

# Good Friday pilgrims pray for life outside Baltimore abortion clinic

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As hundreds of Catholics prayed the rosary outside a Planned Parenthood building March 29, a lone woman with strings of rosaries dangling from her arm approached men and women as they entered the downtown Baltimore abortion facility.

Some of those going inside ignored the petite parishioner of St. Thomas Aquinas in Hampden, but one hooded young man talked with her for several minutes while the nearby prayers and clangs of passing light rail trains could be heard along a blighted stretch of Howard Street.

The man, whose pregnant girlfriend was already inside, was sympathetic to Mary Bergin's pro-life message, but wondered about the justice of bringing a child into poverty.

"I told him that Jesus was purposely born poor and he had a foster father, St. Joseph, and he walked through the streets homeless," said Bergin, who offered resources for helping the man's girlfriend have the baby.

"If God chose to be poor, why would we take the lives of our children if we're in a poverty state?" she asked.

Bergin doesn't know if the man carried her message of hope to his girlfriend, but she planted a seed.

That was the goal for many of those gathered for what has become a Good Friday tradition in the city.

Catholics assembled at the Shrine of St. Alphonsus early in the morning, walking a few blocks to the abortion clinic while carrying a wooden cross and prayerfully stopping along the way to pray the Stations of the Cross. Pilgrims of all ages sang along the route, and many knelt on concrete sidewalks for some of the prayers.

On the return to St. Alphonsus, they prayed the Chaplet of Divine Mercy. Monsignor Arthur Bastress, pastor of St. Alphonsus, stayed to hear confessions.

Bishop Denis J. Madden, who led the pilgrimage, said the event gives the church an opportunity to "show our great love and respect for life."

"It really does bring blessings to the city," Bishop Madden said. "We do it in the way we do all things - through prayer, through community, through being together and

trying to help people realize the preciousness of life.”

Monsignor James Farmer, pastor of St. John in Westminster, said the public display of prayer is meant to show women there are alternatives to abortion.

“The pro-life movement stands ready to help women in their time of need,” he said. “Life is better than death. We’re here to be compassionate and we’re here to be helpful.”

Maureen Stansell, a parishioner of St. Andrew by the Bay in Annapolis, participated in the pilgrimage with her 10-year-old and 15-year-old grandchildren.

“We witness to Jesus on the cross,” she said, “and we help with the conversion of women who are considering abortion.”

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