



Rachel's Challenge Inspires Saint Viator Students

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Students take time out of their lunch period to sign the "I Accept Rachel's Challenge" banner. (Photo by Chris Santucci '12)

Saint Viator senior Nick Fedyna of Hoffman Estates shot up his hand at the end of the emotionally charged "Rachel's Challenge," which tells the story of Rachel Joy Scott, the first student gunned down at Columbine High School.

Fedyna was one of the first to respond to a question posed by presenter Jon Prensner, who asked for a show of hands from students who pledged to start a chain reaction of kindness and compassion.

"It was so moving," said Fedyna, a varsity football player, "to see how this chain reaction of little acts of kindness can make a difference."

When asked what he could do, he didn't

hesitate: "If I see people not having a good day, I can go up to them."

It's that simple, Prensner told the teens.

"Rachel's story is a powerful witness," Prensner said, "that a life committed to kindness can change a world."

Saint Viator students were riveted during the presentation, which wove video clips and photos of Rachel and her family with excerpts from her six diaries, including the last one which still features a tear from one of the bullets.

"It's been four years since we've had the program here, and a whole new group of students need to see it," says JoAnne Francis, student activities director.

The Rev. Robert M. Egan, C.S.V., president, felt strongly about bringing back the program to the Saint Viator community.

"This profoundly powerful presentation will challenge all of us to work together," Egan says, "to create a more compassionate, respectful Christian environment at Saint Viator High School."

Freshman Jeff Madden of Arlington Heights and his friends from his lunch table were among the first to sign a banner in the cafeteria pledging to accept "Rachel's Challenge."

Madden said he was moved by all the pledges that have been made since the first ones written on Rachel's casket during her funeral, which drew the largest television audience in CNN's history.

"The last part of the video, seeing what her dad wrote, that she was his hero and that her life was not spent in vane," Madden said, "that really got me."

Rachel's message lives on, and now has touched more than 14 million people literally around the world, delivered by as many as 14 professional speakers spreading her challenges to schools and communities around the world.

But to Saint Viator students on Wednesday, it was all new. Most of them were mere toddlers or young children when the violent attack occurred, so consequently they knew little about the deadliest school shooting attack in U.S. history.

“I knew there were 13 people killed that day,” said senior Patrick Ryan of Medinah as he signed the banner, “but I never had heard any of their stories. This makes it real, and doing small acts of kindness --- is something I can do.”