

# The Catholic Register

## **Kielburgers' power of youth nurtured by Jesuits**

Written by **Michael Swan, The Catholic Register**

Thursday, 14 February 2013 08:00

### *Kielburgers took lessons learned at Brebeuf to Free the Children*

TORONTO – If you want to make people believe in something they've never seen and half the world says is impossible, start young. The Kielburger brothers learned that lesson from the Jesuits at Brebeuf College in Toronto.

Marc and Craig Kielburger started Free the Children in 1995 in Craig's Grade 7 class. Children challenging the economics of child slavery and underdevelopment in the global south was something the world had not seen before — a laughable notion. Today Free the Children is a movement of 1.7 million young people running programs in 45 countries, building schools, digging wells and supporting families in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Marc, the 35-year-old elder of the Kielburgers, returned Feb. 4 to thank the Jesuits for what he learned as a teenager. The CEO of the Me to We social enterprise kicked off the Jesuits in English Canada's Provincial's Lecture Series with a speech about the power of young people.

"It was Br. (Henry) Spencer who took me under his wing and said, 'You know, it's OK to care.' Thank you for that," Kielburger said as he addressed both Spencer and a audience of more than 100 at Regis College in Toronto.

Forming men and women for others, the idea that there is always something more that life demands or that grace offers and an unwillingness to accept injustice were Jesuit ideals Brebeuf College aspired to when Kielburger studied there.

What Kielburger learned at his Jesuit-run school in north Toronto served him well. He studied international relations at Harvard University, was a Rhodes scholar and has a law degree from Oxford University.

It's an education that has equipped the Kielburgers perfectly for the task of giving kids the courage to be idealists.

"We are convinced that you don't suddenly acquire a social conscience at 18," said Kielburger.

The message wasn't lost on Brebeuf's student council president Raffi Dergalstianian.

"Young people have power and their power is limitless, that's what really struck me," Dergalstianian said at the end of Kielburger's lecture.

It's not easy for young people to believe they have power, but once they believe they can act, he said.

"It comes with faith. If you trust in God and believe in yourself and believe in Him, you can do anything," said Dergalstianian.

The Kielburgers have not been afraid to involve children as young as kindergarten, nor does Free the Children soften or romanticize the challenges of poverty around the world.

"You can't shield kids any more," Kielburger said.

It isn't just being on Facebook that matters. It's what you say that counts with young people, according to Kielburger.

"It has to be genuine and it also has to be action oriented," he said. "At the end of the day, they want to take action. Discussing it won't cut it."