

Archbishop O'Brien leads Good Friday pro-life walk

As at least seven women entered a Planned Parenthood abortion clinic on Howard Street in Baltimore April 10, about 200 Catholics stood on the opposite side of the street and peacefully prayed for them and their unborn children.

The street corner was the final stop of a Good Friday pro-life procession that began at St. Alphonsus, worked its way down Saratoga Street and ended on a forlorn Howard Street corner populated with pager businesses, a beauty shop and abandoned and crumbling buildings.

Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien led marchers along the way, making prayerful stops along the sidewalks to pray the Stations of the Cross.

"Lord Jesus Christ, stripped of everything, you stood exposed to the jeers and contempt of the people whom you loved," Archbishop O'Brien prayed at the 10th Station, using a bullhorn to raise his voice above the din of clanging light-rail trains and downtown morning traffic.

"Clothe us with genuine love of others, so that nothing we suffer may ever fill our hearts with hatred or bitterness," he said.

Teens who carried a large wooden cross throughout the procession planted the sacred object on the sidewalk and turned it to face the abortion clinic as participants prayed the final stations. Looking back at them were signs in the windows of Planned Parenthood that featured smiling women and children, along with the slogan, "every child a wanted child."

The juxtaposition of the happy faces on the signs with what was happening inside the clinic was ironic to many of the marchers, some of whom volunteer in crisis pregnancy centers and know the pain that abortion causes.

"When we're out there on the street, people see us and it causes them to think," said Ruth Dawkins, a pro-life coordinator at New All Saints in Liberty Heights who

participated in her eighth Good Friday prayer walk. "It definitely makes a difference."

As Ms. Dawkins spoke, a woman dressed in ragged clothes approached her and asked what brought so many people out on a Friday morning.

"We're praying for an end to abortion," Ms. Dawkins said.

"Yes, ma'am, that's good," the woman responded with a smile. "They tried to make me get rid of my child, but I didn't do it. You're doing a good thing."

Ms. Dawkins said there is a need for more people within the church to embrace the sanctity of life.

"Too many people don't trust in God," she said. "He will provide."

Sister Mary Christea attended the prayer walk with several of her fellow Missionaries of Charity who work with AIDS patients at the Gift of Hope group home based at St. Wenceslaus in East Baltimore.

"We're bearing witness to the value of all human life," Sister Christea said. "It's nice to support life."

The pilgrims prayed the sorrowful mysteries of the rosary and the Divine Mercy chaplet to conclude the event.