

Catholics gear up for March for Life

Two days after President-elect Barack Obama is inaugurated, thousands of Catholics from the Archdiocese of Baltimore will join tens of thousands of prolife supporters from across the country in urging the new president and Congress to protect the sanctity of life.

Demonstrating at the Jan. 22 March for Life in Washington, abortion opponents plan to focus their attention on the Freedom of Choice Act (FOCA). The legislation, which the incoming president has promised to sign if it reaches his desk, would overturn state laws on parental notification, abortion clinic regulations and bars to government funding of abortion. It would also wipe out prohibitions on procedures such as partial-birth abortion and laws protecting the right of medical personnel and institutions to decline to participate in abortions.

It is unclear whether the Congress will take up the controversial and divisive legislation at a time when the economy is suffering and there is talk of bipartisan cooperation.

“FOCA is the most dangerous issue right now,” said Linda Brenegan, respect life coordinator for the Archdiocese of Baltimore. “It’s really the biggest threat since before Roe v. Wade.”

Ms. Brenegan said it will be important to show the nation’s leaders that “the vast majority of Americans don’t want abortion on demand.”

The March for Life, which commemorates the 36th anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court’s Roe v. Wade decision legalizing abortion, is a “wonderful, peaceful and joyful event,” Ms. Brenegan said.

“More and more young people are attending, and they really make it energized,” she said. “We have to instill in young people respect for all human life because they get the anti-life message all the time from the culture.”

Approximately 30 parishes from the Archdiocese of Baltimore will send busloads of people to the march (see page 13), as will several Catholic schools.

The theme of this year's march is "Remember - The Life Principles Mean 'Equal Care' With No Exceptions," meaning the intentional killing of even one unborn human is never justified or necessary, according to the March for Life Web site.

Organizers are also stressing that the U.S. must provide equal care for both a pregnant mother and her unborn child.

The National Prayer Vigil for Life will begin with a 7 p.m. Mass Jan. 21 at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, and conclude with a 7:30 a.m. liturgy Jan. 22. Cardinal Justin Rigali of Philadelphia, chairman of the U.S. bishops' Committee on Pro-Life Activities, will celebrate the evening Mass and Bishop Paul S. Loverde of Arlington, Va., will be the principal celebrant for the morning Mass.

Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien, Cardinal William H. Keeler and Auxiliary Bishop Denis J. Madden will concelebrate the vigil Mass and participate in the march. Auxiliary Bishop Mitchell T. Rozanski will celebrate a 7 p.m. vigil Mass and participate in a rally at St. Peter in Libertytown.

For the first time since the all-night vigil has been held, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops will direct people who won't fit into the basilica for the events to similar Masses within walking distance, said Deirdre A. McQuade, assistant director for policy and communications for the USCCB's Office of Pro-Life Activities.

Earlier on Jan. 21 the Sisters of Life will host an afternoon of prayerful remembrance and intercession at the Crypt Church of the basilica from 1-4 p.m. to allow men and women whose lives have been affected by abortion to pray and seek God's healing and forgiveness, Ms. McQuade said.

On the morning of the annual March for Life, the Washington archdiocese expects more than 20,000 Catholic teens and young adults from all over the U.S. to attend its youth rally at the Verizon Center from 7:30-11:30 a.m., with a 10 a.m. Mass celebrated by Washington Archbishop Donald W. Wuerl.

On Jan. 23 the American Life League will hold a conference from 7:30 a.m.-3 p.m. at the Liaison Capitol Hill Hotel in Washington, followed by a 6 p.m. concert sponsored

by Students for Life of America and featuring Barlow Girl and Laura Ingraham.

Nancy Paltell, associate director of the respect for life office of the Maryland Catholic Conference, said she hopes the number of participants at the March for Life dwarfs attendance at the inauguration.

“We want to show our leaders that this issue is not going away,” she said. “We’re not going to give up until we win.”

Catholic News Service contributed to this article.