



St. Gabriel the Archangel students Henry Lake, Michael Pietroburgo and Rocco Wilson, all members of Salt and Light Pro-Life Club, worked on blankets for residents of Marygrove on Nov. 7 at the school in St. Louis.
Photo Credit: Jacob Wiegand

Salt and Light Pro-Life Club at St. Gabriel School teaches middle schoolers about the dignity of all human life from conception through end of life



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Submitted November 16, 2023 | 1:28 PM

Members of the Salt and Light Pro-Life Club carefully laid out several large swaths of brightly colored fleece, layering two pieces each to be cut and tied into blankets.

The no-sew blankets were later donated to [Marygrove](#), a Catholic Charities of St. Louis agency that provides treatment and support to young people with emotional and behavioral issues resulting from abuse, neglect and other trauma.

Earlier at the meeting, a Marygrove representative spoke about the agency’s mission to support young people in a safe environment through its residential and other community services.

The club at St. Gabriel School in south St. Louis is focused on teaching sixth-through eighth-grade students about the dignity of all human life, from the moment of conception through the end of life.

The after-school club covers a different life-related topic each month, usually with a speaker followed by a discussion and a service project. The hope is that students come away with “a greater understanding that we need to love one another,” said Lisa Slama, seventh- and eighth-grade religion teacher who helps moderate the club. “And we can’t do that if we don’t see the dignity of every human being, from beginning to end. By making them more aware of the needs of people around them, hopefully, they have more compassion as human beings. And hopefully, as they grow into adults, maybe some of them will step up and be the people coordinating these efforts.”



Lisa Slama, faculty moderator for the Salt and Light Pro-Life Club, spoke during a group meeting Nov. 7 at St. Gabriel the Archangel School in St. Louis.

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The group got off the ground last school year. Nicole Hollmann, Ozarks Regional Coordinator with [Students for Life of America](#), visited students for an Apologetics 101 training, which taught them about the value of human life using the SLED analogy: that a person is a person no matter their size, level of development, environment or degree of dependency.

“We’re trying to lay the foundation of why we believe all life deserves protection,” Hollmann said, adding that in Christian and Catholic schools, there is also an understanding that every human being is created by God and has intrinsic value.

Students for Life is a national pro-life advocacy organization that offers training and support to more than 1,400 pro-life student groups on middle school, high school, college, university, medical and law school campuses. Hollmann said she has received inquiries from several other Catholic schools in the archdiocese that are interested in starting a pro-life club aimed at middle schoolers.

“It’s important to start the conversation early, and middle school is not too early,” Hollmann said. “They’re hearing this in social media messaging and elsewhere, and it’s good to lay a foundation.”

Eighth-grader Elise Niemira, the club’s president, has been involved in pro-life activities with her family, including the annual Life Chain in October and Coalition Life’s March on the Arch in the spring. She plans to attend the March for Life in Washington, D.C., in January.

Last year, Elise began looking more deeply into what it means to be pro-life. “I had the general idea of just abortion, and I have learned that it is a major factor, but pro-life is also about helping people,” she said. “It’s anything living — that is what pro-life stands for. Abortion plays a big part because we respect life.”

The club at St. Gabriel collaborates with parish pro-life coordinator Amy Weston and youth minister Sarah Henderson to coordinate meetings and topics of interest for the students. Past meetings have included discussions on foster care, with a collection of items taken up for Good Shepherd Children & Family Services, and promoting a pro-life message through media, with a visit from a representative from Vitae Foundation. Students collaborated with the parish pro-life committee to make cards that were placed in gift bags for moms served by Birthright and Our Lady’s Inn and made crafts for senior living residents.

Students attended the monthly [Helpers of God’s Precious Infants Mass](#) at the Cathedral Basilica of Saint Louis and the [Generation Life](#) event held in St. Louis earlier this year.

Kolbe Heithaus, a seventh-grader who has been a club member since its inception, said he has liked learning more about organizations that support human life with different needs. “When I first started, I thought it was just about abortion, but I realize it covers a lot more and in different stages of life,” he said. “I’ve also learned more about what (abortion) is and ways that people are trying to bring an end to it.”

Sixth-grader Maria Snodgrass wants to spread the message that “every life is sacred. And to stop abortion, it’s making sure that you’re caring for others in your everyday life and upholding the dignity of life.”

>> Getting started

Students for Life of America is a national pro-life advocacy organization that offers trainings and support to more than 1,400 pro-life student groups on middle, high school, college, university, medical and law school campuses. Students for Life offers individual trainings on a variety of topics and has a “plan your year” guide, which includes suggested activities and related materials. For more information, email start@studentsforlife.org.

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