

Arkansans renew pro-life commitment at national march

Arkansas Right to Life organizes trip for the first time to Washington

BY ARMANDO RIOS
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

WASHINGTON D.C. — Arkansans joined a river of pro-life people flowing down Constitution Avenue to the U.S. Supreme Court, carrying signs, chanting pro-life slogans, praying and singing during the 37th annual March for Life Jan. 22.

Fifty-eight Arkansans rode a bus for 21 hours from St. John Center in Little Rock to the nation's capitol for the event. They ranged in age from 12 years old to seniors. Many of them were going to the March for Life for the first time. They carried a banner for Arkansas Right to Life, which organized the bus trip, during the march.

Media reports listed the number of participants as more than 100,000.

Although the Arkansas group arrived only six hours before the rally and march Friday, a small contingent walked from their hotel to the meeting spot a couple of hours before the rally started at noon.

As they waited, they saw groups from other dioceses and archdioceses, other denominations and even a Jewish group. Groups sang and performed on stage before the rally started. Many carried signs identifying their groups, others carried signs with pro-life statements. A number of bishops, representatives of other religions, politicians, and women who had abortions were among those who were on the stage for the rally.

As the two-hour rally started on the Capitol Mall, Jon Haslauer, a parishioner at Our Lady of Good Counsel Church in Little Rock, said he felt it important to be there.

"My wife and I are very active in Little Rock in pro-life work and the sanctity of human life," he said. "It is very important to be involved on a national level now, the way politics are ... There are some signs that it is turning around. We need to get this country back to where it needs to be."

The number of people present at the rally and march are only a tip of the iceberg, he said. He said only 58 Arkansans on one bus were there, but he knows that there are many more people involved in the pro-life movement in the Diocese of Little Rock.

Each one of the hundreds of thousands



Arkansans walk with the Arkansas March for Life banner, joining more than 100,000 marchers at the Jan. 22 national March for Life in Washington D.C.

in Washington represents many more back home, he said.

"A majority of Americans are pro-life, yet we have an administration that continues to push abortion down our throats," Haslauer said. "They are not representing the people; they have their own agenda regardless of what their constituents at home think."

Katie Johnson, a member of Christ the King Church in Little Rock, made the trip with her friends, Meagan Lenehan, also a member of Christ the King Church, and Aaron Smith, a member of St. Theresa Church in Little Rock. All three are sophomores at the University of Central Arkansas in Conway.

"I was really in shock about the whole thing, I had never been to anything that big with that many supporters behind it. It was really moving," Johnson said.

She said she attended in order to be a voice for the millions who have been abort-

ed. She celebrated her 20th birthday on a bus most of the day but said it was not about her but about meeting other people who felt the same way she did.

"I wasn't sure what to expect, I had been to all the Arkansas Right to Life marches and basically it was the same thing only a lot bigger, and I was overwhelmed by all the people," Lenehan said.

Seeing so many people at the march gave her hope for the pro-life movement, she said.

Lenehan said having a large number of people show their support for life accomplished something.

"I always feel that as a group you can accomplish more and with the number of people there it can have an impact on the outcome," Lenehan said.

Both Johnson and Lenehan said participating in the rally and march was an accomplishment and gave them more enthusiasm for what they are doing.

"I think I accomplished more a goal in myself, and I feel like I have changed something in the world," Lenehan said. "It makes you want to do everything you possibly can."

Smith said he went to Washington to take a stand, something that people who want change have done for many years.

"That is the whole point of the march to tell our president that we don't want him to support abortion, we want it to end."

Throughout history people have come to Washington to protest when there is a problem, like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. did in 1963, he said.

"Hopefully, if we keep coming back every year and growing bigger and bigger, eventually they will have to do something about it," Smith said.

Participating in the national march made him want to participate even more in the pro-life movement.

Maria Maldonado, a second-grade teacher at Christ the King School in Little Rock and president of St. Joseph's Helpers, was also at national March for Life for the first time.

"It was like a blessing to me from God because I saw so many people involved," Maldonado said. "So many priests, nuns, seminarians, all different ethnic groups, Hispanics, I saw signs in Russian, I heard people speaking in different languages. They were from all facets of life, from youth to the elderly. It made me think that this is something that we have to continue doing."

For 15 years, she has been praying and counseling women in front of the abortion clinic in west Little Rock. She said God told her that she has to keep doing this work.

While she was with the Arkansas group before the rally, Maldonado received a call on her cell phone. She said it was a pregnant woman who the week before Maldonado had counseled and the woman had decided not to go through with an abortion. The woman wanted to meet with her.

"Guess where I am at," Maldonado told the caller. "I am at the national March for Life." Maldonado beamed as she spoke on the phone.

Maldonado was also proud to see that Johnson and Lenehan, two of her former students, were making the bus trip with her.

Rose Mimms, president of Arkansas Right to Life, said she organized the trip for the first time because the interest was high, which was confirmed by how quickly the bus filled up. If the interest is there in 2011 and people will reserve seats on one or two buses, Arkansas Right to Life will be happy to sponsor a trip next year, she said.

A member of St. Theresa Church in Little Rock, Mimms said she felt uplifted to see so many diverse people turn out for the cause of life, and many of them young people.

"They are the future of our movement," Mimms said. "We are not going away. (Pro-choice supporters) want us to go away and have tried for 37 years to make us go away and they cannot."

Change is coming, she said. More people are declaring themselves pro-life while the abortion rate is dropping and fewer physicians are performing abortions.



Aaron Smith (far left) and Maria Maldonado (far right), both of Little Rock, listen to a speaker on stage at a rally, which preceded the national March for Life Jan. 22 in Washington D.C.