

Religious violence impacts AQ class

Mike Latona/Catholic Courier

Holocaust awareness efforts recall atrocities committed against mankind more than a half-century ago, when millions of Jews were exterminated in Europe. However, as Aquinas Institute students were recently reminded, tragic occurrences from ethnic and religious differences are an ongoing reality.

For the past few years Patrick Connelly's religion class at Aquinas has corresponded by e-mail with high-school students in Israel. The basis of their exchange is to discuss *Night*, author Elie Wiesel's 1958 personal memoir of European concentration camps during World War II. While sharing reflections about the Holocaust, Aquinas and Israeli students also find out about each other's interests and lifestyles.

On March 5 of this year, Connelly's students got a major jolt. One of their e-mail friends, Daniel Harush, was among 17 people killed when a suicide bomber attacked a bus in Haifa as part of the ongoing violence between Jews and Palestinians.

Daniel was memorialized on April 29, Holocaust Remembrance Day, when a group of Aquinas sophomores visited the Jewish Community Center for an exchange session with Jewish youths. One of the AQ students, Erica Appleman, recounted some of Daniel's most recent correspondences with Aquinas.

Erica, 15, commented during the meeting that her classmates "all have read in the papers over the last two years about suicide bombings in Israel, but we never dreamed it could happen to someone we know ... we felt at a loss for words and many of our Israeli friends are still working through their grief, especially Daniel's classmates as they see that empty desk in their classroom each day."

Another sophomore, Teja Mehendale, remarked that Daniel's death was a sobering reminder that extreme violence is a daily occurrence for Israeli teens.

"That thing that impacted us so much is, it's normal for them. Kids



Aquinas Institute sophomore Teja Mehendale displays a drawing May 2 that she recreated from a photograph of a girl in a concentration camp. The drawing will be displayed at the Ghetto Fighters Museum in Galilee.

my age are training to use guns. And here I'm worried about the clothes I wear," remarked Teja, 16. "It's bizarre."

The April 29 event at the Jewish Community Center also included a candlelight service as well as guest speakers. Meanwhile, at Bishop Kearney High School, a ceremony on that same morning included a keynote talk by Claire Subar, a Holocaust survivor. The assembly was sponsored by the Rose and Joseph Denaro Interfaith Center for the Study of Genocide and Violence Prevention, located at Kearney. The center opened in September 2002 and is an ongoing community resource for research, study and reflection on topics related to genocide and violence prevention.

Teja, also, is making efforts to ensure that Holocaust remembrance continues into the future. Inspired by her class at Aquinas, she created a piece of artwork that, according to Connelly, will be displayed for a one-year period in the Ghetto Fighters Museum in Galilee. The museum is named after Jews from Warsaw, Poland, who resisted Nazi oppression during World War II.

Using pencil, Teja recreated a photo of a 10-year-old girl in a concentration camp bearing an identification number and the Star of David, marking her as a Jewish prisoner.

"I knew what the Holocaust was, but I didn't have that much of an idea of what actually happened and how the world was impacted," Teja said of Connelly's class. "It's not a happy course, but it's very interesting."

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