

Area groups plan to join national 'life chain'

By Lee Strong
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Several communities in the Diocese of Rochester will be participating in the National Life Chain on Sunday, Oct. 6, from 2-3 p.m.

Chains have been scheduled to form from 2-3 p.m. that day in Rochester, Canandaigua, Geneva and Hornell. The Oct. 6 date was chosen to coincide with Catholic celebrations of Respect Life Sunday.

Chains in these cities will be among 18 formed in New York state, and 350 across the United States and Canada, according to Royce Dunn, national director of the life-chain campaign.

The event's general format consists of individuals standing along roadsides at intervals of approximately eight feet. In most of the chains, each person holds a sign carrying the message, "Abortion Kills Children." Signs proclaiming, "Jesus Forgives and Heals," are interspersed throughout the chain.

Participants in Canandaigua will hold flowers, with banners opposing abortion being held up at intervals.

While standing in the chains, participants are asked to pray silently in reparation for abortion, Dunn said.

He said the goal of the ecumenical effort is to "offer every Christian a good opportunity to stand as 'salt and light' against the holocaust of abortion."

"It is a call to the Christian churches to act. We believe that God has always expected his 'called out people' to stand against the killings," Dunn added.

Two life chains took place earlier this year in western New York.

On July 14, 1,800 people took part in a chain in Batavia. Geneva Area Right to Life Committee staged a chain in Waterloo May 11, attracting 300 participants even though there had been little prior ad-



Babette G. Augustin/Staff photographer
Gerald Crawford (center), director of Project Life, displays one of the signs pro-life demonstrators will hold in area life chains.

vertising, noted the committee's co-chairman, Jane Atkachonis.

That May effort was seen as a trial run, Atkachonis said, noting that her group hopes 800 to 900 people from such communities as Geneva, Newark, Waterloo, Seneca Falls, Auburn and Clyde will take part in the Oct. 6 chain. That event will take place along the lake shore in Geneva on Routes 5 and 20.

Part of the appeal of the life chains is that they are low-key, noted Gail Cayer, who organized the chain that will form along Main Street in Canandaigua.

"It's a low-key way for a multitude of denominations to participate," said Cayer, who also assisted with organizing the

chain planned for Rochester's East Avenue.

In addition, Cayer said, the chain provides an opportunity for people who oppose abortion — but who are not comfortable with rescues, protests and civil disobedience — to make their views known.

Atkachonis observed that the chains are effective because of the cumulative effect of seeing the same sign being held by people for several miles.

"It makes people aware that abortion kills children," she said. "A lot of people have never given it a second thought."

Making people think twice was the idea behind the effort, according to Dunn, who originated the concept in 1987 as a mem-

ber of the board of Please Let Me Live, a pro-life organization based in Yuba City, Calif.

"We thought if we could put the bottom line of what abortion is and say it often enough, it could make it a difference," he said.

Dunn then came up with the chain idea, and the concept that all the signs should be the same size and bear the same message, "Abortion Kills Children."

The first chain took place in Yuba City and Marysville — two rural communities north of Sacramento — on Nov. 15, 1987, and drew 2,500 people, Dunn said.

Originally the effort was planned as a one-time event, Dunn said. But he was later asked to help organize a chain in Bakersfield, Calif. That chain took place in September, 1989, with approximately 7,500 participants, Dunn said.

Publicity from the Bakersfield chain led other groups to attempt them in California, then across the United States and Canada. It was at that point that the life chain organization was formed to help coordinate those efforts and to provide the signs to groups planning chains, Dunn said.

He estimated that more than 200 chains since have taken place. The chain that drew the largest number of participants took place in Torrance, Calif., chain on Jan. 20 of this year. That chain had an estimated 30,000 participants, Dunn said.

This year marks the first time multiple chains are being staged simultaneously, he said. The organization is already beginning to consider National Life Chain Sunday 1992, he said, although no date has yet been set. The goal for that event is 700 chains, Dunn said.

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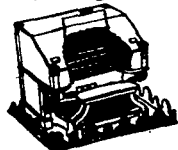
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