

Washington rally for life attracts massive crowds

WASHINGTON — A massive crowd of pro-life activists — including several hundred from the Rochester diocese — braved heat, long trips and toe-to-toe gridlock caused by their own turnout to rally against abortion in Washington April 28.

At the Rally for Life '90, a crowd estimated at 225,000 to 250,000 by U.S. park police and at twice that number by the event's organizers, heard President George Bush, Vice President Dan Quayle, other politicians and such religious leaders as Cardinal John J. O'Connor of New York denounce abortion and urge continued efforts to combat it.

Filling virtually every inch of space around the Washington Monument, the crowd included men and women, teenagers and children of various races and religions — on blankets, in lawn chairs, and in some instances, in the waters of the Reflecting Pool in front of the Lincoln Memorial.

The Washington-based National Right to Life Committee, which sponsored the rally, said after the event that the 569,000 crowd count calculated by news media stationed in the top of the Washington Monument was probably a better attendance gauge than the 225,000-250,000 estimated by the National Park Service's police mobile command post.

During the rally itself, Dr. John Willke, National Right to Life president, suggested that the crowd had reached 700,000.

Buses from Rochester, the Finger Lakes region and the Southern Tier joined more than 100 from New York state at the rally. According to Amy Dorscheid, who has gone to jail for her participation in "rescue missions," St. Joseph's, Corpus Christi, St. Thomas the Apostle, St. John of Rochester and St. Rita's parishes, all of

Rochester, sent buses to the first-ever event.

Dorscheid said she attended the rally because "I can't turn my back on the babies."

"This is so much a call from God. Whenever there is something happening that will show people how I feel ... I have to be a part of it," Dorscheid said. Just hours after returning to Rochester early Sunday morning, Dorscheid joined approximately 30 other activists for a rosary service outside Monroe County Jail in support of Father Anthony Mugavero.

The Gates priest was given a 15-day jail sentence last week for a harassment charge stemming from an incident outside a Brighton doctor's office January 30.

Although she expressed disappointment with some states moving toward more liberal abortion laws since last year's *Webster vs. Reproductive Health Services* Supreme Court decision, Dorscheid said she will continue her fight against abortion.

"We don't have a political agenda. I'm convinced of our righteousness in standing up for the babies," she said. "What's wrong is wrong."

Father Michael A. McHale, a priest intern at St. Pius the Tenth Church in Rochester for the past year, attended the rally along with nine other parishioners from his church.

"I've been following the issues and decided to do something more than just talk about it," Father McHale said. "The sacredness of human life is under attack."

Diocesan churches from outside of the Rochester-area were also well represented at the rally. According to Don Peters, more than 100 activists filled two buses and a van that left from St. Mary's Church in



Crowd estimates for April 28's Rally for Life '90 vary widely, ranging from a Park Service figure of 250,000 to rally officials' estimates of nearly 600,000. AP/Wide World Photos

Waterloo late Friday night.

In the weeks before the march, Peters was contacted by people from communities near and far, hoping to become a part of the huge rally.

"People care; we're seeing more new people every day," said Peters, who added that he was especially impressed by the number of young people at the rally. "We can't trust the politicians to do the job (of ending abortion). Politicians are just there to be re-elected."

Chemung and Broome county Right to Life groups also sponsored buses to the march. Michael Natishak, a member of St. Margaret Mary Church in Apalachin, attended the rally with his son, Michael Jr. He said that approximately 140 people filled three buses for the rally.

"It's time to stand up and be counted," Natishak said. "All the politicians aren't concerned with moral values ... All they care about is numbers. We've got to show them we've got the numbers."

Those numbers were acknowledged by President Bush, who spoke to participants by telephone hook-up from the White House. Bush pointed out that he had addressed a similar event, the Jan. 22 March for Life, commemorating the anniversary of the Supreme Court ruling that legalized abortion nationwide.

"And I said then and I reaffirm now that your presence on the mall today reminds all of us in government that Americans from all walks of life are committed to preserving the sanctity and dignity of human life," the president said.

In his remarks, Cardinal O'Connor defended the decision by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops to promote the pro-life cause as a top priority of the U.S. church.

The NCCB recently announced that it had hired a major public relations firm to conduct an anti-abortion campaign with an estimated cost of \$3-5 million. Cardinal O'Connor chairs the NCCB Committee on Pro-Life Activities.

"The bishops of the United States will proceed with using the best possible means available to communicate the word of God that we call human life," Cardinal O'Connor promised.

"It is a remarkable thing," he continued, "that if the bishops of the United States committed themselves to raise funds — millions or hundreds of millions — in the very justifiable causes of hunger, of destroying apartheid, of ridding us of the national scandal of homelessness, of forever wiping out racism and sexism, if the bishops committed themselves to raising millions or hundreds of millions of dollars for any one of these causes, they would be applauded to high heavens."

"It is only when the bishops address the subject of abortion that they are subject to criticism, to slander, to every kind of accusation," the cardinal added. "But the bishops will not back down."

The cardinal said that in 1984 he offered numerous services of the Archdiocese of New York free of charge to women with

problem pregnancies. Other bishops have undertaken the same kind of charitable efforts in their own dioceses, he said.

He repudiated "the constant charge that we (pro-life activists) care nothing about women, nothing about children after they are born, nothing about hunger, nothing about homelessness. That is a false charge. It will not hold up."

Yet, despite his repetition of his offer to pregnant women, "I personally have never seen one reference in the secular press anywhere about what I have said," the cardinal added.

The cardinal wasn't alone in taking potshots at the news media. Some members of the crowd vehemently yelled at reporters — fenced inside a press section — to "tell the truth."

"I agree with what you're saying because the truth will make us free," Cardinal O'Connor added.

In the rally's Benediction, Cardinal James Hickey of Washington asked for divine assistance to help pro-lifers be "strong, compassionate, convincing witnesses to the humanity of each and every unborn child from the first moment of conception until God calls us home."

"Make our voice united and clear in the defense of the unborn, who have no voice but ours," he prayed. "Help us to be persuasive as we speak ... Help us to be good teachers of the truth about life. Strengthen our resolve to free our nation from the scourge of abortion."

Among other church leaders present were Archbishop Daniel E. Pilarczyk of Cincinnati and Bishop Anthony Pilla of Cleveland. Neither addressed the rally.

Quayle, who unlike Bush appeared in person, reminded the crowd that "there are no easy victories in any great cause. But this we may say confidently: the worst years are behind us. The conscience of this country, because of you, is stirring."

Once they know the facts, Americans "will always, always choose justice for the weak and mercy for the helpless," the vice president said. "That is our heritage, and today we reaffirm that heritage."

"Will the American people continue to accept the notion that an unborn child is disposable?" he asked. "Our answer is: not in this country, not now and not ever."

Rep. Henry Hyde, R-Ill., suggested that certain political colleagues might want to note the fervor of the pro-life cause. "To those politicians who have been getting nervous about the pro-life issue and who've been weakening and waffling ... look around," he said. "The American way is to protect the right to life as an endowment from our Creator, not an achievement."

Sen. Gordon Humphrey, R-N.H., said that in any dispute, "there is no more powerful ally than truth. We have the truth on our side. The truth is abortion is the worst civil rights abuse in history. And truth will prevail."

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