

on the **M**OVE

Call to defend life rises at Mercy



Bishop Matthew H. Clark greets a student at Our Lady of Mercy High School Sept. 21 at an assembly about abortion.



Bishop Clark listens to Jann Armantrout speak at the assembly.

A pro-life group at Our Lady of Mercy High School went straight to the top in staging its first event.

Bishop Matthew H. Clark was one of two guest speakers for a Sept. 21 assembly at Mercy that focused on the Catholic Church's stance against abortion. The message will resurface throughout the school year, thanks to the new coalition, Students for Life.

Mercy seniors Molly McBride and Katie McCormack, both 17, said their group was formed to raise awareness on a subject that, in their opinion, requires greater attention. Molly said Mercy's curriculum teaches that abortion is denounced by the Catholic Church — but she feels deeper reflection is needed for students to fully understand why abortion is wrong.

"Obviously, with a school full of girls this age, it kind of needs to be discussed," remarked Molly, a parishioner at St. Louis in Pittsford.

The subject was discussed in detail on Sept. 21. Bishop Clark delivered an opening speech and closing prayer, noting, "We defend life in all its stages because every life bears an image of God." He said that the Catholic Church's position applies not only to abortion but also to poverty, acts of war, the death penalty and physician-assisted suicide.

Jann Armantrout, life issues coordinator for diocesan Catholic Charities, warned of the harmful effects of abortion to young women, saying, "Abortion takes a life and injures you emotionally, spiritually, physically." She also noted that young women ages 18-24 have the highest incidences of abortion.

In the Rochester Diocese, Armantrout said, more than 5,000 abortions occur each year. The 1973 *Roe vs. Wade* decision that legalized abortion in the United States, she charged, opened the door for "the use of death as a solution to problems." Adding to this problem, Armantrout said, is our culture's insistence on promoting sexual intercourse as "a coming-of-age ritual" for teenagers.

Molly and Katie preceded the guest speakers, explaining Students for Life's mission and inviting anyone in grades seven-12 to join them. The group contains approximately 10 students and several of their parents. In an interview after the assembly, Molly and Katie told the *Catholic Courier* they hope to advance pro-life causes through education, advocacy, service and prayer.

Molly acknowledged that not everyone will agree with their anti-abortion stances, saying, "I think it is an awkward subject. People can be pretty passionate on both sides of the issue." She and Katie noted that Mercy has numerous non-Catholic students, as well as Catholic students who don't all agree with church teachings on abortion.

But so far, Molly and Katie reported, Students for Life has gained acceptance among faculty and students. "It's been pretty respectful here," Molly said.

"Although there has been some criticism, I don't think it's as bad as it would be in a public school."

Molly and Katie added that they're prepared to face any critics who may emerge. "I'm proud that I stand up for this," Molly commented. She attributed her strong stance to her family's influence, saying, "I was brought up learning that life was the most precious gift from God."

Katie said that her upbringing, along with her realization of the graphic nature of abortions, played major roles in her opposition to abortion.

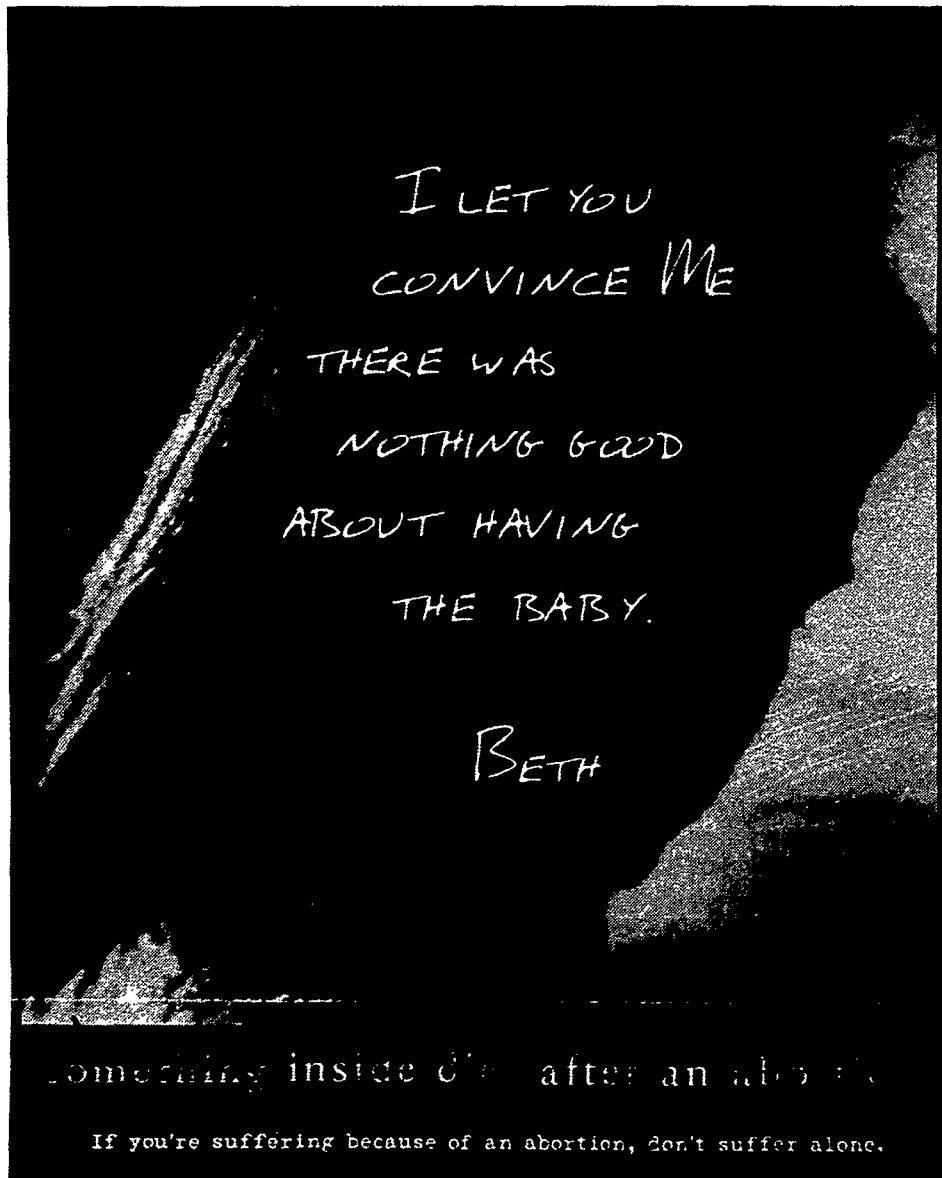
"I don't want to have to face God someday and try to explain why I didn't do something" to warn peers about the dire consequences of abortion, she said.

Katie likens any potential critical backlash to sufferings that Jesus warned his disciples they'd endure in his name. "If you're persecuted for what you believe in as a Christian, you will be blessed. This goes before (worrying about) reputation and popularity," said Katie, from St. Pius Tenth Parish in Chili.

Katie added that she draws strength from the fact she's not alone in her mission. "We offer support to each other," she said of Students for Life.

The Sept. 21 assembly's focus on life-related issues came 10 days after terrorist attacks on the United States caused the loss of thousands of lives, prompting Bishop Clark to tell Mercy's student body, "I have very much been reminded about the frailties of life."

"It's affected not only our group but the entire school; we've prayed about the value of life," Molly commented. "It really makes people more aware, and hopefully that can kind of transfer over to what we're (Students for Life) working on."



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Materials for the Respect Life campaign of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops include posters developed for Project Rachel, offering help for people who have been affected by abortion.

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