



Saint Viator Students Join Activists for Immigration Reform

May 10, 2010



Grace Donnelly leads the chants during the immigration march earlier this month.

As a club, members of the Saint Viator High School's Student Action Tribe look for ways to participate in issues of peace and justice.

Already, they demonstrate every month against genocide as they try to raise awareness about atrocities in Darfur. Earlier this month, they added a new experience by marching in favor of immigration reform.

Five students joined three Viatorians in a march organized in Palatine by an ecumenical group of organizations. Students included sophomores Grace and Libby Donnelly of Inverness, junior Valerie Kiebala of Rolling Meadows, and freshman Katie Cascino and junior George Theotokatos, both of Arlington Heights.

They were accompanied by the Rev. Corey Brost, Br. Michael Gosch and Br. Rob Robertson, all members of the

Clerics of St. Viator, based in Arlington Heights.

"Marching along side of immigrants helps our students understand who their neighbor is," Gosch said. "They saw that their neighbor isn't someone who always looks like them, or even speaks the same language.

"As people of faith, we are called to act justly and treat our neighbor as we would like to be treated," added Gosch, a former English teacher at St. Viator now teaching at St. Martin de Pores High School in Waukegan. "Our students did just that, by raising their voices in favor of compassionate and comprehensive immigration reform."

The students and religious joined with nearly 500 people in the march that stretched from St. Thomas of Villanova Church in Palatine to Mission San Juan Diego in Arlington Heights.

"In our Student Action Tribe meetings, we talk about the need for immigration reform and what we can do," Grace Donnelly said. "But with the passing of the Arizona bill, it became apparent we needed to do something, now."

The march presented them with an immediate opportunity, they said. It was planned with the Chicago Archdiocese's Office for Hispanic Catholics, Chicago Workers' Collaborative, Jewish Council and Urban Affairs, Northwest Cook and Lake County Alliance for Immigration Reform, the Immigration Advocacy Project, and Northwest suburban Catholic parishes.

"That's what hit me the most," said junior Valerie Kiebala of Rolling Meadows, "the power of unity at the rally, of all of these people working together."

Sophomore Libby Donnelly saw firsthand how current immigration laws can divide families. She vividly recalls the emptiness and anger she felt three years ago when a junior high classmate's mother was discovered to be an illegal immigrant. Ultimately, she was deported back to Mexico, and she took her daughter with her.

"I've never heard from her again," Donnelly said. "It just makes us look so unfeeling when we separate families like that and make them feel like criminals."

The group joined with marchers in shouting chants that echoed their concerns, including "People united can never be divided," and, "Sí se puede," or Yes, we can.