

# Obama's visit to Arizona draws protest, prayers for his presidency

MESA, Ariz. – Hundreds of protesters lined up along a Mesa street Feb. 18 to give President Barack Obama a piece of their mind.

Later that morning at a local high school, the president unveiled his \$75 billion "Homeowner Stability Initiative," aimed at helping homeowners in danger of losing their houses avoid foreclosure.

But the protesters weren't interested.

Some held lighthearted signs, with messages like "I'll keep my freedom, you keep the change" and "Give me \$," and others had signs with more serious messages, like "Abortion kills children."

Meanwhile, across the street, members of St. Timothy Parish met in a far different way. More than 200 gathered for an 8:30 a.m. Mass and a 45-minute prayer service before the president's address.

"We are here to pray for our president. We are not here to protest anything," said Father Jack Spaulding, pastor of St. Timothy, during his homily.

"Yes, we don't agree with a lot of the things he's going to do or even the things he's doing now," he said, referring to the president's stand on abortion legislation. "But he's our president and we need to pray for him."

Father Spaulding said that "a prayer for the president of the United States" would become a regular prayer of petition during weekend Masses. He also called parishioners to pray a chaplet of Divine Mercy for the Obama administration.

"More than any protest or sign that we carry, prayer can change hearts," he said, "even ours."

Mike Phelan, director of the Phoenix diocesan Office of Marriage and Family Life, said Catholics should pray for those in authority.

“We know that we face ideological problems with a lot of our leadership,” he said. “But this is the year of St. Paul. It’s the year of conversion.”

While he has his reservations about President Obama’s support for keeping abortion legal, Deacon Dick Peterson, marriage preparation coordinator for St. Timothy, also expressed support.

“He’s a son of God like we all are,” he told The Catholic Sun, newspaper of the Phoenix Diocese. “Hopefully we can work with him to change things for the better, as he keeps promising.”

Arizona Right to Life’s Melanie Pritchard noted President Obama’s positions on embryonic stem-cell research and euthanasia.

“We hope he has a change of heart and a change of mind,” she said.

President Obama is expected to lift the Bush administration’s restrictions on federal funds for embryonic stem-cell research.

Regarding euthanasia, President Obama said during one of the presidential debates that he regretted failing to support more vigorously those calling for Terri Schindler Schiavo’s feeding tube to be removed. The brain-damaged Florida woman died in March 2005 after a court ordered its removal.

Ms. Pritchard said that, in addition to prayer, the pro-life movement can focus on educating the community about abortion so that women “don’t even walk in the front door of an abortion clinic.”

“If we can do that,” she said, “then Obama’s pro-abortion policies won’t matter.”

Father Spaulding, recognizing the challenges facing the president, asked parishioners to “pray for his enlightenment, for God’s mercy, and for wisdom.”

“Nobody knows the burdens that are being brought to bear on him,” he said.

President Obama unveiled his housing initiative in a state that has been hit hard by the housing bust, with 117,000 foreclosures in 2008. In 2005, the figure was under 17,000. Since the recession began, the average home in Arizona has lost more than

40 percent of its value.