

Grassroots Pro-Lifers Show Strength and Commitment

BY Liz Townsend

Taking to the streets in towns and cities across America on the 33rd anniversary of Roe v. Wade, pro-lifers demonstrated their unwavering commitment to restoring respect for life for all people—born and unborn.

“We have a dream today that someday soon this will not be an anniversary of sadness, but an anniversary of justice restored,” Minnesota’s Republican Gov. Tim Pawlenty told a huge crowd of 6,000 in St. Paul January 22. Minnesota pro-lifers called for the passage of a proposed law to protect women harmed by abortionists, end taxpayer funding of abortions, and strengthen teenage girls’ right to parental involvement.

Along with calls for more state laws that protect women and unborn babies, speakers at rallies also demanded safeguards for the vulnerable born, people like Terri Schindler Schiavo whose lives are threatened because of disability. Bobby Schindler and Suzanne Vitadamo, Terri’s siblings, spoke at several rallies.

Vitadamo told over 4,000 rain-drenched marchers in Little Rock, Arkansas, January 22 that her sister was a victim of the “quality of life mentality” that judges people based on ability. But Terri’s life was immensely valuable to those who loved her. “She taught me to appreciate every day on this earth,” Vitadamo said. “She taught me where there is life, there is hope.”

Terri’s sister also spoke at South Carolina’s Stand Up for Life March and Rally in Columbia January 21. Organizer Holly Gatling of South Carolina Citizens for Life said that the pro-lifers came together “to promote the dignity and worth of human life from conception to God-ordained death.”

Bobby Schindler joined Nebraska’s Walk for Life January 28 in Lincoln. Schindler told thousands of pro-lifers that there is a direct connection between the abortion and euthanasia issues. “It’s the same movement, the same language,” he said. “The way they take away someone’s personhood.”

Although bad weather forced the Tennessee Rally for Life to relocate to a Nashville hotel ballroom instead of the state capitol steps, the pro-life spirit was undiminished. Addressing a standing-room-only crowd, Dr. Richard Land, president of the Southern Baptist Convention’s Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, spoke of hope for the future: “The most pro-life voting bloc in America is 18- to 33-year-old voters.”

The disrespect for human persons also spills into other areas of society, according to Brian Rohrbough, featured speaker at Colorado’s March for Life January 21 in Denver. Rohrbough’s son, Daniel, was murdered in the 1999 Columbine High School massacre. “When we allow mothers to murder their children, we undermine the foundation of life,” Rohrbough said. “If our society teaches children that we will not value or protect the life of an innocent baby, then our children will realize there are no boundaries.”

Georgia pro-lifers gathered Together for Life in the pouring rain January 23 in Atlanta. Thousands

marched silently through the streets after hearing an inspiring speech from pro-life Democrat Senator Zell Miller.

Rain also dampened but didn't discourage pro-lifers in Augusta, Maine, January 14 at the annual Hands around the Capitol Memorial. Over 350 people circled the state capitol building hand in hand, while the Capitol Bell tolled 33 times in memory of the innocent unborn babies killed by abortion.

Over 3,000 right to lifers braved record-setting rain in Olympia, Washington, January 18 for the state March for Life. Young people delivered roses to state legislators, many of whom spoke to the crowd and encouraged them to keep fighting for the innocent.

Hundreds of Rhode Island pro-lifers gathered in Providence January 19 and heard from several state legislators. A major goal this year is to pass the Women's Right to Know Act, requiring women to receive information and then wait 24 hours before an abortion.

In a unique event, Massachusetts' annual Interfaith Assembly for Life January 15 featured the Boston premiere of *A Distant Thunder*, a 35-minute supernatural thriller about the horrors of partial-birth abortion. Lead actress Deborah Flora, whose filmmaker husband Jonathan wrote and directed the film, spoke to the gathered pro-lifers about her desire to challenge people to examine their views about abortion.

Other rallies in state capitals occurred in Montpelier, Vermont, January 14; Charleston, West Virginia, January 17; Jefferson City, Missouri, January 18; Honolulu, Hawaii, January 20; Boise, Idaho, and Cheyenne, Wyoming, January 21; Springfield, Illinois; Bismarck, North Dakota; Salem, Oregon; and Pierre, South Dakota, January 22; Des Moines, Iowa; Topeka, Kansas; Lansing, Michigan; and Columbus, Ohio, January 23; and Austin, Texas, January 28.

Kentucky pro-lifers rallied on the state capitol steps in Frankfort February 1, and also gathered in Washington, D.C., January 23 for their annual Congressional Breakfast.

Joining them in the nation's capital were tens of thousands of right to life supporters from states across the union, including Virginia, Maryland, West Virginia, North Carolina, Delaware, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Connecticut, Delaware, and New York.

Pro-lifers also stood up for life in their own towns, gathering with their neighbors in marches and rallies in Mobile, Alabama; Fort Wayne, Indiana; Jackson County, Oregon; Louisville, Kentucky; Syracuse, New York; Petoskey, Michigan; Cookeville, Greeneville, Henderson, Lawrenceburg City, Lexington, and Sevierville, Tennessee; Dubuque, Iowa; Corpus Christi, Dallas, and San Antonio, Texas; and Appleton, Wisconsin.

Memorial services and prayer vigils were held in Cumberland, Maryland; Warren, Michigan; Sedalia, Missouri; Fairlawn, Miami, and Stow, Ohio; Fond du Lac, Wisconsin; Gettysburg, Pennsylvania; and Alcoa, Tennessee.

Moving candlelight vigils took place in Mesa County, Colorado and Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin, while right to life supporters lined the streets in Life Chains in Pulaski, Tennessee, and Wausau, Wisconsin.

Pro-lifers expressed their views in South Bend and Tippecanoe County, Indiana, and Will County, Illinois, through signature ads in local newspapers.

Several communities found unique ways to mourn abortion victims. Bells of 15 churches tolled for five

minutes at noon January 22 in Huntington, Indiana. The public was asked to say a silent prayer when they heard the bells.

And in an anniversary event that honored the unborn while helping babies in need, seventh-grade students in Washington, Illinois, delivered over \$5,000 worth of baby food and formula January 23 to four local service agencies.

A blessing given to the Maine pro-lifers before they gathered hands around their capitol captured the prayers of all pro-lifers nationwide. "In our eagerness to do your will, may we never forget the human dignity and worth of even those who oppose us, but may we treat them with the same patient love that you have shown us," said Rev. Msgr. Michael J. Henschel. "May we never lose heart, but remain committed to the mission you have given us that all people may come to know and cherish your gift of life."