

WORLD & NATION

Annual March for Life draws tens of thousands

By Nancy Hartnagel
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — Calls for continued prayer and expressions of thanks for the marchers' faithfulness dominated the rally preceding the 25th annual March for Life Jan. 22 in Washington.

"How many times today we have heard of the need to pray," said Nellie Gray, March for Life founder and president of the March for Life Fund.

Gray, a dozen members of Congress, and several religious and pro-life leaders, including Boston Cardinal Bernard F. Law, addressed tens of thousands of marchers on the Ellipse, just south of the White House. Also attending were hundreds of pro-lifers from the Diocese of Rochester.

Near the end of the 90-minute rally, Cardinal Law, who is chairman of the bishops' Committee for Pro-Life Activities, introduced 28 other Catholic archbishops and bishops from around the country.

Among them were Cardinals John J. O'Connor of New York and Anthony J. Bevilacqua of Philadelphia, and Cardinal-designate Francis E. George of Chicago.

"We're happy to march with you," Cardinal Law told the enthusiastic crowd as it was about to set off on a 25th protest march to the U.S. Supreme Court. The event marks the anniversary of the court's 1973 *Roe vs. Wade* and *Doe vs. Bolton* decisions, which legalized abortion in the United States.

To begin the rally, Gray introduced three new faces, people she described as "principals responsible in part for *Roe* and *Doe*."

The three were Dr. Bernard Nathanson, a physician who worked in one of New York's first legal abortion clinics; Sandra Cano, the "Mary Doe" in *Doe vs. Bolton*; and Norma McCorvey, the "Jane Roe" in *Roe vs. Wade*.

Nathanson said he was asked a day earlier on a TV show if he thought *Roe* would be reversed. "I said 'no,'" he recalled, "and I said it would not be necessary because the American people are reversing it themselves."

He cited a recent *New York Times*/CBS News poll in which 50 percent of adult Americans said they believe abortion is the murder of a child.

Cano said her participation in the *Doe* case was "based on deceit." At the time, she said, she was poor, pregnant, uneducated and getting a divorce. "I was used by an attorney as a tool to achieve her agenda," she said.

"I was against abortion then," she added. "I am against it now."

McCorvey, who said she has begun a "Roe No More Ministry," told the marchers, "I want to apologize to all of you."

No estimate of crowd size was given. Neither Washington Metropolitan police nor U.S. Park Police give crowd estimates.

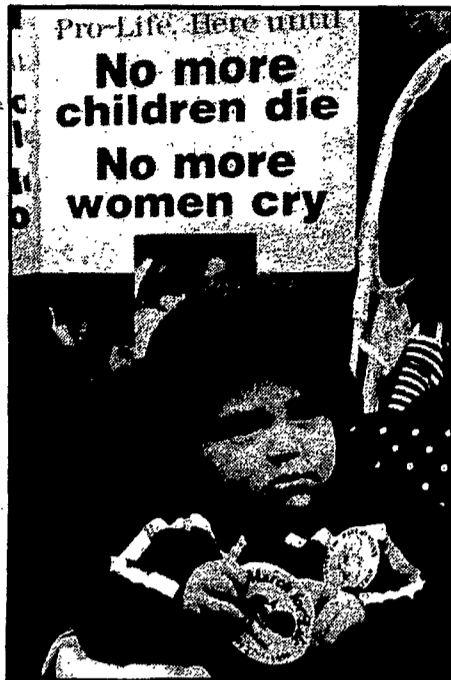
This year's march theme was "His Truth Keeps Marching On." Gray said of the theme, "We'll keep going until the feminist-abortionists stop killing pre-born children."

She was the first of many to thank marchers for coming back year after year. She said reporters this year repeatedly asked if she was not disappointed after 25 years. "No," she shouted with the crowd.

"Are we going to stay the course?" she asked, and got a resounding "Yes" from marchers.

Before she welcomed members of Congress, Gray introduced a group of about 20 marchers from around the country. "This is a sampling of the people who have stayed the course," she said.

In the group were a Rhode Island two-some who said they "have never missed a march." Another woman described herself



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John Clear of Lebanon, Ohio, attends his first March for Life in Washington on his first birthday. He came with his mother for the annual protest against legalized abortion.

as a "cheesehead" from Wisconsin, referring to a nickname for football fans of the Green Bay Packers, a team in this year's Super Bowl.

Gray noted that members of Congress had come even though Congress was not in session. Among Catholic members who spoke were Sen. Mike DeWine, R-Ohio; Rep. Chris Smith, R-N.J.; Rep. Michael P. Forbes, R-N.Y.; and Rep. Steve Chabot, R-Ohio.

Despite two presidential vetoes of a bill banning partial-birth abortion, Chabot pledged, "We're going to try again to prevail on this."

Forbes exhorted marchers to "Pray, work, struggle, fight." He thanked hundreds of marchers who traveled from Long Island.

"We mourn 25 years and 37 million babies lost to this, the greatest nation on earth," he said. "Shame on you, America."

DeWine praised marchers for "loving those who cannot love you back." He, too, said Congress will revisit a ban on partial-birth abortion.

"The vast majority of the American people favors the ban," he said, along with majorities in the House and Senate.

He addressed an absent President Clinton, saying, "It is time for you to follow the American people and sign the partial-birth abortion ban."

Rep. Michael Pappas, a New Jersey Republican, particularly thanked clergy who were present. "If your priests or ministers are not here," he said, "I challenge you to go back home and challenge them to come."

"This is a moral issue," he added.

Pappas described a congressional prayer group in which he participates and said, "There is tremendous power in prayer." He encouraged marchers to call their senators and representatives "to let them know you'll be willing to join them in prayer."

Rep. Roscoe Bartlett, R-Md., said the pro-life cause of marchers has "come a long way." He cited another recent poll in which 80 percent of Americans said they oppose using abortion for birth control.

After listening to a dozen members of Congress in Washington's damp air, Cardinal Law quipped that next year he might come disguised as a congressman and get up here earlier.

Bishop John J. Myers of Peoria, Ill., offered the closing prayer. "We seek your gift of the determination and the strength to carry on for as long as it takes," he said.



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