Young people engage in respect for life

While Catholics around the country will take respect life issues into the voting booth Nov. 4, many young people unable to cast are nonetheless looking for ways to change the United States.

Our Lady of Mount Carmel junior Ricky Johnson said a lifelong curiosity brought him to an Oct. 20 Respect Life symposium organized by the archdiocese's Youth and Young Adult Office. The daylong event, which attracted approximately 100 Catholic high school students from the archdiocese, featured speakers who preached the need to protect all in danger of preventable death or harm.

"For me, it's discussing the different aspects of life and what we should do to help out," Ricky said.

A member of the Essex school's Respect Life Club, Ricky said his desire to help people in need is what drew him to the symposium. Fellow club member Jasmin Cook, a Mount Carmel senior, said she has attended the national March for Life, an annual rally in Washington, D.C., to protest the Roe v. Wade decision.

"It was kind of surprising to see so many people out there against abortion and there to respect life," Jasmin said. "It kind of strengthens you."

Dr. Ronald J. Valenti, archdiocesan superintendent of Catholic schools, told the students that the church and the country need more socially conscious young people.

"Your willingness to be here, to increase your awareness of life issues and hopefully plan ways to promote and defend life at your school and in communities is truly a great sign of hope," Dr. Valenti said.

Julie Varner, associate director for social concerns for the Maryland Catholic Conference, told the students the church calls people to transform their political parties with their values.

"Neither of our American political parties supports the dignity of the human person on a broad enough basis," she said. "So, let's work to make them better and make them good enough to really deserve our votes. In the meantime, we have to look at all the issues before us and we have to make these right decisions."