

Bishops decry abortion; New Yorkers start 'sign for life'

By Jerry Filteau
NC News Service

As Americans neared the 13th anniversary of completely legalized abortion, Catholic bishops around the country urged new pro-life efforts.

The bishops of New York jointly launched a "Sign for Life" campaign, asking Catholics to sign cards urging Gov. Mario Cuomo to reverse the state's policy of funding Medicaid abortions.

Several bishops, also marking the first federal holiday observance of the birthday of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., linked a struggle for unborn rights today with Dr. King's struggle for black rights two decades earlier.

Others linked abortion with growing tendencies to accept infanticide and euthanasia.

Florida's eight Catholic bishops issued a joint statement in which they said, "Lethal neglect of newborn children with disabilities, mercy killing of the elderly and rational suicide are now publicly proposed and to some extent practiced under the umbrella of" the U.S. Supreme Court's 1973 abortion decision.

Across the country, at a Jan. 18 pro-life rally, Archbishop Roger Mahony of Los Angeles warned against "the gradual erosion of the value placed upon human life."

With counterdemonstrators from the Revolutionary Communist Party and the Feminist Women's Health Center trying to shout him down, Archbishop Mahony declared, "Once a person concedes that a particular human life is vulnerable to extinction -- whether in the womb, in a glass container, or in a hospital for the terminally ill -- then all human life becomes vulnerable."

Cardinal Joseph L. Bernardin of Chicago, speaking as head of the U.S. bishops' Committee for Pro-Life Activities, struck a hopeful note in a statement marking this year's anniversary observances.

The past year saw "the sacrifice of another million-and-a-half innocent lives," he said, but "in the last 12 months much has happened to advance the cause of the unborn child."

He cited a shift against abortion in public opinion and greater media visibility to the issue among reasons for hope. New

legislative efforts against abortion and signs of a rethinking of the 1973 decision within the Supreme Court are also causes for hope, he said.

Cardinal Joseph O'Connor of New York and other bishops of the state started a grass-roots signature campaign Jan. 18 against state funding of abortions. They also urged Catholics to set aside the 22nd of each month as a day of prayer for the unborn.

"It is time to stop the shedding of innocent blood in our society," declared Cardinal O'Connor in a homily Jan. 19 at St.

Patrick's Cathedral.

The cardinal compared the high court's Roe vs. Wade decision in 1973, denying personhood to the unborn, to its Dred Scott decision in 1857, denying citizenship rights to blacks. The same week that Americans were marking a "day of glory" in commemorating Dr. King's civil rights achievements, they were also observing a "day of shame" over the anniversary of the court's abortion decision, he said.

In the neighboring Diocese of Brooklyn, Bishop Francis J. Mugavero ordered a card-signing campaign outside all Catholic churches on two successive weekends to protest public funding of abortions in the state.

In 1984, Catholic spokesmen said, \$16 million in tax dollars was spent in New York State to pay for 45,000 abortions.

New York is one of eight states and the District of Columbia which fund abortions by legislative and executive decision. Another five states fund abortions because they are under court order to do so.

In Massachusetts, where pro-lifers are seeking a state constitutional amendment to reverse court-ordered abortion funding, the state's bishops issued a joint letter lamenting that "we are one of only a few states still funding abortion."

"The clear threats to life from abortion, infanticide and euthanasia must be eradicated from the Commonwealth (of Massachusetts) and our nation.... We must say 'yes!' to all life," the bishops wrote.

Calls to join in the pro-life cause through prayer and action came from other bishops across the country.

"We all need to ask our consciences: 'Have I done enough for the pro-life

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PETITION CARD

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Two anti-abortion leaders ask Reagan to pardon abortion-clinic bombers

By Liz Schevtchuk

Washington (NC) — President Reagan was asked at a White House meeting with pro-life leaders Jan. 22 to pardon criminals convicted of abortion clinic bombings but took no action on the suggestion, according to meeting participants.

The suggestion was made by two of 24 anti-abortion leaders invited to meet with Reagan after the kick-off of the annual March for Life, which Reagan had earlier addressed by telephone hook-up from the White House.

The two meeting participants — Paul Brown, spokesman for the American Life League, and Joseph M. Scheidler, director of the Pro Life Action League — said Reagan agreed to take the pardons under consideration on a case-by-case basis. Others said Reagan merely listened attentively and said he would think about it.

Some pro-lifers at the meeting seemed

taken aback by the request and, in comments to the press after the meeting, took steps to distance themselves from it.

"We cannot strongly enough condemn the violence — and condemn the violence that goes on outside or inside (clinics)," said Kay James, public affairs director of the National Right to Life Committee. She said such pardons could be misconstrued as acceptance for such violent acts. "And it needs to be made perfectly clear the pro-life movement doesn't condone violence," she said.

She and Dr. John Wilke, NRLC president, both said the NRLC has no position on pardons for clinic bombers but appeared shaken and surprised by Brown's suggestion.

Comments from various meeting participants came as they emerged from the White House after talking with Reagan.

"I asked him to consider a pardon for all the pro-lifers who've been jailed for clinic violence," Brown said.

Regardless of their action, he said, "we still think they're nice people and shouldn't have to spend the rest of their lives in jail. They never hurt anybody. They may have destroyed a building or two."

"The president said someday he may consider these on a case-by-case basis," Brown stated.

"We are not approving of the bombing," he added. "These kids made a mistake and we simply feel pardons should be considered."

"We're asking a pardon," Scheidler said, comparing such an act by Reagan to President Abraham Lincoln's act during the Civil War in pardoning one or more sleeping Union sentinels who faced the death penalty.

"We are in a war, a battle in this country between life and death," Scheidler said.

Asked whether such an executive act would imply a condoning of such tactics as bombings, he responded, "that's a risk he

(Reagan) would have to consider."


"I've met with most of these people," Scheidler said of the bombers. "I don't approve of violence. But I do believe it is less violence to destroy a building than to continue the abortions inside."

He termed it "trivial to compare real estate and human beings" but then added, "I don't believe in blowing up clinics."


Victor Rosenblum, a law professor and representative of Americans United for Life, emphasized that Brown "was speaking for himself" in seeking a pardon for clinic bombers. "I'm strongly personally against pardoning people who bomb anything. I think a message of a pardon would be the wrong message."

He disagreed with Brown's reading of Reagan's reaction, saying there is no indication Reagan would ever agree to such pardons — if he could even offer them since some of the crimes would fall under state jurisdiction.


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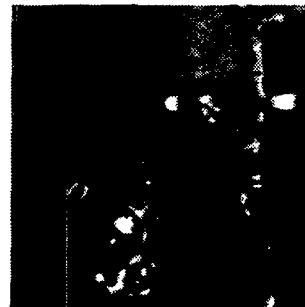
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