

King's Men march at adult book store

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For The Bulletin

More than 20 people peacefully demonstrated on public property in front of the adult book store on Route 30, Unity Township, on Saturday afternoon, a turnout that impressed Damian Wargo, director of operations and co-founder of The King's Men, based in Montgomeryville, near Philadelphia.

"We usually average five to seven at these things," he said. "This is really great."

The three-hour demonstration was the last of three King's Men events this weekend that called men to live their faith as warriors and as "real men" who are providers, leaders and protectors of their wives and families. Wargo came with co-founder and president Mark Houck at the invitation of the Rev. Boniface Hicks, OSB, of St. Vincent College and Archabbey.

On Friday night, they spoke about faith formation to 10 students and monks in the campus ministry lounge. On Saturday morning, they presented "Men: Backbone of the Church" to 25 men at the Greensburg Chapter of the Catholic Men's Fellowship that meets at Panera's, near Greensburg.

The King's Men, named for Christ the King, has chapters in Pennsylvania and several other states. Their main goal is the faith formation of men, but they have received the most attention for their No More Porn Tours that target adult book stores.

Saturday's protest included family men and one son, male and female college students and several Benedictine priests. They carried signs with assorted messages, among them "Pornography hurts children," "Pornography destroys marriages" and "Real men respect women." They were visible to heavy highway traffic, and while most passersby gawked and were neutral, many honked their horns and gave thumbs up in support.

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There also were some obscene gestures and remarks.

Ludwig Kern, a student from Penn State University, came down in support of Father Boniface, whom he knows from involvement with The King's Men programs at the State College campus. "We had a lot more angry outbursts from people there," Kern said. "Some people drove by holding up porn magazines, and other people yelled that there were more important issues."

But The King's Men and their supporters view the fight against pornography as a worthwhile battle, citing the negative impact that the multi-billion dollar industry has on relationships, formation of attitudes and the people that it exploits.

The Rev. Shawn Matthew Anderson, OSB, said that he only recently learned about the high percentage of women in the sex industry who are childhood victims of sexual abuse.

"They are broken," he said. "And it's bad enough that marriage and the marriage act is being mocked, but people are actually capitalizing on the brokenness of these women. It's really an industry that capitalizes on human brokenness."

College junior Carl Vater, 20, of Germantown, Md., came in support of the protest. "I see a bad attitude," he said about some of the young men he knows. "They don't seem to understand the long-term consequences of pornography."

Kelly Lind of Mount Lebanon, also a junior, said that many people her age "think that it's not hurting anyone to look at pictures or videos" of pornography. "They don't realize that these girls are humans who deserve more," she said.

Amanda Hautz, a sophomore from Bell Wood, criticized the sex industry for taking advantage of girls, "treating them like objects" and "keeping them in a vicious cycle." That was especially apparent to her, she said, last year when she visited Brazil and saw so many women in prostitution.

"This is a group of warriors out on the front lines fighting a cancer that has infiltrated our society," said Dave Ridilla of Latrobe. "We are stepping up to help those who are addicted because it is an addiction, and like

any other addiction, there's help."

The King's Men practice an aggressive but friendly approach to try to reach people going in and out of porn shops. Their goal is not to embarrass anyone, but rather, said protestor Jerome Franey of Muirysville, to "embrace them so that they can take stock of what they are doing with their lives."

There were few customers coming and going during the Saturday afternoon demonstration. When one man came out, Wargo slowly approached and greeted him with, "How are you doing, buddy?" It's a friendly approach, he said, "because we are their friends. We are trying to help them."

Wargo then asked, "Don't you think you're doing harm to yourself and doing harm to women?" Then he offered the man a pamphlet, which he took and looked at it in his car before he drove away.

The demonstration brought several positive reactions from people who live in the village behind the store. One man stopped his car to say "thanks," and a woman stopped to say that she "was glad" and was going to tell her neighbors that there was a protest going on.

Gloria Dietrich, who lives on the street below the store, got out of her car to talk to the protestors. "Bless you for what you are doing," she said. "As a Christian and a moral person, I don't like having this place as a neighbor."

Some of the college students at the demonstration were at the meeting on campus the night before when Houck and Wargo talked about the personal challenges of "being a real man" in control. "The King's Men give this awesome challenge that many men need in their lives," junior Paul Haywiser said.

Dan Swartz, a freshman from Columbus, Ohio, responded to the challenge by taking part in the demonstration. "Last night's talk opened my eyes to the masculine role of a Christian, which the world sometimes downplays," he said.

Adam Ridilla, 12, a student at Baggeley Elementary School, was too young for the college program and for the men's prayer breakfast, but he wanted to come to the demonstration with his father, Dave.

"I wanted to show my faith and my belief that this isn't right," he said.