life could have been saved, and the baby died anyway."

Members of DeSales Teens for Life admitted that they had anticipated differing viewpoints on the abortion is-

sue. "There are some students who think maybe we're radicals, trying to tell people what to do," Hickey said.

However, several group members noted that the day's overall mission — to spread information and provoke discussion — was accomplished.

"I think a lot of people don't know the facts. This can really change the way you feel," said April Pettingill, 16, a junior from Waterloo.

"People in the hall are going, 'Oh, my God, I didn't know that.' Where else are they going to find out? Not on TV," said Matt LeRoux, 16, a junior from Seneca Falls.

Don Peters' wife, Kathy, who serves as adviser for DeSales Teens for Life, agreed that this event was made necessary because the general media does not appear to cover the abortion issue objectively.

"A lot of people say they're Catholic and pro-life, but they're not in the media," remarked Kathy Peters.

Father Mura told the *Catholic Courier*, "It tends to be that sometimes Catholics are less responsive than non-Catholics. Our Catholic politicians are bending over backwards not to be known as Catholics."



Anthony Urwin examines pro-life materials distributed during the annual pro-life program at DeSales.

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