

Local News

Marchers seek continued debate on abortion issue

By Lee Strong

Although polls indicate a majority of Americans favor that legal abortions in at least some circumstances, organizers of the 15th annual March for Life remain firm in their commitment to challenge the Supreme Court's 1973 decision legalizing abortion.

"The Supreme Court said slavery was legal too," explained Father Bernard F. Dollen, pastor of St. John of Rochester Parish in Fairport. "They were wrong before, and we believe they're wrong again."

Thursday evening, Jan. 21, 10 buses carrying approximately 400 participants from the Diocese of Rochester will leave for Washington where — on January 22, the 15th anniversary of Roe vs. Wade — they will join thousands of marchers declaring their opposition to legalized abortion in the United States. In Washington, they will meet with their senators and congressional representatives, rally on the Ellipse behind the White House, and march to the Supreme Court Building.

In previous years, as many as 75,000 marchers have participated in the protest. Last year, a freak snowstorm that dumped a foot of snow on the Washington area disrupted the march and reduced the number of protestors. Organizers predict that fear of another storm will not affect numbers this year, however.

"Many of the same people who went last year are planning to go again," said Dee Dries, who chairs the Rochester March for Life Committee. "No one has said they are not going because of the weather."

Dries noted that during the five years she has been involved with the march, parish participation has been growing. This year, buses will be leaving from St. Theodore's, St. John of Rochester in Fairport, St. Rita Parish in Webster, St. Mary's in Waterloo and St. Margaret Mary's in Apalachin.

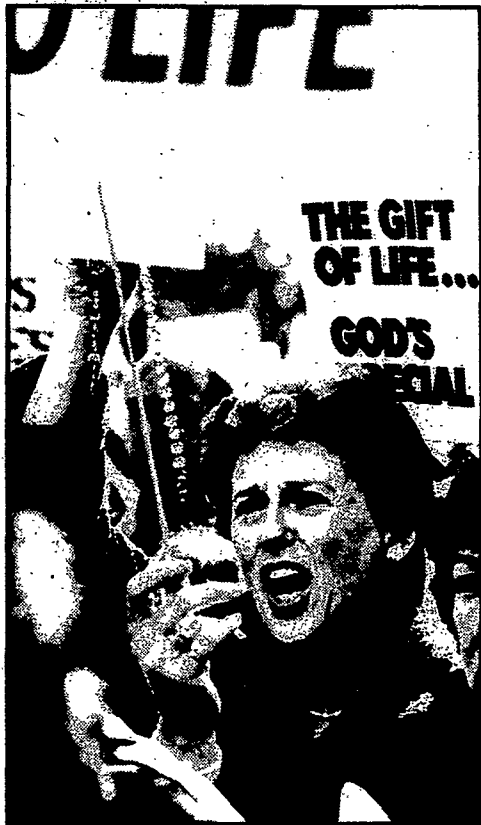
"We encourage (parishes) to have their own buses," Dries said. The number of parishes sending buses — and the number of people going — have increased, she said, because, "the spirit kind of catches on." Last year, for example, parishioners from St. Rita's went to the march on buses from St. John's. This year, St. Rita's has enough interested parishioners to send a bus of its own.

One factor that helps to increase participation is the support of the clergy in a parish, Dries said. "It's the priest," she declared. "It's whether they want to promote it or not."

Father Dollen agreed that clergy support has helped to increase participation in the march over the years, but cited another factor for the support he has seen this year. "People are really upset after reading recent articles about raising fetuses for spare parts for human beings." A number of people have said they are going on the march this year because of this issue, he noted. "It's much less difficult to fill the buses this year (than it was in previous years)."

In addition to his own support for the march, Father John T. Reif, St. John of Rochester's pastor, pointed to his parish's growing awareness of social issues in general as causing increased interest in the march. He attributes this growing awareness to the activities of the parish's social ministry committee. "In the last two to three years we've developed a consciousness of issues in general," he noted, "and this has helped to catapult our interest in the March for Life."

What St. John's is experiencing coincides with a broader trend towards linking life issues. In December, for example, 65 people from the pro-life and anti-war movements participated together in the Faith and Resistance Retreat at



File photo
March for Life participants will rally on the Ellipse near the Washington Monument.

Our Lady of the Genesee Abbey in Piffard. The retreat was designed to draw the two groups together and to foster the "seamless garment ethic" — a belief in a consistent pro-life stance on such issues as abortion, war, capital punishment and euthanasia — as articulated by Cardinal Joseph L. Bernadin of Chicago. Nationally, such groups as JustLife, Pro-Lifers for Survival and Feminists for Life have formed to link life issues together.

Father Frederick W. Bush, pastor of Holy Spirit Church in Webster, will address some of these issues during St. Theodore's prayer service, which will take place before the buses depart for Washington. The talk will be "about life, not just abortion," he said.

"(Author George) Orwell's description of thought control is here (when we talk about life issues) — we use some nice jargon," Father Bush said. "We call the killing of the unborn as the 'right to choose' or 'termination of pregnancy.' In the same way, the arms race is called 'security,' terrorism is 'liberation,' systematic violation of human rights is called 'pacification.' When the language is perverted, a clear gloss is put on the destruction of life."

He applauded the March for Life because it keeps abortion alive as an issue before the public. Even though such efforts as the march may not change the situation immediately, Father Bush noted, they will help today's



File photo
March for Life organizers hope the January 22 anti-abortion protest will draw as many participants as previous marches have attracted.

children to decide about the issue in the future. "The march has a lot of sign value," Father Reif agreed. "When big numbers are brought together in the nation's capital, it is a strong witness to the fact that many people are opposed to the present practice."

"Even though it hasn't brought a change yet, (the march is) a constant reminder to people that many people are opposed, even though it is the law of the land." He added that without the march, "people could get the impression

that no one cares." Putting the issue in historical perspective, Father Dollen compared the present situation to the one faced by Pope Pius XII when the Jews were being persecuted by the Nazis. Pope Pius XII has been criticized for not actively opposing the Holocaust. Likewise, he said, "historians will look back and ask where we were (while abortions were going on). At least we (who participate in the march) will be able to say we raised our voices."

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Clarification

Some question has arisen regarding a passage in last week's article "Committee pegs diocesan salary increases at 6 percent." With reference to transportation costs for women religious, the article states that "the diocese will allocate a \$1,750 car allowance for each sister" and that "diocesan contributions to the sisters' retirement program will be raised \$50." Although the diocese has mandated these expenditures and will pay them for the religious it employs, the new guidelines also specify that parishes and other diocesan organizations allocate these amounts for the religious they employ.

Use of the word "personal" with respect to automobiles referred to vehicles used by individual sisters, and was not intended to imply that individual sisters actually hold title to the cars.