

# Teens help peers understand facts of AIDS

By Barbara Hughes  
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"Teens With A Purpose" may sound like a buzz phrase but for teenagers and some young adults at the Basilica of St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception, Norfolk, it's a call to action.

The Norfolk inner city teen ministry that started at St. Mary's has partnered with AIDS Care Center for Education and Support Services (ACCESS) and the recently empowered coalition is taking their message to churches, schools and the greater community.

The goal of Teens With A Purpose (TWP) is to equip teens with healthy life skills and emphasize the prevention of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases by encouraging abstinence.

In the process, TWP trains youth to become peer leaders and educators while promoting healthy choices for mind, body and spirit.

The group recently learned their project would be funded through a grant awarded by the Commonwealth of Virginia beginning in January 2008. However, the initiative has been in the works much longer.

Deidre Love, a parishioner at St. Mary's Basilica who coordinates the effort, has been involved with youth on the parish level for 10 years.

With statistics showing that the rise in HIV/AIDS continues

State of Virginia and the AIDS Resource Center, a division of the Eastern Virginia Medical School.

Next she began the process of training young adult facilitators who in turn train youth.

Through blending her faith and commitment to youth, Ms. Love helped develop a plan that targets not only youth at St. Mary's but teens throughout the city.

"Teens With A Purpose reinforces faith and family values," explained Ms. Love. "It emphasizes the freedom to choose but stresses that when you engage in risky behavior, you put yourself at risk."

"We keep it real," she explained. "Methods such as reverse role playing, which invites youth to assume the role of a parent, gives them a different perspective from which to talk about sex and abstinence."

A values auction conducted by young adults invites teens to decide the price they would pay for values esteemed by our culture compared to the values that a faith perspective encourages.

During the Nov. 3 retreat day for teens held at St. Mary's, young people were instructed to look at the fleeting nature of material possessions and encouraged to set their aims higher.

It seems the youth got the message. When they were asked how they would spend the play money they were given for the



Teenagers practice a learning exercise.

was using someone, but that educational component which inside he felt torn up.

"And then God stepped in," he said.

"God sees your struggle. He knows your family and your neighborhood," he continued. "He knows what you go through every day. Some of you feel alone, but you don't need to because when you open up your heart, God is real."

The retreat also included an

be a "foot soldier" and plans to knock on school doors and churches and any organization that can benefit from their message.

Plans are also in the works to develop a website for the group.

Teens With a Purpose is permitted to implement the program in public schools as

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Deidre Love, a parishioner at St. Mary's Basilica who coordinates the effort, has been involved with youth on the parish level for 10 years.

With statistics showing that the rise in HIV/AIDS continues to be a problem among black teens, she decided to do something about it.

Her motivation was prompted by her desire to offer something better for her son, Andre, who has since become a peer leader in the movement.

As a first step Ms. Love completed a training program about HIV/AIDS that was offered through the Health Departments in Norfolk and the

material possessions and encouraged to set their aims higher.

It seems the youth got the message. When they were asked how they would spend the play money they were given for the exercise, one youth said he would pay for his mother's surgery, another said he would donate the money to find a cure for AIDS, and a third person decided to give the money to victims of Hurricane Katrina.

Brian Greenfield, guest speaker from Hard as Nails Ministry in Washington D.C., pointed out that before he opened his heart to Christ, he thought he was cool when he

help the youths work through some of the problems in the event before they take the program to the community.

She told The Catholic Virginian that she is prepared to

group.

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## New Cathedral rector

Father Patrick Golden acknowledges applause from the congregation after he was installed as new rector of the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart Nov. 18 by Bishop Francis X. DiLorenzo. The installation ceremony came at the same liturgy at which the Cathedral ended the formal celebration of its Centennial. Father Golden, a native of Lynchburg, was ordained a priest for the Diocese of Richmond in 1996. His previous assignment was as pastor of St. Jude parish in Radford.

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long as it is offered in the context of an after school club.

The grant is intended primarily to reach African American teens. National statistics indicate 69 percent of HIV/AIDS diagnoses are made among blacks, although they represent only 17 percent of the population. In Virginia, 74 percent of young people between the ages of 13-19 that are HIV/AIDS positive are African Americans.

Marcus Brown, a 20-year-old from St. Mary's who has been involved with the youth group for seven years, said, "Helping people has given me a deeper and meaningful perspective on life."

(For more information about Teens With A Purpose, contact Deidre Love at (757) 503-3509 or [twthepurpose@yahoo.com](mailto:twthepurpose@yahoo.com))