

# Marylanders march for life in Annapolis

ANNAPOLIS – Jolly Abad struggled for a response when her daughter, seven-year-old Air, asked why they were walking in the 40<sup>th</sup> annual Maryland March for Life.

“How do I tell my children?” asked Abad, a parishioner of St. Isaac Jogues in Carney. “It can be so harsh for kids to hear that adults are killing babies.”

Abad’s husband, D’Gee, was attending with his Knights of Columbus council, and she decided to bring along their daughters, Air and Ria, 2.

“It’s a family affair,” Abad said, adding that she hopes immersing her young children in the pro-life culture will help them to understand its importance.

The Abad family joined hundreds of pro-life advocates March 12 to march from St. Mary Parish and School in Annapolis to the Maryland State House for a rally.

The evening began at St. Mary’s School with a youth rally. Joined by other marchers, Mass was offered in the parish concurrently with a non-denominational prayer service in the school.

“It is good that we gather for this Mass, it is good that we will march and will rally and show physically at this critical time in Annapolis what we stand for,” Auxiliary Bishop Mark E. Brennan said in his homily. “We stand for the dignity of every human being from the moment of conception right to natural death.”

He noted recent improvements in the pro-life movement, including young advocates, life-friendly judges and the many states that are rejecting physician-assisted suicide, but encouraged attendees to not lose their vigor.

“We have to avoid complacency,” Bishop Brennan said. “There are some good signs, but don’t be complacent.”

Advocates at the march were joined by Jeanne Mancini, president of the national

March for Life, held in January in Washington, D.C., near the anniversary of the Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion.

“When and if Roe is corrected, the abortion law will return to the states,” Mancini said. “It’s very important that we’re working at the level of the states to instill good, pro-life public policies that protect the inherent dignity of the human person from conception to natural death.”

Mancini, a parishioner of St. Leo the Great in Fairfax, Va., said that there is a lot of work to be done on the local level, and that grassroots movements are the heart of the March for Life.

“As long as we stay true to the reality and the beauty of the inherent dignity of the human person, that is inherently attractive,” Mancini said, adding that it is important to remember that God is behind the pro-life battle. “Truth is on the side of life, science is on the side of life, technology is on the side of life. So it’s our job just to keep beating the drum and keep showing that for what it is.”

“This large turnout of people from all corners of the state is just another testament to the strength and size of Maryland’s pro-life movement,” said Garrett O’Day, associate director of education, children and families for the Maryland Catholic Conference, who marched with his family. “This comes as no surprise to us, knowing the numbers of pro-life Catholics in the state that we communicate with on a regular basis and who tirelessly advocate for policies that promote the culture of life from conception until natural death.”

Tony Martelli, a parishioner of Our Lady of the Fields in Millersville and administrative director for the Maryland Coalition for Life, is displeased with the lack of media coverage that pro-life marches receive.

“This march, that’s about love, they ignore,” Martelli said. “We get half a million people at the national march – we need 5 million.”

Knights of Columbus councils from around the state came out to promote a Culture of Life, one of their six program areas.

“We need to tell the legislators what they need to hear,” said Stephen Cohen, Maryland State Deputy for the Knights. “It’s important everywhere. You have to start in your own state.”

Bringing up the rear of the march was the Students for Life group from Mount St. Mary’s University in Emmitsburg. Maddie Weldon, a sophomore from Rockville, attended the Maryland March for the first time.

“(Abortion) needs to be resolved,” said Weldon, who wants to see improvements in legislation restricting the practice “on any level.”

Marchers walked through a wintry mix of precipitation and temperatures in the low 40s to Lawyers’ Mall at the Maryland State House.

“It is not a march for life if the weather isn’t bad,” Mancini quipped.

She was joined by keynote speaker Roland C. Warren, CEO of Care Net, a network of pro-life pregnancy centers. He was formerly president of the National Fatherhood Initiative, which seeks to increase the number of children raised by dedicated fathers.

Warren shared his personal story in pro-life ministry, which began in college, when he got his girlfriend pregnant. They made the choice to keep their child, get married and start a family. He said his inspiration was St. Joseph, who embraced Mary’s “unplanned” pregnancy to become a dedicated husband and father.

After the rally, marchers returned to St. Mary for a mixer with a resource fair and a free Chick-fil-A dinner.

Blanche O’Neill, a parishioner of St. Mary, was one of many volunteers handing out dinners.

“(We need) to try to demonstrate the importance of life at every step,” said O’Neill, who has testified against physician-assisted suicide. “So that people understand what we really mean when we say we respect life.”

O’Neill said that respect life includes those who have disabilities.

“If you have faith,” she said, “then you have love and care about other people.”

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