

‘A light that is breaking through’: Pro-lifers march on Annapolis

ANNAPOLIS - Despite a postponement and opening day for both the Baltimore Orioles and Washington Nationals, pro-life supporters arrived in throngs to participate in the 39th annual Maryland March for Life March 3, streaming by the hundreds through the streets of the state capital.

“We have to let the vulnerable know we care, whether they can hear us or not,” said Maureen Stansell, a parishioner of St. Andrew by the Bay in Annapolis, as she distributed balloons with a pro-life message: “Smile! Your mother chose life.”

The march was originally scheduled for March 13, but a snowstorm postponed it. The rescheduled event included speaker David Bereit, founder and former CEO of 40 Days for Life, an organization and movement dedicated to ending abortion that began in Texas and has since expanded internationally.

Bereit, a trim man in a tailored suit and cosmopolitan eyeglasses, observed that Maryland’s legislative climate is “very hostile” toward protecting the unborn, but its pro-life citizens are proportionally joyful and dedicated.

“Even in that darkness, the pro-lifers across Maryland are a light that is breaking through,” he said. “You and I are standing up against the greatest injustice, the greatest crisis of our generation, and that crisis is abortion.”

Many marchers have been standing up for a long time.

“I’m 80 years old, and I’ve watched what has happened in our country over the last 40 years since Roe vs. Wade,” said Cathy Stefano, a parishioner of St. Louis in Clarksville who has participated in the march for the past 15 years. Our whole philosophy has changed.”

She said that she was aware of the landmark Supreme Court decision when it was

made, and was initially “not too concerned about it, because it was limited,” but has “watched the progression to today.”

“It has led us to many issues, including physician-assisted suicide,” Stefano said, referencing repeated legislative efforts to bring the practice to Maryland.

For the third straight year, the End-of-Life Option Act, which would allow doctors to prescribe lethal medication to patients facing a diagnosis likely to be terminal in six months or less, failed to advance, but supporters have said they are not giving up.

Neither are those who, in Bereit’s words, have taken it upon themselves to be “voices for the vulnerable.”

“I do have hope – you always have to have hope,” said Stansell, the balloon-distributor, acknowledging that a sea change would be necessary to establish a culture that fully embraces and protects life, from conception until natural death. “Hope is one of the theological virtues.”

Hers is fed, she said, by an increasing number of young people who value life and speak up for it.

“I’m here because the pro-life movement means a lot to me,” said Maria LeMonnier, a senior at Mount de Sales Academy in Catonsville. “I myself am adopted – knowing there are other options for families and how important families are, it’s important to spread that message in a kind and loving way.”

LeMonnier was one of 11 students from the all-girls school who attended the march together; others came individually or with their parishes.

Bereit noted that the pro-life movement has gained momentum , with new pro-life laws established in the last two years exceeding the total from the previous 20 years, he said.

“We have to remember, though, as long as one child is at risk – as long as one woman is at risk – we have a lot of work to do,” he said.

As she got ready to march with her five children – two in a double stroller, two

walking and one strapped to her front – Maria Centano, a parishioner of Ascension Catholic Church in Bowie, a Washington Archdiocese parish, described the little ones’ embrace of life:

“They already know it’s a baby (growing in the mother) because of the babies I had,” she said.

“Yeah, I could feel Rachel’s feet in your tummy,” said her daughter, Alexandra, smiling at her younger sister.

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