



## **Real Life Hero of “Hotel Rwanda” Draws Crowd at Saint Viator High School**



Paul Rusesabagina answered questions from students during an informal visit to the school cafeteria.

In anticipation of many students jamming into Saint Viator High School’s auditorium to hear Paul Rusesabagina speak, administrators moved his presentation to the Cahill gymnasium to accommodate the crowd.

In all, more than 700 students gave up their activity period Monday to hear the real life hero give his testimony.

The former hotel manager who inspired the movie when he saved the lives of more than 1,200 people during the Rwandan genocide came at the invitation of the Student Anti-Genocide Coalition, in partnership with the Clerics of St. Viator.

During a three-month period in 1994, when more than 800,000 Rwandans were killed, Rusesabagina risked his life to shelter Hutus and moderate Tutsis who sought refuge during the conflict.

The massacre now is viewed as one of the worst tragedies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In a rare visit to the Northwest suburbs, Rusesabagina spoke at the morning assembly before sitting down with members of the Student Anti-Genocide Coalition for a Q & A session, including juniors Connor Romenesko of Barrington, George Theotokatos of Arlington Heights, Valerie Kiebalala of Rolling Meadodws and Samantha Ropski of Prospect Heights.

The teens asked him about his own children’s reaction to what they witnessed, and later about what role they could play, living in the Northwest suburbs.

“I am traveling around to raise awareness and talk to young people,” Rusesabagina said. “Young people are the ones who can change the world. We are all part of the problem – but we are also all part of the solution.”

Later, he sat in on two lunch periods with students before making a formal presentation that night to school parents and members of the community. In both settings, he challenged his audience to aim higher in the fight for social justice and human rights.

In fact, Rusesabagina said in order to bring about change, ordinary people must work together to prevent genocide throughout the world.

In preparation for his visit, teachers across all departments talked about the situation in Rwanda with their students and the surrounding Great Lakes Region of Africa, including in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Darfur.

“This is an incredible opportunity for our students and our entire community to meet a hero,” says the Rev. Corey Brost, C.S.V., moderator of the Student Anti-Genocide Coalition. “Paul is a winner of our nation’s highest civilian honor, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, which he received from President George Bush in 2005.”

His Hotel Rwanda Rusesabagina Foundation, based in Chicago, aims to raise awareness about the conflict that continues in Rwanda and in the surrounding Great Lakes Region of Africa, including in the Democratic Republic of Congo and in Darfur.

The foundation also strives to give voice to victims of genocide and support peace efforts in Rwanda and around the world.