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Abortion and the college student

By ROB CULLIVAN • STAFF WRITER



Andrea Dixon/Staff photographer

Serrin Foster, president of Feminists for Life, with a statue of Susan B. Anthony at the Susan B. Anthony Square Oct. 22 in Rochester.

Most women who attend college leave with a degree.

Unfortunately, a number of them leave with the memory of an abortion as well.

That needs to change, said Serrin M. Foster, president of the Washington, D.C.-based Feminists for Life of America. She paints a sad picture of what happens when most college students get pregnant. At one northeastern university, for example, she said, students reported six live births one year — and 300 abortions.

"You find that women who did experience pregnancy (on any campus) were stared at as if they were some sort of exotic animal," Foster said in a phone interview Oct. 18.

Foster, a Catholic, spoke to students at the University of Rochester on Oct. 22. Her topic was "The Feminist Case Against Abortion," and it was sponsored by Feminists for Life of New York and the university's Newman (Catholic) Community. Earlier in the day, Foster took a private tour of the Susan B. Anthony House in Rochester, and gave a press conference at a downtown hotel. Her stop in Rochester was part of a tour of Upstate New York this week highlighting historic sites of pioneer feminists.

FFL maintains that it is carrying on the feminist tradition of women like Anthony who opposed abortion. FFL has worked with a number of colleges through its College Outreach Program, which has encouraged such pro-life initiatives as on-campus housing for parents.

Foster cited statistics that purported one of every five abortions in America are performed on college students. Indeed, the Alan Guttmacher Institute, one of the nation's leading gatherers of abortion statistics, has reported that women between the ages of 20 and 24 obtain almost one-third of all abortions. More than half of the women having abortions are under age 25.

One of the reasons women on campuses are so inclined to choose abortions is because colleges and universities, for the most part, are not designed for mothers, she said. Most higher education institutions still operate as if only single men attend college, she said.

She was particularly critical of "liberal" universities whose professors teach about social justice in their classes, but whose policies toward women with crisis pregnancies amount to little more than routinely referring them to local abortion providers.

"They only want women to go to school as if they were men and not respect the fact that women have life-bearing capabilities."

One university she studied provided four pages of information to students on safe abortions, but nothing about where a woman could turn if she wanted to keep her baby.

Foster blamed both radical feminists and traditionalists for contributing to the problem of college women and abortion.

Radical feminists cannot fathom the idea of a woman bearing a child before she completes her higher education studies, much less getting married in her early 20s and having children, she said.

"They cannot believe that anybody would not establish a career first and not wait until her eggs hatch on their own," she said sarcastically.

Yet, traditionalists at more conservative higher education institutions also contribute to a climate encouraging abortions by ignoring the prevalence of premarital sex among their own students, she said. Young women at more traditional institutions are getting pregnant out of wedlock just as their sisters are at more liberal institutions, she noted.

For example, she said, when Feminists for Life worked with Georgetown University to set up a pregnancy resource program on campus, a number of young women came out of the closet and admitted they had children they or their relatives were raising, children the school's staff and

students didn't even know existed.

Foster stressed that she welcomed efforts to encourage abstinence among college students, but noted that her focus was on those students who get pregnant and feel pressured to abort.

Foster said she wants to encourage colleges and universities to consider setting up housing for mothers, and to include prenatal and maternity care among the benefits in students' health insurance plans. Too many institutions will only offer to cover a woman's abortion costs and not offer anything toward helping her have her baby, she said.

She added that mothers who live off-campus can also participate in classes on-campus through distance learning via computer networks.

When asked about the financial costs of implementing maternity-friendly campus programs, Foster said that colleges and universities regularly find the money to endow sports programs and campus buildings, and should be just as aggressive in finding funds to help mothers.

She added that many school districts have programs that help high school mothers complete their studies, and that college mothers should expect no less from their institutions. Tuition-paying students are "employers" of university staff, she said, and should not settle for being shunted aside by schools when they find themselves pregnant.

"What women should say today is we refuse to choose between our careers, our educations and our children."

Youth Day beefs up security

By Mike Mastromatteo
Catholic News Service

TORONTO — Participants in World Youth Day 2002 in Toronto can expect an increase in security at the biennial international event in the wake of the Sept. 11

terrorist attacks on the United States, organizers said.

Basilian Father Tom Rosica, World Youth Day national director, told Catholic News Service that the governments of Ontario and Toronto have increased security and intelligence staff assigned to World Youth Day, scheduled for July 23-28.

"We have been given every assurance that all levels of security will be at their highest for this worldwide event of peace and harmony," Father Rosica said.

World Youth Day is expected to attract at least 760,000 people, ages 16-35, to Toronto.

Officials said they hope to learn from the security arrangements being made at the upcoming Winter Olympic Games in Utah and other large-scale events.

Father Rosica said the terrorist attacks have caused a renewed interest in peace, forgiveness and reconciliation among young people and, as a result, more may seek to attend World Youth Day.

Visitors to the event's English-language Web site have indicated that they are more compelled than ever to attend the gathering.

"While we at World Youth Day 2002 are deeply saddened by the recent tragic world events that have shaken all of us, we are nevertheless convinced of how much the world truly needs World Youth Day," Father Rosica said.

"Now more than ever, the world needs young people to be the salt of life to counter the culture of death. Now more than ever, the world needs young people to be the light of the world to counter the darkness of the cycle of violence," he said.

Father Rosica said that, while the safety of participants at next year's gathering was always a top priority, the September terrorist attack has heightened security concerns.

He said the original security force of senior police officers has been augmented by additional intelligence-gathering work.

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