

Thousands join chain protesting abortions

By Nancy Frazier O'Brien
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — Hundreds of thousands of abortion protesters lined hundreds of miles of U.S. and Canadian roads Oct. 6 in a North American "life chain" designed to bring home the message that "abortion kills children."

In most locations, the demonstrators carried identical blue-and-white signs bearing that slogan or "Jesus forgives and heals."

According to The National Life Chain, based in Yuba City, Calif., more than 665,000 people formed life chains in 350 cities. The largest demonstration was believed to be in the St. Petersburg/Clearwater area of Florida, where an estimated 28,000 people lined 29 miles of U.S. Route 19.

The life chains took place one day before the U.S. Supreme Court refused to lift an injunction against abortion protests by Operation Rescue in Atlanta.

The refusal was announced without comment Oct. 7, the first day of the court's 1991-92 session. The same day, the court declined to review the criminal convictions of nine people arrested at an abortion protest in front of the Supreme Court on Jan. 22, 1988.

Although most of the abortion protests took place Oct. 6, designated by the Catholic Church as Respect Life Sunday, some were held earlier or scheduled for later in October — which is Respect Life Month. The second annual worldwide Rosary for Life is scheduled to take place Oct. 12. Organizers estimated that participants tur-

ned out at more than 300 locations in 12 countries for last year's rosary.

According to the Florida Life Center, the Port Charlotte, Fla., group which organized life chains throughout the state, an estimated 150,000 participants from 2,250 churches participated in the chain — covering a total distance of 290 miles. Sites included St. Petersburg, with 28,000 people; Orlando, with 15,000; Fort Lauderdale, with 10,000; Tampa, with 10,500; and Miami, with 8,500.

In Canada, cities including Ottawa, Edmonton, Alberta, and Vancouver, British Columbia, held life chains Oct. 6. In Vancouver, about 20,000 people participated.

In New York, pro-life supporters who formed a "human cross" in midtown Manhattan Sept. 27 said their silent demonstration was a success even with competition from a raucous march by abortion rights supporters.

"They have banners in their arms; we have babies in our arms," said Kathy DiFiore, who runs a pro-life shelter in Ramsey, N.J., and participated in the life chain outside St. Patrick's Cathedral. "They have empty slogans; we have life."

Police estimated the abortion-rights demonstrators at 4,000 and pro-life supporters at 1,100.

In St. Louis some 20,000 people — including Auxiliary Bishop Edward J. O'Donnell — joined in a life chain extending 25 miles from St. Louis University in midtown to St. Charles, Mo. More than 400 churches were represented in the ecumenical event.

Despite the cold and windy weather, more than 9,000 pro-life supporters gath-



AP/Wide World Photos
LENIN AS DEMON — Two Soviet youths hold up posters of Lenin depicted as a demon as they hold a counter-demonstration outside the city hall in opposition to pro-Communist protesters in St. Petersburg Sept. 30. The Communist supporters were protesting the change of the city's name to St. Petersburg from Leningrad.

ered in downtown Indianapolis Oct. 6 for a massive interdenominational life chain. Another 15,000 people from Indiana and Kentucky spanned the Ohio River from Jeffersonville in southern Indiana to Louisville, Ky.

In addition to the Diocese of Rochester, other dioceses and archdioceses participating in the life chain project included:

- Atlanta, where some 7,000 people lined Peachtree Road for an hour-and-a-half and some 25 Catholic parishes were among the 200 churches of all denominations participating.

- Burlington, Vt., which had chains in Rutland, Brattleboro and Burlington with some 800 participants.

- Harrisburg, Pa., which included chains in Lancaster and the state capital of Harrisburg with more than 2,000 partici-

pants each.

- Arlington, Va., where some 10,000 people joined the life chain at five sites. Catholic groups came from 43 parishes, a Catholic high school, the campus ministry office at a local university and Fort Belvoir Army base.

An estimated 5,000 people formed human chains in Pittsburgh, where Catholic parishes and groups planned other Respect Life activities for the rest of the month.

Bishop Donald W. Wuerl of Pittsburgh was among U.S. bishops issuing statements about Respect Life Month and the life chain project. "The life chain is a peaceful, prayerful and powerful statement of this community's support for the rights of unborn children," he said. "Children in the womb are also our brothers and sisters who need protection and love."

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