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To Save a Life

Sr. Rose Pacatte | Jan. 22, 2010

Sean Michael Afable, Kim Hidalgo and Randy Wayne in "To Save A Life."

Independent Christian film aimed at teens opens Jan. 22

Jake Taylor (Randy Wayne; "Ghost Town") is a high school jock who is popular and on the fast track to college. He has a hot girl friend, Amy (Deja Kreutzberg; "Sorority Row") and life is cool. Jake?s life spins out of control when he witnesses the suicide of his childhood best friend and neighbor Roger (Robert Bailey, Jr.; "Coraline"). Roger once saved Jake?s life but they became estranged when the mostly white and cliquish high school kids pressure Jake to ignore the black kid. Jake is plagued by guilt and wonders if he could have saved his friend.

Meanwhile his girl friend pressures Jake for sex and she becomes pregnant. Drugs and alcohol are there for the taking. Jake?s family is well off and his father is distant. When Jake meets a youth minister by chance who invites him to come to a youth get-together. Jake is turned off at first but even starts going to church. For this his father mocks him. Life goes on but Jake seeks meaning and forgiveness in his life. Things come to a head when Amy chooses to have an abortion.

The sense of guilt over Roger?s suicide is what initially drives Jake to begin his journey. Jake (always a male lead in evangelical films) is a sincere seeker.

MGM and New Song Pictures, an independent studio out of Oceanside, Calif., in conjunction with Outreach Ministries, are releasing "To Save a Life." The film has created a lot of buzz among evangelical Christian churches and earned some respectful remarks by Catholics for dramatizing the challenges facing young people today, consequences and life-affirming choices.

"To Save A Life" has the distinctive evangelical feel of the 2008 hit "Fireproof," produced by Sherwood Pictures, a ministry of Sherwood Baptist Church in Albany, Ga., and distributed by Samuel Goodwyn Films. "Fireproof," starring Kirk Cameron ("Growing Pains"; the Left Behind franchise), was the highest grossing independent film of 2008, bringing in $33 million. Sherwood Pictures? previous films were "Facing Giants" (2006) and "Flywheel" (2003).

I am not a fan of ?message? movies. I would rather figure out the meaning for myself. But from the above list of on-the-nose Christian films, I appreciated "Fireproof" very much because it dealt with the ?elephant in the living room? topic: pornography and its effects on a marriage. (When was the last time you heard anyone preach or teach about pornography during Mass or in a parish class?) The acting was poor except for Kirk Cameron?s performance, but the writing was sharp. Sherwood Pictures is the little film company that could, and it will go

places. Whether or not it will break the glass ceiling and cross over from the evangelical genre to mainstream entertainment, is still to be seen.

"To Save a Life" has a strong, professional cast. It is hard to say if the film will appeal to audiences beyond the choir, but the choir is on track to make the movie?s opening weekend very successful. By the end of the film I felt like I had been through a laundry list of teen issues that went from guilt, racism, pre-marital sex, abuse, family, friendship, alcohol, drugs, all the way to abortion. However, I was moved. I could feel what the characters were going through and aspects of the story resonated with me. In my book, this says there is something here that a savvy catechist, youth minister, parent, or homilist could apply Catholic sensibilities to conversations about these very significant issues.

It is no coincidence that the film is opening on Jan. 22, the 37th anniversary of anniversary of **Roe** v. **Wade**. This is a ?message? film and it works off the guilt Jake feels at not being there for his friend, which can be a tricky thing. Whether or not youth audiences will grasp the full human, religious, spiritual and moral landscape or implications of what the film is saying and what Jake is seeking, ample resources are available for reflection and reinforcement. www.WingClips.com has the trailers online (streaming video), presumably with clips to follow. Resources for leaders are available online at www.ToSaveALifeLeaders.com.

[Sr. Rose Pacatte, a member of the Daughters of St. Paul, is the Director of the Pauline Center for Media Studies in Los Angeles. Read more of her film reviews and media criticism here [1].]

Special Coverage for the National March for Life

To mark the 37th annual March for Life in Washington, NCR has prepared a series of articles that will appear on our Web site Jan. 21 and Jan. 22.

- Stammering about abortion [2], Jan. 21
- Time to rethink antiabortion strategy [3], Jan. 21
- To Save A Life [4], Jan. 22: Independent Christian film aimed at teens opens Jan. 22
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