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The National Youth Pro-Life Coalition: A Positive Force in a Violent World

Thomas W. Hilgers, M.D.

Dr. Hilgers is co-founder and advisor to the NYPLC. This article explains the background of the organization and its current activities on behalf of the "respect for life" movement.

A little more than two years ago, 60 young people from nearly 23 states met in Chicago, Illinois, with a common interest in human life. The abortion issue was the main item of concern at the first conference, but it didn't take long to recognize that those in attendance had a great concern for human life at all stages of development and in all strata of social existence. From the first meeting, the first national youth pro-life organization was conceived. At that time, this organization, the National Pro-Life Coalition (NYPLC), adopted three fundamental tenets to its existence: it would be non-violent in its activities; it would espouse that human life was a continuum from conception to natural death; it would promote the concept that "there is no human life not worth living" (taken from the writings

of Dr. Viktor Frankl, an Australian psychiatrist who spent three years in the Auschwitz death camp).

Since that very first meeting, the NYPLC has experienced a steady and evolving growth. In the 1972 presidential primaries, the members of the Coalition brought the abortion issue to those candidates running in the Wisconsin and Ohio presidential primaries. John Lindsay walked off the platform when confronted on the issue and later said that his pro-abortion stand was a major reason for his dropping out of the race. Later, on Labor Day, 1972, the NYPLC sponsored the first National Rally for Human Life. This rally, held at the Lincoln Memorial, was the first event that began to bring national attention to the Coalition.

However, it wasn't until January 22, 1973, that the NYPLC as an organization began to jell. Spurred into action by the U. S. Supreme Court's tragic decision on abortion, the NYPLC organized a successful campaign to have

the court petitioned, by the Georgia and Texas Attorneys General, to rehear the case. Over the past several months, the leaders of the Coalition developed the sale and distribution of the 'Circle of Life' bracelets, hired a full-time National Director, and opened a national office in Washington. In the summer of 1973, eight student leaders of the NYPLC traveled over 60,000 miles in spreading the word all across the United States.

All of the activities and accomplishments of the NYPLC cannot be listed here, but suffice it to say that the Coalition has consistently worked towards the development of pro-life youth leadership, activist in orientation and dedicated to grassroots development. I think it would be fair to say that at the present time, the NYPLC is the fastest growing pro-life organization in the country. And, I think, this is a credit to the performance, dedication and hard work of the leaders of the NYPLC.

The concern of the NYPLC, which now has chartered groups and affiliate members throughout the United States, lies in the issue of life itself. Dismayed by the inconsistent way human life is valued in our society, the Coalition speaks out for consistency. The membership is aware of the prevailing attitude among young people, especially on college campuses, that ties anti-war, pro-civil rights, and pro-abortion feelings all into a tightly knit 'liberal'

bag. Equally discouraging has been the anti-abortion, pro-war, pro-capital punishment attitudes of yet another segment of the population.

In the "respect for life" movement, the Coalition believes that only a *real* revolution in the value and dignity of *every* human life will produce constructive social and human reform. If human life is to be respected, then *all* human life is to be respected and arbitrarily eliminating anyone from this respect produces inconsistencies which undermine the basic ground-structure from which true reform emanates.

The NYPLC has been criticized for taking a "multi-issue" approach in their work. However, that in itself seems to be a matter of either definition or perspective. In fact, the Coalition is a "one issue" organization and that issue is human life. The NYPLC has taken strong positions *against* abortion and abortifacient 'contraceptives,' euthanasia, fetal experimentation, government birth regulation, and *for* positive solutions to human problems, cooperation with nature, the poor, the elderly, the mentally and physically handicapped, prisoner rehabilitation and peace. All of the positions revolve around intensifying the value and dignity of *every* human life and the leaders of the NYPLC firmly believe that this is where the ultimate strength of the pro-life movement lies.

Recognizing that mankind encounters enormous problems,

many of which do not have ready solutions, the very first position of the NYPLC is a call for the creation and implementation of positive, non-violent solutions to human problems. The NYPLC openly admits that it does not have all the answers; nonetheless, it maintains that the use of violence to solve human problems is unconstructive, non-progressive, and ultimately always destructive.

In November, 1973, the NYPLC held their second 'Thanksgiving for Life' Convention. This time, 300 young people from over 30 states attended. Nick Thimmesch, highly respected syndicated columnist for *Newsday*, delivered the main address. At this convention, the first truly democratic and truly grass roots national pro-life organization was born.

On January 22, 1974, the NYPLC sponsored delegations from over 40 states who lobbied their representatives for pro-life

legislations. While this did not receive great publicity, the response of Capitol Hill was overwhelming. Such leading politicians as Senators Edward Kennedy, George McGovern, Strom Thurmond, and Walter Mondale were *all* confronted on the abortion issue.

In addition, Susan Bastyr-Hilgers, President of the NYPLC appeared on the *Today Show*, and a full-page ad in the *Washington Post* declared our support for life.

Presently, the Coalition is moving forward on a massive membership drive, organization of the states through summer tours and continuing its lobbying efforts in Washington.

Greatly in need of financial support, we ask all of you to seriously consider a generous donation. Contributions can be sent to and more information received from the NYPLC National Office, 235 Massachusetts Avenue NE, Washington, D. C. 20002 (202-543-8000).