

## A Tribute to Gail McInnish

BY Holly Gatling and Wayne Cockfield

Gail McInnish, 54, delegate from Alabama to the National Right to Life Committee Board of Directors, died December 23, 2006, after years of challenging and debilitating health problems. She lived her life with courage and without complaining. Her death leaves a vacancy in the pro-life movement here on earth, but we know she is being welcomed with shouts of joy into Eternal Life.

Gail knew, as did her close friends and family members, that she probably would not live a long life, so she spent all of her strength and energy defending the right to life of unborn children and protecting medically fragile members of our human family from death by euthanasia. She served on the board of directors with a strong sense of duty to protect the defenseless and disabled. She made every minute of her life count.

As members of the National Right to Life Board of Directors, we were close to Gail. We are Southerners and Southerners tend to stick together. Gail's home in Tuscumbia, Alabama, is a nine-hour drive from South Carolina, but we were able to travel and attend her funeral the day after Christmas.

Space does not permit us to recount all the hilarious stories about how Gail effectively persuaded politicians to be pro-life. Once at a political rally she vehemently disagreed with a pro-abortion candidate. Intrigued by her passion, the candidate decided to listen to Gail. Eventually she converted him and he became a strong pro-life supporter.

In his homily, Fr. Patrick Tierney said that Gail "could have been the first woman president of the United States if she had wanted to." But she chose pro-life work instead.

At the end of the funeral Mass at Our Lady of the Shoals Catholic Church where Gail was the fourth member of her immediate family to be buried, Fr. Tierney invited Cheryl Ciamarra, legislative director for Alabama Citizens for Life, to reflect on Gail's numerous and unique contributions to the pro-life movement locally and nationally. Gail probably was best known in Alabama for working equally well with Democrats and Republicans on pro-life issues.

"Gail was an effective lobbyist both by phone from Tuscumbia or in the halls of the Montgomery State House or in Washington, D.C." Ms. Ciamarra said. "Although disabled herself and in a wheelchair the last few years of her life, Gail lobbied for women, the unborn, and the disabled. She truly was an example of a Christian woman's purpose-driven life."

Gail "made entertaining radio spots with her typically sugar-sweet picturesque Southern drawl that were effective in educating the people of Alabama both to the respect for life issues and to how their representatives voted on them," Ms. Ciamarra recalled. "She was instrumental in creating the bipartisan effort that succeeded in passing the Women's Right to Know Act after decades of effort. Without Gail's tireless efforts we may not have the Unborn Victims of Violence Act — her last legislative success."

Gail wore numerous hats for Alabama Citizens for Life. She served as Vice President as well as its Political Action Committee director. "Gail activated the Alabama Citizens for Life Political Action Committee and was very effective," Ms. Ciamarra said.

"Gail also served as the Alabama delegate to the National Right to Life Committee headquartered in Washington, D.C. Few people realize the significance of that honor," Ms. Ciamarra said, noting that each state has only one representative to the NRLC Board where national and international pro-life issues are addressed.

Gail was preceded in death by her mother, Mary Katherine McInnish; and brothers, Gary McInnish, Sr., and Todd McInnish. Survivors include her father, Niven Daniel McInnish; sister, Bridget McInnish Gillis; best friend, C.J. Colonna; and a host of nieces and nephews whom she loved as if they were her own.

Her laughter and presence will be deeply missed.

Holly Gatling is the NRLC delegate from South Carolina. Wayne Cockfield is an at-large member of the NRLC Board who represents the community of persons with disabilities.