

Philadelphia holds ‘Pro-Life Rally Against Bullying’

PHILADELPHIA — More than 1,000 people gathered in Philadelphia May 10 to demonstrate against recent social media videos of a Pennsylvania lawmaker berating people for praying outside of an abortion clinic.

The “Pro-Life Rally Against Bullying” took place in front of the Planned Parenthood facility in downtown Philadelphia where the week before, Democrat State Rep. Brian Sims had confronted pro-life demonstrators and posted two videos on social media where he asked for donations to the abortion center while offering money to viewers who could provide the identities and addresses of the activists.

Shortly after the videos emerged on social media, the national organization Live Action organized a rally in response that featured representatives from the Pro-Life Union of Greater Philadelphia, the Pennsylvania Family Council, 40 Days for Life, Students for Life, Sidewalk Advocates for Life, Sidewalk Servants and the Susan B. Anthony List.

Lila Rose, founder and president of Live Action, served as the moderator. She called for Sims’ resignation but also said the event was organized for a “much bigger reason” — to stand for the dignity of human life, a point emphasized in several other speeches at the rally.

Rose said: “Over 900 babies are killed every day at Planned Parenthood facilities across the U.S., and 2,600 across the nation at abortion clinics.”

Author and speaker Matt Walsh, who had called for the rally through a series of Twitter posts, said “abortion is not a reproductive issue, but a parenting decision,” since “by the time the abortion happens, reproduction has already occurred.”

He said he hoped the rally would become a regular event.

Ashley Garecht, one of the women who had been confronted in Sims’ videos, drew cheers as she commended the longtime efforts of pro-life demonstrators and

volunteers, noting they “are standing on the side of the angels.”

Garecht also pointed out that the rally was taking place just blocks from the former home of James Madison, a primary author of the U.S. Constitution, which enshrines “a self-evident, inalienable right to life,” she said.

Several speakers directly addressed Sims’ claims that the pro-life advocates he had filmed were racist.

Richara Krajewski of the Pro-Life Union of Greater Philadelphia said she stood before the crowd “as a pro-life black woman.”

Noting that “it’s so popular now to call out racism,” Krajewski wished to clarify that application of the term, particularly “in the context of pro-abortion politics.”

“Real racism,” she said, “is co-opting the language of liberation to advocate for the destruction of the lives of the most vulnerable. Real racism is a so-called white ally telling black and brown women that they need to choose between their dreams and their babies.”

Toni McFadden, founder of Relationships Matter, described her own experience as an African American teenager who had turned to Planned Parenthood for an abortion induced through an abortifacient prescription. In speaking engagements, McFadden now shares her insights on post-abortion healing and spiritual development “so that no more babies need to die because of convenience.”

Abby Johnson, author of the book “Unplanned” and a nationally recognized pro-life advocate, met with an enthusiastic response as she announced she is now 37 weeks pregnant.

A former Planned Parenthood employee, Johnson took the organization to task for “covering up statutory rape of minors, not sterilizing instruments that are being used woman to woman” and repeatedly failing health inspections.

“That is the antithesis of health care and the antithesis of feminism,” said Johnson.

Earlier in the week, Philadelphia Archbishop Charles J. Chaput in a statement had

encouraged people to attend the rally and “meet the hateful actions of Representative Sims with the love of Christ.” Philadelphia Auxiliary Bishop John J. McIntyre delivered a final blessing at the rally.

Some 20 patient escorts from Planned Parenthood, wearing bright yellow and pink vests, lined the sidewalk during the rally. They declined to offer comment about it to CatholicPhilly.com, the news outlet of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia.

Margaret Kuhar, a Philadelphia resident who has just finished her freshman year at the University of Mary near Bismarck, North Dakota, said the rally was remarkable for its “shoulder-to-shoulder turnout” and the rapid way it came together.

She has attended the annual March for Life in Washington more than 15 times with her family and said she has seen “a big turnaround” in the attitude of younger generations to abortion.

Stacey McMahon, visiting Philadelphia from Cape Coral, Florida, attended the rally by chance and stood against the exterior wall of the Planned Parenthood facility throughout the rally as she silently prayed for both rally attendees and the abortion facility staff.

“I prayed for a young lady who had been shielded by escorts to enter Planned Parenthood during the rally,” said McMahon, a Catholic. “I was being the hands and feet of Christ, not making myself known as any type of Christian. That’s what Christ asks you to do, to stand silently for those who need him, the vulnerable.”

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