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St. Gerard students graduate

By JUSTINE GRIFFIN
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Mothers and their babies honored at ceremony Friday

Summary:

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The happy giggles and shrill cries of many infants provided the background noise of the St. Gerard Campus 2011 graduation ceremony Friday night.

But those in the audience and on stage didn't mind. They're used to the sounds of their own children.

The St. Gerard Campus faculty honored 29 young women -- along with their 28 children, collectively -- who graduated at the Destiny International Church.

The St. Gerard Campus is a nonprofit maternity home and Christian high school for pregnant teenagers in St. Augustine.

"Moms in labor, babies being born, teachers with babies on their shoulder ... and mothers taking time out of their day just for their children -- that's what we deal with every day," said the director and founder of the school, Caroline Wolff. "You have overcome all the parallels."

The church was filled with proud supporters of their graduates. Seat aisles were littered with baby seats and toys, blankets, bottles and diaper bags.

Before the mothers received their diplomas, their children were honored on their own during a brief "capping of the babies" ceremony.

St. Gerard Campus nursery staff spent a moment to talk about each child while a graduation cap was placed on their head and they got one quick kiss from their graduating mother.

This class set a record for the largest group of babies capped, Wolff said.

Ninety-nine percent of their graduates are already enrolled at a college. Several of those were awarded scholarships.

A slide show of photos was played during the beginning of the ceremony, bringing back memories from the past year. Some women, with round tummies during their pregnancies, hugged each other tight at a school Thanksgiving dinner. Others posed for the camera during

a holiday fashion show or while dressed in their Halloween costumes.

The graduates cheered for one another and each of their children as each climbed the steps to the stage to accept their diplomas.

"The easy way out is abortion," Wolff said. "Not many do what you have done; your lives have changed in a profound way."

St. Gerard Campus Class of 2011

29 graduates

28 children

Class officer: Brandilyn Cilk

Valedictorian: Catherine Greene

Salutatorian: Shawntavia Harrison

justine.griffin@staugustine.com

The women of the St. Gerard Campus class of 2011 make their entrance during their graduation ceremony held at Destiny International Church on U.S. 1 in St. Augustine. Twenty-nine young women received their high school diplomas Friday night. By JUSTINE GRIFFIN, justine.griffin@stuagustine.com [1]

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