

DIOCESAN NEWS

Small rosary groups lodge sidewalk protests

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them. — Matthew 18:20

GREECE — On Saturdays at mid-morning, traffic is just beginning to thicken along Ridge Road West as shoppers head for The Mall at Greece Ridge Center.

Directly across the six-lane road, a comparatively solemn scene unfolds.

Since mid-June, a small contingent of Catholics have gathered — not to shop, but to protest abortion in front of the Planned Parenthood office at 2236 West Ridge Road. They pray the rosary weekly on the sidewalk at the corner of West Ridge and Greenfield Roads.

The rosary was begun by Agnes Falbo, a parishioner at Greece's St. Lawrence Church. Though she said that no more than six people have attended at any one time, her more immediate goal is was to establish the rosary as a weekly ritual — it has been held at 9:45 a.m. every Saturday.

"Our Lady will do the inviting," Falbo stated.

Another small but loyal group exists in Newark. People from St. Michael's Parish unite every Monday at 1 p.m. to pray the rosary across from the Planned Parenthood office at the Cannery Row Mall. Parishioner Leo Kamalsky said that the gatherings have averaged about 10 people since he organized the weekly rosary two years ago.



John Powell/Photo Intern

Unidentified protestors pray outside of Planned Parenthood in Greece on Sept 30. The group has been praying outside of Planned Parenthood every Saturday morning since the middle of June and plans on continuing.

"Even a small group can be effective in prayer," Kamalsky said.

Though abortions aren't performed at the Newark or Greece offices, Kamalsky and Falbo said they are protesting the offices' practice of providing referrals for abortions.

"I carry a sign that says 'Abortion Kills Children.' It's against God's divine law and I feel very deeply about it," Kamalsky said.

Kamalsky also said he opposes the availability of contraceptives at Newark Planned Parenthood. In fact, he said, he decided to organize the protest group after seeing a Planned Parenthood advertisement in a

free weekly newspaper offering contraceptives to teenagers.

In Greece, Falbo said she got the idea to start the rosary after becoming aware that a Planned Parenthood office existed in the town. She was motivated, she said, "because Pope John Paul said to defend life and go into the streets."

"I thought about my responsibility for these little babies. I'm praying for the people who work there, the people who go there, and the babies," Falbo commented.

Falbo stressed that she doesn't want her group to become confrontational by breaking trespassing laws or engaging in shout-

ing contests with Planned Parenthood employees and clients.

"It's a place where people can pray the rosary peacefully, and nothing else," she remarked.

Beginning in the summer, posters advertising the rosary have been displayed at Greece-area churches.

"We hope to be an instrument of God's love," said Pat Baloga, a parishioner at Holy Cross and longtime volunteer with Problem Pregnancy Help Center.

Jim Gelormini, from St. Mark's Parish in Greece, said he got involved in the weekly rosary at Greece Planned Parenthood to counter "the abortion mentality that has become so pervasive in our society."

"We're here to cooperate with the Blessed Mother against the evils of abortion and the evils of contraception," Gelormini said.

Mary Melfi, who has been involved in numerous anti-abortion protests in the Rochester area dating back to 1985, commented that tiny groups such as those in Greece and Newark can make a difference in the struggle against abortion.

Yet she also expressed frustration that more Catholics and Protestants are not vociferous in protesting such agencies as Planned Parenthood.

"Unfortunately, you're not going to get a lot of people. The apathy is what's killing our children," said Melfi, a parishioner at St. Cecilia's Church in Irondequoit. "Too many people think, 'I guess there's nothing I can do about it; that's just the way it is.'"

Pro-life song signifies Marian Conference speaker's ministry

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

Wherever David Parkes sings, he makes a point of including one very special song in his repertoire.

"Let Me Live," which starts with the lines *There will be no dawn or sunset for this child to see/For today his short existence will have ceased to be*, is about an unborn baby soon to be aborted. The song describes all the wonderful things the baby could become, if only it were allowed to live.

"It's the only song I know that I will definitely, definitely sing at each performance," said Parkes in a telephone interview from his home in Dublin, Ireland.

Parkes will share his music and reflections at the annual Marian Conference on Saturday, Oct. 14, at Theater on the Ridge, 200 Ridge Road West, Rochester.

Parkes, 50, said the ritual of performing "Let Me Live" stems from a promise he made to the Virgin Mary during a pilgrimage to Medjugorje in 1992. Though the Irish recording artist didn't write his signature song, he acknowledged that "Let Me Live" perfectly articulates his stance against abortion.

"It's a song I was told was going to ruin my career," he said. "Instead it's opened so many doors. I often thought someone would come up and accost me and say 'How dare you,' but that's never happened."

Rather, he noted, women who have had abortions have told him that if they had heard "Let Me Live" sooner, they would have decided to keep their babies.

Parkes will be among numerous guest speakers and performers at the one-day Rochester Marian Conference. He is no

stranger to Rochester, having been master of ceremonies for a Marian event in 1994 and a guest speaker/performer in 1998.

He has just finished his seventh album, *In His Time*, which was due to be released this month by Irish Records in Boston.

As a young adult, Parkes was a budding musician and professional soccer player. But at age 27 he was struck down with a severe case of Crohn's disease, a chronic inflammation of the digestive tract. He underwent 10 major bowel operations and was not expected to live.

In 1992 he visited Medjugorje, Bosnia, in the former Yugoslavia, where apparitions by the Virgin Mary have allegedly been occurring since 1981. Parkes' dis-

ease miraculously went away, and in gratitude, he pledged to Mary that he would record "Let Me Live" and dedicate his career to the Marian movement.

Parkes and his wife, Anne, have three grown children. One son, 25-year-old Ken, has battled cystic fibrosis since infancy. Parkes acknowledged that Ken's life-threatening disease, as well as his own battle with Crohn's, have greatly influenced his passion for defending life.

"It's so close to my own heart. All that emotion is built up," he remarked.

EDITORS' NOTE: Details on the Oct. 14 Rochester Marian Conference can be obtained by calling 716/889-2849 or 315/539-2025.

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