



the Roman Catholic Diocese of Paterson, New Jersey

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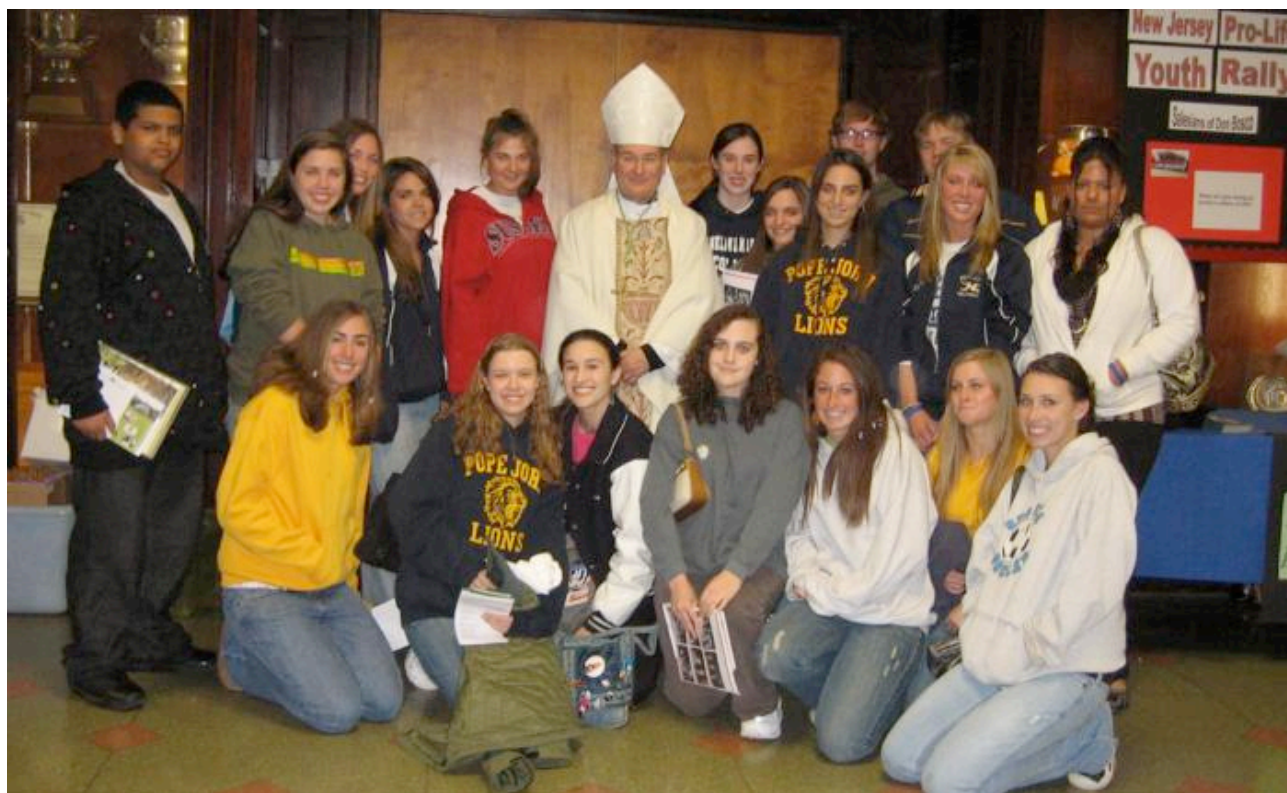
YOUTH
UPDATE

Young, pro-life and proud of it!

More than 1,000 Catholic high school teens celebrate life at annual rally

By **CECILE SAN AGUSTIN**
Reporter

SOUTH ORANGE - It felt like a rock concert. They danced, they sang, they cheered - loud and proud - 1,000 Catholic high school teens from all over New Jersey celebrated being pro-life.



The N.J. Pro-Life Youth Rally sponsored by the Salesians of Don Bosco was held at Seton Hall University here April 19. Under enthusiastic fanfare, there was much to celebrate - the event came one day after the Supreme Court upheld the ban on partial-birth abortions.

Diocesan students came from the following schools: DePaul Catholic High School, Wayne; Morris Catholic, Denville; Mary Help of Christians Academy, North Haledon; and Pope John XXIII, Sparta.

The daylong youth rally included a morning prayer service, abortion facts, a skit presented by students from Immaculate Conception High School in Lodi and speakers from Catholic Voices, N.J. Right to Life and Birthright. The Spirit Band, a musical group from parishes in Sussex County, provided the music and Bishop Serratelli was the main celebrant of the closing Mass.

Sal Solo, a former lead singer of an 80s British rock band Classix Nouveaux, presented the keynote address to the young people hoping to inspire change among them to change the world. He himself had a transformation within his own life, once living the rock lifestyle to becoming an advocate for youth and the pro-life movement.

Finding emptiness in his life as a rock and roll star, he began his search for something more to his life. His life-changing experience began on pilgrimage to Italy when he visited the Church of San Damiano near Assisi, the hometown of St. Francis.

"At first I hated the pilgrimage," recalls Solo, "but after a couple of days having listened to the conversion stories of simple people and soaked up the atmosphere of prayer, I believed as they did, that God is real, He is alive and He does care for us."

It was at that pilgrimage where Solo also found what to do with this youth. "Somebody on this pilgrimage said to me, 'young people in the world are looking for answers. They're looking for the truth. They listen to



music. You have discovered what you're looking for. You can use music to tell them.' And since that day my life has been dedicated to teen-agers just like you around the United States and around the world and there is nowhere I rather be right now than right here with all of you," said Solo.

He recalled to the young people the reckless lifestyle his band mates lived, saying, "It was all about booze, drugs, girls. The guys in my band, they used to sleep with a different girl every night. He was a sex object. She was a sex object. And that's what those of us who are pro-life do not believe in."

A thunderous applause followed as Solo said, "We believe we were made in the dignity of God. We are sons and daughters of the most high, King of the universe. That makes us a royal family of princes and princesses not to be cheapened and not to be treated in a causal fashion."

Solo spoke about his struggles on spreading the pro-life message to a secular world. At first, he explained his success on releasing a song about religion and God.

"If they are willing to let me talk about God and Christ, then maybe I can also talk about other meaningful things. So I made a pro-life record," said Solo.

He wrote a love song from an unborn baby to a mother who doesn't want the child. He tried to make it sound like a love song that people wouldn't get "too up and arms against" until they knew what it was.

"But somehow the word got out," said Solo. "When people went into the stores to buy this song, they were told, 'Don't buy this record, this record is anti-abortion.' "

In addition, the song was blacklisted from radio because it was considered unsuitable for families. Solo said, "Can you imagine that? I thought rock and roll music is about what feels good. Anything goes - except the right to life. You can make songs about killing, violence, murder, sex and rape. You can call women names and you'll hear it on the radio and that's suitable for a family audience. But a child's right to life, that subject cannot even be heard."

That was the day he turned his back on the music business and never made a commercial record again, instead focusing his message to those who care to hear it.

Solo also spoke about Jesus as the model for a real man and spoke about Jesus' own sexuality. He explained to the teens the huge difference between sex and sexuality and that sexuality is part of personhood and what defines a human being. He also told the teens about the value of their own lives and ultimately, it is up to them to make the change to live in a pro-life society.

He said to the teens, "We are not just in favor of saving babies, we are in favor of every kind of life and your life is wonderful."

Being young and pro-life

The youth rally proved to be an uplifting experience for the young people who can often feel wrong for their beliefs in the MTV society they see among their peers.

For Mary Khanjian, a senior at Mary Help of Christians Academy, she realized things she wanted and deserved in her life through Solo's talk. She said, "I never thought of Jesus as a 'real man' before and the way he presented Jesus as a real man was really inspiring. It made me realize that that's really what I want in a man in my life and that he's the best example."

It was Khanjian's fourth time at the rally. She likes coming here because "It is awesome to see the amount of teen-agers who gather in support of the pro-life movement. It's inspiring to me to know that I'm not the only one my age that feels so strongly about the right to life.

Spreading the pro-life message to her peers is important for Katelyn Monteleone, a senior at Morris Catholic. "It is a really big deal and people don't take it seriously enough. It's way to common and so many people die from it," she said.



Dayana



Dakis, a parishioner at St. Anthony Parish, Passaic, and a sophomore at Paramus Catholic, said, "I don't think it's right for people to kill a baby they don't even know yet. I think babies have the right to live just as anyone else has the right to live."

Tom Amarante and Devin McCabe, seniors at DePaul, were at the rally to get a better grasp about the pro-life movement.

McCabe said, "I am here to form a consciousness about the issues and I want to know more about it. Solo had so much enthusiasm about the issue and made my feelings change about a lot of things."

Part of the Pope John XXIII High School group, Michelle Heney, a sophomore, said, "I've always been pro-life and I knew that this would influence me even more. It's been such a wonderful experience and I had a great time."

Her schoolmate, Lena Chilingerian, a senior, knows first hand the importance of ending abortion. "I am against abortion. I should have been aborted - a partial birth abortion."

Now that she's 18, Chilingerian said, "I can now vote and use that right to spread my belief. It's really not about the politics, it's about the life but unfortunately, our lives are ruled about the politics. Those who can't defend themselves need someone to defend them."

Celebrating a pro-life Mass

Praying for a culture of life was a main focus at the closing Mass celebrated by Bishop Serratelli. He urged the young to "respect the sanctity of life."

In his homily, he said, "Our Gospel is for the sheer hope for the present time in which we live. For our Gospel is the risen Lord and as Jesus is raised from the dead who restores creation to its original dignity."

The bishop encouraged the young people to not allow politics and media influence their opinion on life issues and that God's Gospel message is the true word.

"This message that we bear will attract others when we ourselves do all we can to help the woman with the unwanted pregnancy bring that child to term, when we reach out to the sick and the terminally ill with love and compassion and when we assist the dying with understanding and tenderness," said the bishop.

He ended his homily by expressing, "As followers of Jesus today, we need to be courageous in letting our society know our commitment to life by what we say and even more than that, we need to be heroic in letting our society see our commitment to life in what we do."

At the close of Mass, the bishop also encouraged the young people to look within themselves for God's plan for their own lives. He ended the day saying, "The Lord speaks to us and so in the silence of your heart listen to what the Lord is speaking. I know for many of you, the Lord is saying come follow me as a priest or a religious sister. Know that he is giving all of you a life that is beautiful and a life worth living."