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Pro-life convention: The truth behind the tragedy

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NEIGHBOR ISLAND REPORT



Photo by Kara Nelson

Bobby Schindler talks about the death of his sister Terri Schiavo.

The truth behind the tragedy

At a Big Island life issues conference, the brother of Terri Schiavo dispels the myths about the death of his sister

By Kara Nelson | Special to the Herald

I had the immense privilege last month of meeting three extraordinary leaders in the national right-to-life movement. They spoke at the June 26-27 Family Life Issues Conference, which I attended, at St. Joseph School in Hilo. Of the three, Bobby Schindler impacted me the most.

CNS Photo

Sculptures seen in newly restored Pauline Chapel at the Vatican



CNS photo/L'Osservatore Romano via Reuters

Sculptures in the newly restored Pauline Chapel are seen at the Vatican June 30. Pope Benedict XVI led a service July 4 to inaugurate the chapel after a \$4.6 million, five-year restoration funded by donors.

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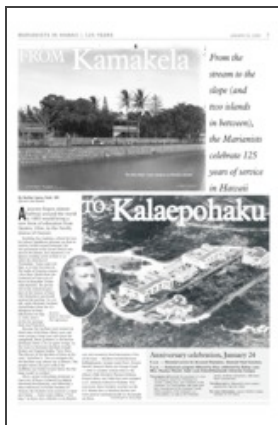
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Schindler is the brother of the late Terri Schiavo, a disabled woman who died of severe dehydration in 2005, 13 days after her feeding tube was removed by a Florida court-order at the request of her husband Michael Schiavo.

In his June 26 keynote speech and at his workshop on June 27, Schindler sought to dispel the myths surrounding this world-known, controversial case.

“There are so many misconceptions about my sister in the public that exist today; thinking she was on life support, thinking that ventilators, whatever, were keeping her alive,” Schindler said.

He explained that his sister was neither brain-dead nor dying. She only needed food and water, administered by a feeding tube because she had trouble swallowing. If they had a wheelchair, Terri could be taken anywhere, such as to the movies, he said.

“Our family’s only intention from the beginning was to bring Terri home and care for her,” the mild-mannered Catholic explained. “We were ready to accept her the way she was.”

Schindler’s message was a warning. He sees his sister’s death as portraying the future of euthanasia in our country. He said that life and death situations will affect everyone, either directly or through a family member.

“We’re moving into a climate where all the power is being given to doctors, to nurses, and facilities to make decisions on persons and their care even if a person has an advanced directive,” he said.

“The doctors [and] hospitals now have these ethics boards that have formed that can override even a person’s wishes,” he said.

Every day, Schindler said, brain-damaged, but otherwise healthy, people are dying because their feeding tubes are being removed.

“This was never about my sister — this was about us and how we’re going to treat people like my sister,” Schindler said. “They are completely vulnerable to us.”

To the often asked question, “Who’d want to live like your sister?” Schindler had a response.

“Nobody would choose to live with a disability if they had the choice,” he said. “But the reality of the situation is that there are people living in this condition (roughly 30,000-40,000 in the U.S.). What are we going to do to care for them? Are we simply going to continue down this path, and continue to justify and rationalize not treating them and starve and dehydrate them to death? Or are we going to do what I believe we’re called [to] as human beings, and that’s to care for them? These are not easy decisions a family has to make, but what other decision do we have?”

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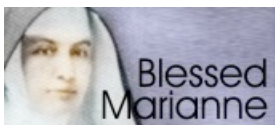
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What can youth do?

I had the opportunity to ask Schindler what he thought youth could do to protect vulnerable life and prevent euthanasia.

“Educate yourselves so you can understand the issue,” he said. “Too many people are being educated by the secular culture.”

“Perhaps the medical institution might not always believe their best interest is providing the care your loved one might need,” Schindler said.

He said that in these situations, we need to question doctors and nurses. We also should have advocates who share our beliefs and values who can speak for us if we ever become incapacitated.

“Suffering is being looked upon as bad,” Schindler told me. “And we’re trying to eliminate it any way we can. By eliminating the suffering, we eliminate the sufferer, so to speak. As long as you keep telling a culture that’s OK, it’s going to continue.”

I also spoke to guest speaker Walter B. Hoye II, a soft-spoken African-American Baptist preacher and founder of the Issues4Life Foundation. I asked him what youth and young adults can do to promote a respect for unborn life.

“Educate themselves on the issue – the sanctity of life,” he said, suggesting Internet sites like www.priestsforlife.org.

“I ask all the [pro-life] student groups to inform, to educate and then to activate,” he said.

“Activate” is something Hoye does well. This year, he served 18 days in jail for breaking a law in Oakland, Calif., that banned sidewalk counseling outside an abortion clinic.

He did it without being threatening or forceful, treating everyone with respect.

We need “to be committed to non-violence,” he said.

The third speaker, Joseph M. Scheidler, the Catholic founder of the Pro-life Action League, gave me similar advice.

“Get active,” he said. “Make it your mission to protect human life, to protect your little brothers and sisters.”

He suggested that youth can get the free “Student Pack on Abortion” from Generations for Life (www.generationsforlife.org). He urged young people to pass out fliers and strike up conversations about abortion in school. We have the right to pass out fliers about abortion just as much as we can pass out free tickets to a ballgame, he said.

At the conference, I learned about the frailty of human life and our duty to

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protect those who cannot protect themselves. About a quarter of us there were youth and young adult Christians. Many helped plan the event, decorate, prepare meals and serve in informational booths. We may be young, but we can make a difference now and in the future.

Kara, 17, lives in Kau on the Big Island with her parents, her brother and their pets. She is a high school senior, home-schooled by her mother in the accredited Seton Home Study School program. Her parish is Holy Rosary Church in Keaau. She is considering a career in writing, travel, psychology or law.

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