

ProlifeProfile

Youth Well Spent

At Loretto Academy in El Paso, Texas, Sandra Ramirez started a pro-life club inspired by Generations for Life shortly after she attended her city's first ever pro-life fair.

After senior Margaret Motto attended a Generations for Life leadership conference last October, she began a vigorous pro-life club at her school, Lincoln-Way Central High in Chicago,

by **JOSEPH PRONECHEN**

after she got the necessary petition signatures.

Similar stories are unfolding around the country, and it's no surprise. If anyone knows how to give teens the truth about pro-life issues — and get them excited enough to form active pro-life clubs in schools, churches and youth groups — it's Generations for Life, the Chicago-based youth-outreach arm of the Pro-Life Action League.

One of the reasons for the group's "contagion" can be found in the uniqueness of its approach, Generations' co-director John Jansen told the Register. Teens have a desire to do something for the cause of life, he says, but often don't know where or how.

"Our curriculum gives them the material and the tools to get a club up and running," he adds. "It gives them all they need to maintain the club and to make sure membership and enthusiasm stay up."

With much experience and research behind it, the Generations for Life curriculum offers specific suggestions on activities and discusses more than 30 topics in language that appeals to teens' highest ideals. It also provides tips on fund raising.

Sandra Ramirez found the resource invaluable when she started the 35-member pro-life club at Loretto Academy.

"I basically used that curriculum so I could run all my meetings," she says. Her club became one of the biggest and most active on campus. Members responded robustly to activities like a clothing drive and a baby-bottle collection on behalf of a crisis-pregnancy center.

Then, using a Generations for Life idea, Ramirez set up a pro-life fair at her school, bringing together several pro-life groups.

She even invited Annie Casselman, founder of Generations for Life, to speak. The fair and



(Photo: generationsforlife.org)

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Casselman's talk had far-reaching effects on the entire student body of 400 girls.

"So many girls came up to me and said that was the best thing they heard," says Ramirez. "They said, 'No one ever talked to me about abortion that way.' Once they know the whole issue they're so excited to fight for life."

Now, as president of the pro-life club at the University of Dallas, where she's a sophomore, Ramirez still turns to the Generations curriculum.

Youthful Vigor

"It's amazing what these teenagers do," says Casselman. "They can do more than an adult can, talking day in and out to their classmates, leading discussions, giving presentations."

Founding Generations for Life in 2002 came naturally for Casselman. She had taken off a year of college to work for her parents, pro-life workers Joe and Ann Scheidler, at Pro-Life Action League.

Casselman, who is 30 and has a 6-month-old daughter, was always pro-life in her beliefs. But what she learned during that year about the links between, for example, depression and abortion made her feel "kind of annoyed" that she had never been taught such things in the Catholic high school she attended.

It was then, she says, that "I really started getting back into my faith and started learning why I was pro-life."

Having worked in youth ministry at two Illinois parishes, St. Mary's in Sycamore and

Sacred Heart in Winnetka, she wanted to keep working with teens to help them understand the Catholic faith, along with its teachings on chastity and life.

Two and two came together when her parents needed someone to start a youth outreach and suggested that she direct it. She found in the opportunity a perfect outlet for applying her abilities to most deeply held convictions.

Referring to how effectively Planned Parenthood reaches teens with messages about sex and abortion, Casselman says: "Fortunately, we can do the same but in a positive way. And it's much more effective all over the nation than if we only had a pro-life group here in the Chicago area."

Truth Tellers

Father Thomas Loya, pastor of Annunciation of the Mother of God Byzantine Catholic Church in Chicago, finds that Generations for Life responds to a great spiritual need among young people. They're eager, he says, to transform their culture.

One of his own teen parishioners was inspired by Generations to start a pro-life club in her Catholic high school.

"We have to understand that young people are very desirous of, and open to, the truth," says Father Loya, who has a weekly show on Relevant Radio. He finds the Generations program is a powerful counter to the deceptions and lies of the culture of death. "This program really schools people in the truth," he says.

The priest sees another major plus with Generations for Life.

"It inspires people to be disciples to their own peers," he says. "What is very important to young people is ministering to their friends. They take this information to their friends and are very up-front and bold about it."

Casselman envisions teens spreading the truth about the dignity of every human life far and wide, through Generations-inspired clubs all across the country — and the world.

To that end, its next major event is its annual fall leadership-training conference in October. Plus its website, generationsforlife.org, has much information and sample chapters of the curriculum.

"With abortion now illegal in South Dakota and things happening all over the country," the young founder says, "it's cool to be a resource in the midst of this. We have the product. People can come to us when they're getting fired up to change the culture. The Lord set it up perfectly."

Joseph Pronechen writes from Trumbull, CT