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Living her life...



for Life



Greg Francis/Staff photographer
Annie Schwalm prays at St. Pius X Church, Rochester, above, and participates in the March for Life, in Washington, D.C., at left, in provided photo.

STORY BY MIKE LATONA

Each Monday through Friday, at the same hour that most teens are catching their school bus, Annie Schwalm walks across the street from her house for 7 a.m. Mass at Chili's St. Pius X Church.

Annie then returns home to begin her school day as a home-schooler. Her mother, Nancy, serves as teacher, and they're joined by many of Annie's nine brothers and sisters ranging in age from 3 months to 21 years.

During much of the day, Annie — who is the fourth-oldest — tends to her younger siblings by feeding them or helping with their schoolwork.

"I'm a built-in baby-sitter," Annie laughed. "It's kind of fun. I love having so many responsibilities."

The busy 15-year-old also plays violin in a community orchestra, and is a starting guard for the St. Pius X CYO boys' JV basketball team.

Despite a long list of activities, Annie said she never lets her schedule interfere with a cause that is very important to her: protecting the lives of unborn babies.

Although her parents "definitely taught me that abortion is wrong" while growing up, Annie said her convictions are now very much her own.

"It's like, almost part of who I am. It's just me personally," Annie said.

Annie's efforts range from protesting in Washington, D.C., to attending pro-life prayer services and demonstrations in the Rochester area. She credited her steady attendance at church for helping to deepen her convictions.

"Being Catholic has a lot to do with it.

Going to Mass every day definitely keeps me firm in all my beliefs," Annie said.

By attending the March for Life in Washington on Jan. 22, Annie joined tens of thousands of people who firmly believe abortion should be outlawed. The march is held annually to observe the 1973 *Roe vs. Wade* and *Doe vs. Bolton* decisions that legalized abortion in this country.

Annie and her brother Matthew, 13, rode to Washington on a bus that departed from their church. Annie, who had attended the March for Life for the first time last year, said that it's exciting to join so many others who strongly support Catholic teaching against abortion.

"It seemed like you could turn around and talk to anyone," Annie said. "It's amazing to see so many people who agree with me."

Annie said she observed a large number of teens at this year's March for Life. "It's great. It's a good sign for the future," she remarked.

The one frustration on the trip, she said, occurred when she attended a meeting between her Rochester group and officials from Congresswoman Louise Slaughter's office. Slaughter, a Democrat who represents the 28th District covering most of Monroe County, has consistently argued to keep abortion as a legal option for women.

"It was kind of hard to talk to (the officials) because they talked about what is the law, and we were spiritual," Annie said. "In our religion, a baby becomes human as soon as it's conceived. But with (the officials), it was a one-track mind — babies don't become human until 21

weeks (after conception)."

Locally, Annie attends a rosary for life service at St. Pius X Church every Friday afternoon. She has attended other rosaries for life with her family since she was 5 years old.

In addition, Annie often takes part in pro-life marches on Saturdays in downtown Rochester. The marches include rosary recitation in front of Planned Parenthood on University Avenue, where demonstrators protest that agency's practice of performing abortions at the office.

Although Annie is devoted to these marches, she said you probably won't find her carrying a protest sign or shouting at Planned Parenthood clients or officials, as some demonstrators do.

"Some people were made to speak their minds," Annie said. "I believe in leading a silent example. I prefer to pray."

Yet Annie does speak up on the issue of teens and abortion. She said that teens who don't want to risk an unwanted pregnancy "should just abstain" from having premarital sex. By following this teaching of the Catholic Church, she maintained, "They would be rewarded eternally."

The tensions at Planned Parenthood have made Annie aware that she will have to defend her views repeatedly as she grows older.

"I'm prepared for it. I know what I'm going up against," Annie said.

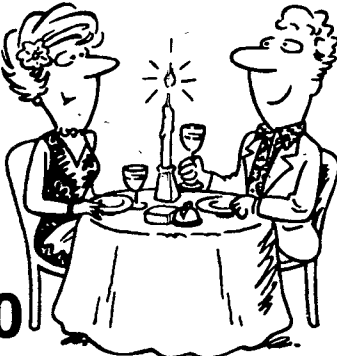
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