

Building a Pro-Life Future

Young Knights join SFLA in the effort to spread a culture of life at colleges nationwide

BY AMBER DOLLE



There is an infectious spirit circulating on college campuses across the United States that is focused on one of the gravest challenges we face today — the fight to save the unborn. Students for Life of America (SFLA) is leading the charge of galvanizing young people nationwide to help bring about an end to the tragedy of abortion. Just like so many cases when our faith calls for action, young Knights are standing on the front lines of this battle.

Founded in 1987 as American Collegians for Life by a group of volunteer students at Georgetown University, SFLA has grown into a full-time operation with a main office in Arlington, Va., and a secondary location in Ann Arbor, Mich. Executive director Kristan Hawkins, a young woman with an unquenchable zeal for life, currently leads the organization.

"SFLA exists to aid college stu-

dents in whatever ways necessary so that they can be successful in saving the unborn and their mothers," said Hawkins. "We are taking the fight to the belly of the beast to save women and children who are being targeted by Planned Parenthood and other abortion providers for exploitation."

'We aim to expand the quantity and quality of this generation's pro-life leaders.'

The group works to educate college students and to equip young pro-life leaders with the training, skills and resources they need to be effective. "We aim to expand the quantity and quality of this generation's pro-life leaders," said Hawkins. And with

glowing endorsements from numerous pro-life leaders, the group is certainly making an impression.

TAKING ACTION

The members of SFLA certainly have their work cut out for them. By all accounts, a strong pro-life presence is desperately needed on college campuses today.

"The statistics on abortion are startling and prove that young people truly are under attack," explained Hawkins. "That is precisely why a group like SFLA is such a necessity. We are the only pro-life organization dedicated to actively starting new campus pro-life clubs."

According to the Alan Guttmacher Institute, the research arm of Planned Parenthood, 52 percent of women obtaining abortions in the United States are under age 25. Another poll conducted by Gallup reported that about half of women are pro-life when they enter college, but 73 percent consider themselves pro-choice by graduation.

While many see these numbers and fall victim to despair, Hawkins is hopeful. "We know that this generation is pro-life," she contends, "so SFLA focuses on finding pro-life students and turning them into pro-life leaders."

There are currently more than 500 pro-life groups on college campuses nationwide, and of this total, 254 have been started by SFLA since 2006. In the fall of 2008 alone SFLA helped to start 60 new college pro-life groups. While SFLA is not a membership organization, it provides the stability and support that is so often needed by pro-life groups. SFLA has worked tirelessly over the past few years to devise effective programs aimed at combating the pro-choice agenda that is propagated at the university level. One such operation is the SFLA Field Program.

"The Field Program is an invaluable tool," said Bry Shields, founder of Students for Life at the University of Alabama at Birmingham and a member of St. Pius X Council 13085 in Mobile. "The support they gave and the practical advice they offered helped to get our organization off to a great start."

The Field Program is where the

WWW.KOFC.ORG

hands-on work of SFLA hits full speed. Each semester, field representatives, or agents, are hired for 11-week contract positions that begin with an intensive training at the Arlington headquarters. Once the field agents are trained on the ins and outs of the pro-life movement, they disperse to different regions of the country to work with pro-life students, to train leaders and to help form new groups. The agents are encouraged to spearhead additional events with existing organizations, start campus pro-life publications and register pro-life voters. Since

its inception in 2006, the Field Program has garnered more than 6,000 pro-life student contacts on college campuses across the country.

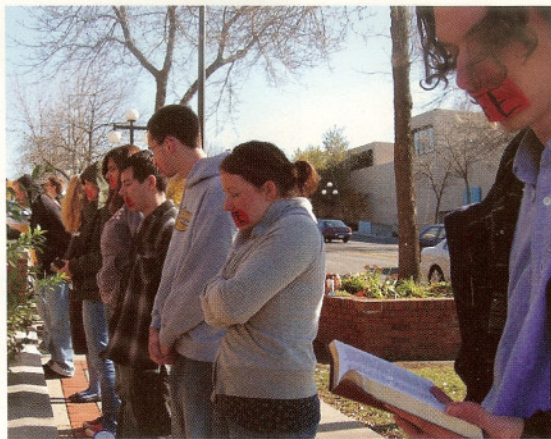
"The goal is to walk step-by-step with the students so they can form and sustain successful pro-life organizations," said Hawkins. "The bottom line is this: If a group is not active, it is going to die. Our field agents equip these college clubs with training, event organization guidance, activism workbooks, pro-life publications and much more so they will thrive on their respective campuses."

KNIGHTS LEND A HELPING HAND

Shields credits both the SFLA Field Program and area K of C councils with helping to make his university pro-life group successful. "Our SFLA agent came to campus several times and helped with recruitment, event planning and basic organization structure," said Shields. "We really couldn't have done it without the guidance and assistance from both SFLA and the Knights."

According to Shields, much of the funding that his group received came directly from Knights in Birmingham and Mobile. "Just about every council I met with offered spiritual, monetary or physical assistance," he recalled. "Whether it was going out to pray in front of the abortion clinic or attending an event on campus, the Knights could always be counted on for support. It really made me proud to be a Knight."

Since graduating from the University of Alabama at Birmingham, Shields joined up with a fellow



Northwestern University Students for Life participate in a "Bound4Life" event.

Knight, Joey Dunbar, to start Alabama Students for Life. This statewide organization, also affiliated with SFLA, is uniting student pro-lifers across Alabama to defend the unborn. "The work of the Knights and SFLA really complements one another and has given me an even greater fervor to stand up for the most vulnerable members of our society," Shields said.

Another SFLA program that has proven successful over the years is the organization's annual conference held at The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. The conference, which takes place in conjunction with the January anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court decision *Roe v. Wade*, consists of presentations offered by nationally known pro-life leaders and general networking opportunities for pro-life students. The event has grown by leaps and bounds over the past four years. Approximately 150 students attend

'The Knights were always involved, always willing to get in the trenches and do the work.'

ed the 2004 conference, and more than 800 in 2008. SFLA leaders credit this growth to the expansion of the Field Program and to general awareness that has been raised on college campuses by student pro-life groups.

"The annual conference is really

where I began my journey with both SFLA and the Knights of Columbus," recalled Michael Sciscenti, an SFLA board member and a member of Sedes Sapientiae Council 13295 at the University of Maryland in College Park. As a pro-life student at Johns Hopkins University, Sciscenti began attending the SFLA conferences and served as conference director from 2002-2003.

"When I was conference director, the Knights were always involved, always willing to get in the trenches and do the work," recalled Sciscenti. "I

was so impressed with the mission and the work ethic of the guys that I chose to take my first degree in 2005. It was just a natural fit."

Although Sciscenti now works full-time as an electrical engineer in the Baltimore area, he still donates much time and energy to the pro-life movement.

'THINK BIG'

One of the most rewarding aspects of SFLA's work, according to its leadership, is that young people are given a sense of belonging and ownership in the pro-life movement.

"The biggest obstacle we see on college campuses is apathy and lack of support," said Hawkins. "If we can just give these pro-life students a sense of security and let them know that they are not alone in their convictions, there is no limit to what they can and will accomplish."

With the tremendous success the organization has experienced in just a few short years, SFLA continues to set its goals high.

"We challenge our field agents, our interns, our office staff and everyone involved with SFLA to think big," explained Hawkins. "We need to be on the front lines, working hard and always mindful of the fact that innocent unborn children are depending on us."

For more information on Students for Life of America, visit www.studentsforlife.org. ■

Amber Dolle is a freelance writer from McKinney, Texas.