

# 600 Catholic teens asked to bear witness to pro-life beliefs

written by Dwain Hebda |

More than 600 youth from 34 parishes across the state gathered the evening of Jan. 21 to participate in Weekend Extravaganza activities. The event held annually in conjunction with the March for Life was held at the Robinson Center Exhibition Hall in Little Rock.

In his welcoming remarks, Bishop Anthony B. Taylor applauded delegates' energy and enthusiasm in their faith and in their pro-life stance. He warned them against a pervasive secularism encroaching upon Christian beliefs that seeks to confine Church teaching to Sunday services and challenge them to be witnesses in their everyday lives.

"You are called to be witnesses to Christ as much as anybody else and not just when you worship," he said. "Don't let anyone tell you that you have to compartmentalize your life into the things you do in church and not out in the world."

Designed as a means to engage the youth of the diocese in the message and action of pro-life issues, Weekend Extravaganza provided an evening of music, skits and peer-to-peer messages, led by teen facilitators from across the state.

Youth Advisory Council member Maggie McWeeney, a member of Immaculate Heart of Mary Church in Magnolia, told the story of her parents' struggle to conceive children, which led them to foster, adopt, and eventually bear children. Such testimonials provide powerful personal narratives for delegates and are central to the event's success, the 18-year-old said. "It's important that we can talk to each other peer-to-peer," she said. "When teenagers see people their own age, they can relate to our stories better."

YAC members also performed a short skit, delivered the opening and closing prayers and introduced guest speakers, including Bishop Taylor and Marianne Linane, diocesan respect life director.

Both McWeeney and Linane said young Catholics should appreciate the substantial impact they can play in the pro-life movement. As a population with their reproductive lives ahead of them, teens and young adults are representative of a vital demographic in the pro-life movement as future parents, voters and adult Catholics.

Linane echoed Bishop Taylor's charge to the assembly, urging them to live up to their individual vocations throughout their lives.

"We are not all called to be martyrs," she said. "We are called to be witnesses to one another. We do this by our example. We are the only Gospel some people will ever read."

The evening's keynote speaker was stroke survivor Kate Adamson. In 1995, the healthy, 33-year-old mother of two suffered a massive stroke that left her in a state known as "Locked-In Syndrome." In this condition, Adamson suffered complete paralysis and was without the capacity to speak or even blink her eyes.

Though she had an awareness that allowed her to hear the conversations going on around her, including those by attending physicians urging her husband Steven to suspend all treatment, she was to all outward appearances, dead.

"Except for one stubborn little detail," she told the crowd, with a broadening smile, "My heart kept beating."

That one "stubborn little detail" was enough for her husband Steven, who brushed aside doctors' placing Kate's odds of surviving the night and achieving any semblance of normalcy at less than a million to one.

“My husband had this crazy notion that only God can play God,” Kate Adamson said. “We can never know what we will lose when we lose a life.”

“I was not so much pro life or pro death when I found my decision in that moment,” Steven Adamson said. “I was pro-God.”

The Adamsons repeatedly challenged the young audience to assign value to life in all forms and to not underestimate the importance of these formative years.

“This is the time to lay your foundation. Cling to and remain true to what you believe.

Someday, when your moment comes and you must make a similar choice, I pray that you will have the comfort of the Holy Spirit.”