

St. Thomas Aquinas pro-lifers booted from Hampdenfest

The Respect for Life Committee at St. Thomas Aquinas in Hampden was banned from having a table at this year's Sept. 10 Hampdenfest after festival organizers said they had received complaints that the group had set up "graphic displays" in previous years.

Deacon Richard "Monti" Montalto, a member of the Respect Life Committee, denied the charges. The Respect Life volunteers displayed dolls showing fetal development, Deacon Montalto said. No graphic images were used. The group also provided resource information for women in crisis pregnancies.

"We did not call people over to our booth," Deacon Montalto said. "People came up to us, and, by and large, we had a positive response - particularly from pregnant women who showed their children the dolls and said, 'This is what your brother or sisters looks like in Mommy's tummy.' "

Deacon Montalto noted that while the Respect Life group was banned, Planned Parenthood had a booth at this year's festival.

Although Deacon Montalto and others said a new festival policy denied all churches from participating in the festival, Genny Dill, one of the festival organizers, said the ban was a "misunderstanding."

"Churches were never intended to be banned," she said. "In fact, some churches had a presence at the festival."

Dill added that there was never a policy about the inclusion or exclusion of churches. The St. Thomas Respect Life group was excluded, she said, because of complaints about the "graphic" nature of the displays and information.

"We look forward to our community churches participating at next year's festival," Dill said.

Deacon Montalto called it a shame that “pro-abortion people get hysterical every time we try to show what fetal development is about.”

The festival is organized by the Hampden Community Council and the Hampden Village Merchants Association.