

First National Youth Leadership Summit Takes Place in Washington, D.C.

BY Joleigh Little

During the weekend of January 20-22, National Right to Life and National Teens for Life held their first National Youth Leadership Summit in Washington, D.C. Twenty young people from around the nation gathered to learn about the life issues from some of the leading minds in the pro-life movement.

To say that these young people were outstanding and amazing would be an understatement. But sometimes words alone just aren't adequate. Some things you just have to see to appreciate.

During the long hours of the summit, teens and college students from as far away as Wisconsin and California learned the ins and outs of debating the issues of abortion and euthanasia. They were treated to a pro-life history lesson from Burke Balch, director of the Robert Powell Center for Medical Ethics, which covered everything from the history of abortion in ancient times to the dual threats of abortion and euthanasia that face our nation today.

Always a favorite among the teens were Bobby Schindler, brother of Terri Schindler Schiavo, and Brother Paul O'Donnell, who shared Terri's story. They challenged the young people to commit themselves to fighting for life on both ends of the age spectrum.

Other sessions included topics such as "Why Women Have Abortions," "Post-Abortion Syndrome," and "Assisted Suicide." Throughout the weekend, the young people learned how to stand up for the defenseless. Probably most encouraging to the adults who witnessed it was their transformation from pro-life teens to passionate, educated, and informed young advocates for the cause of life.

Many in the pro-life movement have long held that education is our greatest weapon against the culture of death. Never is that truth quite so obvious as when you gather a group of pro-life young people and teach them what they need to know in order to become leaders in the cause of life.

After they listened intently and asked question after question over the course of three days, they were given a chance to speak out in a brainstorming session that was extraordinary. (In fact, we're pretty sure that the Movement will never be quite the same!)

To cap off the summit experience, the final activity of the weekend was a field trip to the Holocaust Memorial Museum. What had been a bubbly and happy group outside in the nippy D.C. air suddenly became a hushed and very serious group of 11-19 year-olds.

As we wound our way through the evidence that indicted the Nazis for unspeakable crimes against humanity, including their T4 euthanasia program, everyone was quiet. Upon reading the words of Nazi doctor Karl Brandt, who spearheaded the Nazi euthanasia effort to wipe out those living "lives unworthy of life," one young lady whispered, "Oh, no—it's just like today."

Mission accomplished. Well, the first part of the mission, anyway. Now it is up to the teens who

participated in the summit to take the truths they learned back to their schools and communities—and it is up to us to keep educating and encouraging them to fight for life.

From what we've heard so far, that is exactly what is happening. But don't take my word for it. Listen to what one of the summit participants, 17-year-old Eileen Crosby from Minnesota, had to say.

“As a teenager in American society I have grown up with Roe. I have never known an age where babies are protected from conception to natural death, this concept is something conveyed to me only as a distant past or a hopeful future. This past weekend was an amazing experience for me. It was an opportunity to become more aware of the American holocaust that my generation must inevitably face. The information and personal testimonies given were amazing.

“Especially on the topic of euthanasia, this weekend helped me to reassert my pro-life beliefs with new enthusiasm. I have already had opportunities to use and share the information that I gathered from the summit and I know that this experience will help me to become and stay more active in the pro-life movement. Though my friend group is mainly pro-life when concerning abortion, the topic of euthanasia is more controversial. I was glad that we covered euthanasia as extensively as we did. Through Bobby, Burke Balch, and other speakers, I feel as if I have the information to defend my position and the lives of the elderly and handicapped.”

Enough said.