

WORLD & NATION

Pro-life spokeswoman to leave for university

By Nancy Frazier O'Brien
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — If the fight against abortion were seen as a war, many would consider Helen Alvare a war hero.

But her own admiration goes to the foot soldiers in the pro-life movement.

Alvare, director of planning and information for the U.S. bishops' Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities since 1990, is preparing to hand over the role of chief Catholic pro-life spokeswoman to someone else. The Philadelphia-born attorney recently announced that she will become a law professor at The Catholic University of America in the fall.

In an interview, she reflected on the changes in the pro-life movement and in her own life over the past 10 years.

"The soul of the pro-life movement has been, is and I think always will be the smart, committed individuals at the grassroots level who never say die," Alvare said, "and I do mean that as a pun."

Twice in recent years, media commentators have tried to write off the pro-life movement as dead or dying, Alvare said. The first time was after the U.S. Supreme Court's Webster decision in 1989, when "some very powerful forces in politics and media were wishing the pro-life movement out of existence and trying to make it so," she said.

The second time was when Bill Clinton was elected president in 1992 and told his allies who wanted to expand legal abortion that he would sign the Freedom of Choice Act if it got to his desk. But the leadership in Congress "could never bring



it to the floor," she said, because of grassroots efforts against the legislation.

In the first few years, Alvare's job took her on the road about 100 days a year — to national conferences, pro-life gatherings, priests' conferences, colleges and universities, and Catholic high schools. It was there she met the people she considers the backbone of the pro-life movement.

She recalled one woman who followed her after a talk and insisted on giving her "a tiny little scrap of paper" that contained an idea which she said would "really help the movement."

"And I realized then that the reason the pro-life movement has survived against some amazing odds is precisely because of women like that," Alvare said.

"Really it's the people doing this on the local level that made it happen in the first place, and that is still the case," she added. "Those are the people who convert their neighbors, have baby showers at the parish level, send Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.) 200,000 postcards and change his mind."

As pro-life spokeswoman, Alvare has appeared more and more frequently over the years on television news programs — everything from local cable access stations to "Good Morning America" and "Nightline." She has found that the supporters of legal abortion brought in to debate her can sometimes be their own worst enemies.

On vacation



CNS/Reuters

Nuns smile as Pope John Paul II offers a blessing following his Sunday Angelus in Les Combes, Italy, July 16. The pope was spending 12 days of vacation at the mountain town. He suggested that people who are able to take vacation time use it for inner enrichment and family togetherness.

She said she sometimes allows opponents "to talk until everybody is bored out of their minds," which makes the interviewer and the viewers more interested in hearing her comments. Alvare also practices what her father calls the "killing with kindness technique," which involves "maintaining your pleasant mood despite all the awful, untruthful things your opponent has said."

Those media tips are just a few of the lessons Alvare has learned over the past decade. Many of the other lessons she has learned relate to balancing her work life and a personal life that now includes husband Brian, who runs a trade association, and three children — Catherine, 6; Julian,

nearly 4; and Paul, who just turned 1.

Although Alvare has limited her travel to about 30 trips a year since becoming a mother, she has no live-in help and sometimes finds herself arriving home just as her husband is leaving for a trip for his own job. She has even been known to hire a baby sitter for the hour between 5 a.m., when Brian has left for the airport, and 6 a.m., when she has returned.

"I've tried to do justice to the work and to my family," she said. "But there is so much more, so many opportunities. ... I feel guilty that there is so much more to do be done in pro-life, but I've had to learn to live with less than the absolute maximum in both arenas."



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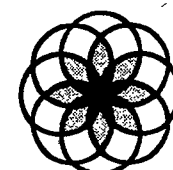
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