

## The Counselor's Corner

### "Coming Together to Be the Change"

On Tuesday, January 19, the elementary schools of Saint Mary (Wayne), Saint Linus (Dearborn Heights), and Saint Stephen (New Boston), joined the students of Saint Anselm to hear Tom Thelon's presentation called "Victim Proof". His topic was bullying, but he approached it in a unique way, opening with some tongue-twisting warmups for the students. Tom is from Michigan, but he has done 500 presentations around the country in the last four years, 98% to public schools. Although Tom is a happily married man with four children, he was unhappy in his younger years when he was the object of bullying or the instigator of it. Neither role brought satisfaction.

Tom provided us with the government's definition of bullying: "an unwanted, aggressive behavior that creates a real or perceived power imbalance." He said there are four types: physical, verbal, social, and cyber. He said whatever the classification, the bully is seeking a reaction from the victim, who more often than not will provide it. The bully can be a parent or spouse, an employer or any authority figure, as well as a sibling or a peer. Tom gave an example of his own father who verbally and physically abused him when the dad's job dissatisfaction was high. Unfortunately, it set the stage for Tom's low self-esteem and made him an easy mark for other bullies. When Tom started getting into trouble at school, a teacher approached him about a summer camp in Portland, MI. Tom went there for three weeks, while his parents secretly went for counseling. Luckily, it made a huge difference in Tom's decisions, and his dad changed, too.

Tom compared a person's heart to a suitcase. If the victim accepts negative comments or any other kinds of abuse, the heart will become heavy and it will impede the victim from travelling at a pace that is desired. Worse yet, the abused can become the abuser, engaging in negative activities toward others. To avoid this, the only choice is to forgive. Tom explained that we do not accept the wrongful acts of others, but forgiveness lets us (not the bully) off the hook. Our burden will be light, because our hearts will be free and our character will be stronger.

Tom had students hold up signs with six words: feel, think, say, do, habits, and character. He told the students that in between each of these words was a space that could only be filled with "choice". He said it is good to acknowledge that we "feel" hurt, but what we do with that feeling is important. He challenged us to "be the change," and he handed out t-shirts with this slogan printed, but in backward format. The implication is that change starts inside us. All of us need to admit and change our actions when we find ourselves abusing another. Those who witness an act of bullying must step in and try to stop it. Those who are young and bullied, need to tell an authority figure, learn to forgive, and make good choices. Let us all take the challenge to try to make sure that bullying does not perpetuate itself.

Diane L. Rivard