

McAuley students to March for Life in Washington

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Deacon Bob Cislo of Mother McAuley High School in Chicago, Illinois grabs bags to put on the bus Friday afternoon January 21, 2011 as he leads a group of students and parent chaperons to Washington, D.C. and the 2011 March For Life to protest the anniversary of Roe v. Wade. | Art Vassy~Sun-Times Media

As 41 Mother McAuley High School students prepared Friday for a bus trip to Washington, D.C., to participate in March for Life events that culminate in Monday's march to protest abortion, Deacon Bob Cislo had high hopes.

"I hope it's such an eye-opening, spiritually enriching experience for them that they come back to be great witnesses in their school, parishes and neighborhoods as people who stand up to protect life at all stages, from the moment of conception to natural death," said Cislo, a theology teacher and moderator for the Chicago high school's Respect Life Club.

Cardinal Francis George was to join the 41 girls, Cislo and several parent chaperones among eight busloads of people representing the Archdiocese of Chicago who planned to attend rallies, prayer vigils and the March of Life.

Monday is the 38th anniversary of Roe v. Wade, which legalized abortion.

The group from Mother McAuley left the school late Friday afternoon to attend a send-off Mass at All Saints Basilica in Chicago, then make the nearly 700-mile trip to Washington, D.C.

Mother McAuley senior Maura Kennedy, of Palos Heights, who said she started the school's Respect Life Club with fellow senior Lauren Newberry, of Oak Lawn, said the trip isn't a vacation.

"It's a pilgrimage to Washington in freezing weather. It's a serious trip that I hope will make a difference in all our lives," said Kennedy, whose twin sisters, Kerry and Clare, sophomores at Mother McAuley, also were going on the trip.

March of Life itinerary

Events in which Archdiocese of Chicago members plan to participate:

3 to 5 p.m. today: March for Life mini rally near the White House

6:30 p.m. today: National prayer vigil to end abortion, at Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception

10 a.m. Monday: Youth rally and Mass for Life

Noon Monday: March for Life Rally on the National Mall, followed by march up Constitution Avenue to the Supreme Court building on Capitol Hill.

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“To change the world,” she said, “you have to change people’s hearts.”

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Carly Bettinardi, 15, also of Palos Heights, hopes to come away more knowledgeable about the topic.

“I want to be able to speak out on the issue more,” said Carly, whose mother, Sheila Bettinardi, was a chaperone.

Sheila believes younger people are eager to stand up for pro-life issues.

“As a mom and a ministry member, it gives me hope for the future that all of life will be respected,” she said. “We need to drown evil with goodness, so we’ll try to end abortion with praying and marching; conquer it with good acts.”

About a dozen youth groups and several college organizations also were in the group making the trip, said Ray Pingoy, coordinator of youth outreach for the archdiocese.

Pingoy said Cardinal George — who will have an audience with the youth groups today — and many adults from the archdiocese have made the trip for years, but youth groups from the archdiocese have been involved in the march for just the past seven years.

“It gives them a chance to see what the march is about and be a witness to make their faith real and to act on it,” Pingoy said.