

Hospitality given marchers

Carol Zimmermann/CNS

WASHINGTON — When tens of thousands of pro-life marchers descend upon Washington each year for the annual March for Life, Dick and Peggy Blackford and Suzanne O'Connor are ready. In fact, they get ready weeks in advance.

The Blackfords and a handful of members of St. Joseph Church on Capitol Hill coordinate a hospitality center for marchers at their parish. O'Connor and about 40 volunteers provide a similar service at St. Peter Church, also on Capitol Hill.

The two churches, on opposite sides of the Capitol, know what many of these marchers want after a long day of walking, listening to speeches and lobbying. And most often, it's a cup of coffee or hot chocolate.

St. Peter's has been providing such hospitality since the first March for Life in 1974 marking the anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court's 1973 *Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Bolton* decisions that legalized abortion in the United States. Volunteer parishioners arrive at the church basement by 4 a.m. to set up coffee and doughnuts for early arriving marchers who begin shuffling into the parish throughout the morning.

O'Connor, who spoke to Catholic News Service midday Jan. 22, said she had 1,400 cups ready for the afternoon crowd. The marchers were still making their way from the Ellipse, the area between the White House and Washington Monument, to the Supreme Court, the final destination for the march. The coffee was brewing and 16 cases of 4-gallon juice bottles were at the ready.

St. Joseph's, located only a few blocks away from the Supreme Court, has been providing refreshments, only in the afternoon, for about 10 years, thanks to the help of dedicated volunteers, including one woman who makes her own Irish soda bread, which some marchers specifically ask for year after year.

"It's a hoot," Peggy Blackford said of the routine of keeping several hundred marchers well fed each year.

In the hours before the marchers were set to arrive, Blackford was cutting 15 dozen muffins in half. She put out some of the 30 dozen doughnuts, but many of them remained boxed up under a table. She and her husband also put out more cookies than they could count in the parish center, a separate building that is smaller than a two-car garage.

They said they're glad to help out because they know the marchers could use something warm and they both believe firmly in the pro-life



Paul Haring/CNS

March for Life participants rally outside the U.S. Supreme Court building Jan. 22 in Washington, D.C. Catherine O'Brien, 12, perches on the shoulders of her sister, Christine, 15, at the end of the march. The girls from Huntington, N.Y., were among thousands who joined in the annual demonstration against the Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion.

cause.

"I keep praying every day for our judges and senators that refuse to listen to God" on the abortion issue, Dick Blackford said as he scooped ground coffee into one of four 100-cup coffee makers on free loan from a local rental company.

And even though the March for Life is now in its 31st year of opposing abortion, Blackford said he was not discouraged.

"I'm heartened every year with the number of people who show up," he said, adding that the participants are "not people in their 80s either. These are young kids."

And sure enough, the crowd gathered on the Ellipse for the noon rally looked akin to a high-school pep rally complete with chaperones.

The crowd assembled in small groups to take pictures of themselves, eat a quick lunch or hold aloft banners before the speeches began, and seemed more relaxed than in previous years, perhaps in part because of warmer temperatures. At midday, the temperature reached 40 degrees, quite unlike years when marchers faced below freezing weather or walked through snow.

But for some marchers the weather is not a big factor. Betty Herold, a parishioner at St. Augustine's in Barbertown, Ohio, who has been marching for the past 25 years, remembers marching in the snow and walking through mud on the Ellipse. But for most of the years the weather has been fine, she said, attributing this to a higher power.

"Our Blessed Mother looks out for us," she told CNS.

Herold stood at the side of Constitution Avenue along with thousands

of others prior to the march, making the street look like a pre-parade gathering. She and other St. Augustine parishioners, while not of the teenage set, said the march invigorated them.

And a group of youths under the banner New Hampshire Teens for Life seemed equally invigorated.

"This is huge. I'm so glad I came," said Meghan McNamara, a freshman from St. Thomas Aquinas High School in Dover, N.H., at the Ellipse.

She and her friends said they had a mixed reaction from their friends back home about coming to the march, but hoped to get a pro-life group together when they got back.

For them and the rest of the New Hampshire contingency, the Democratic primary scheduled to take place five days after the march, was the last thing on their mind.

Father Volney DeRosia, a newly ordained priest and associate pastor at St. Michael Parish in Exeter, N.H., said, "We're not even thinking about the primary. Thanks be to God."

But that's not to say politics were absent from a day that began with a telephone greeting from President Bush played over the loudspeaker during the rally and ended by marchers visiting members of Congress to lobby for pro-life legislation.

One group held aloft a huge cloth banner with the words: "Michigan Loves Our Pro-Life President." Many participants carried "Stop Abortion Now" signs with the words "Thank you President Bush for your voice for life" on the other side.

And in a display of bipartisan spirit, a live donkey, posted at one of the entryways to the Ellipse, wore the message "Democrats for Life."

UNBORN VICTIMS BILL PASSES IN COMMITTEE

WASHINGTON (CNS) — The U.S. House Judiciary Committee Jan. 21, by a 20-13 partisan vote, approved a bill making it a separate crime to injure or kill "a child who is in utero" during an attack on the mother.

The Unborn Victims of Violence Act would apply only to federal crimes of violence, such as kidnapping across state lines or an attack that takes place on federal property. About 30 states have laws offering some form of protection to unborn victims in crimes against pregnant women.

CHILD-ABUSING PRIEST RETURNED TO LAY STATUS

SPRINGFIELD, Mass. (CNS) — Convicted child molester Richard R. Lavigne has been laicized by papal decree.

Bishop Thomas L. Dupre of Springfield announced Jan. 20 that Pope John Paul II signed a decree last Nov. 20 returning the former priest to lay status. Bishop Dupre said he received notice of the pope's action Jan. 9 in a letter from the Vatican.

Lavigne's laicization, coupled with new actions recently reported in at least three other dioceses, indicates that the Vatican has begun to reach the decision point on a number of cases submitted by U.S. bishops concerning priests accused of sexual abuse of minors.

Lavigne, 62, has been accused in more than 30 sexual-abuse lawsuits against the Springfield Diocese. Seventeen of those were settled in 1994 for \$1.4 million.

THIS WEEK'S READINGS

Sun., Feb. 1: Jeremiah 1:4-5, 17-19; Psalms 71:1-6, 15, 17; 1 Corinthians 12:31-13:13 or 13:4-13; Luke 4:21-30.

Mon., Feb. 2: Malachi 3:1-4; Psalms 24:7-10; Hebrews 2:14-18; Luke 2:22-40 or 2:22-32.

Tue., Feb. 3: 2 Samuel 18:9-10, 14B, 24-25A, 30-19:3; Psalms 86:1-6; Mark 5:21-43.

Wed., Feb. 4: 2 Samuel 24:2, 9-17; Psalms 32:1-2, 5-7; Mark 6:1-6.

Thu., Feb. 5: 1 Kings 2:1-4, 10-12; (Ps) 1 Chronicles 29:10-12; Mark 6:7-13.

Fri., Feb. 6: Sirach 47:2-11; Psalms 18:31, 47, 50-51; Mark 6:14-29.

Sat., Feb. 7: 1 Kings 3:4-13; Psalms 119:9-14; Mark 6:30-34.