

Adamson

Paralysis Survivor to Speak at Life Conference, Youth Rally

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One weekend in October will celebrate life, invigorate youths and embrace the diversity of the disabled. On Oct. 22, a respect life conference will be held at St. Leo Church in Fairfax. On Oct. 23, youths will swarm Bishop O'Connell High School in Arlington for the annual diocesan Youth Rally. Though two distinct events, inspirational speaker Kate Adamson will weave a common thread through them by speaking to both audiences on the importance of life and on its endless possibilities.

In June 1995, Adamson suffered a severe double brainstem stroke and was completely paralyzed. Left with what the medical profession termed "locked-in syndrome," Adamson was unable to move or communicate in any form. After 10 years of therapy and overcoming seemingly insurmountable odds, Adamson has regained most of her functions. She is still slightly paralyzed on her left side — she has no use of her left arm and wears a brace on her leg. She uses a wheelchair to travel long distances, a cane for short walks.

After hearing about Adamson's endless advocacy of the life of Terri Schiavo this spring, Kevin Bohli, director of the Office of Youth Ministry, contacted Adamson about speaking at the Youth Rally. Bohli said that students often hear about beginning of life issues such as abortion, but "very infrequently do they hear about the other end. "I felt like it was very timely and a good key note," he said.

Adamson said she hopes to make the rally interactive for students by having them perform tasks that will better enable them to appreciate the difficulty of living life with disabilities.

"They will get to feel what it's like to live in the body of the disabled," by doing something that they would take for granted, like wrapping a present or peeling a banana, she said. Sometimes Adamson has students communicate only by blinking their eyes, like she had to do.

"When you do that with students, they can imagine what it's like," she said. "We tend to think we're invincible and that nothing's going to happen to us."

Adamson's interest in speaking to youths stemmed from explaining her disabilities to her two daughters, currently in sixth- and eighth-grades, and their friends.

"Small children would ask so many questions. The youth are curious," she said. "It's a wonderful message to bring across — focusing on what you can do, not what you can't." Adamson said that she wanted to give up many times, especially during rehab. She got better "little by little.

"Students can relate because they could see that I didn't give up — that I kept going," she said. With awareness, "they have more compassion to someone who's disabled."

Adamson is not Catholic, but is a Christian whose faith has played a "tremendous role" in her recovery.

"My family is in New Zealand, so my family here was the church," she said. "It drew me closer to God."

Adamson began using her life to inspire and encourage others in mid-1996.

"With my recovery, because I focused on other people, it took the focus off of me," she said. "God has worked through me to speak to other people."

In April, shortly after Terri Schiavo's death, Adamson addressed the congressional subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy and Human Resources about the rights of those who cannot speak for themselves and about the responsibility society has to uphold those rights. She related her personal journey and stressed the preciousness of every life — disabled or not.

“A lot of what I do now is speaking for the voiceless,” she said. “Every life is important. We don't get to play God. We don't choose when life is ended.”

For more information on Adamson go to www.katesjourney.com. To register for the respect life conference on Oct. 22, call the Office for Family Life at 703/841-2550. Youths interested in attending the Oct. 23 rally should contact their parish youth ministers.