

# Pro-life marchers take to streets of Annapolis in support of life at all stages

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ANNAPOLIS – Kristan Hawkins was sitting in a cystic fibrosis clinic with her son, Gunner, when a genetic counselor approached and offered some unsolicited advice.

“I can help ensure that you don’t have children like Gunner anymore,” the woman told Hawkins, as Gunner, who has cystic fibrosis, sat on his mother’s lap. The counselor didn’t realize that Hawkins was pregnant with her second son, Bear.

Recounting her story to a crowd of hundreds at the March 9 Maryland March for Life in Annapolis, Hawkins said she had the self-control not to lash out at the woman for “calling this beautiful son sitting on my lap a mistake.”

During her pregnancy with her second son, Hawkins frequently had to explain to doctors why she didn’t want genetic testing. When she gave birth, she then had to resist calls by doctors to implant birth control devices.

“This is a culture of death that we’re up against,” said Hawkins, president of Students for Life of America, noting that her story is not uncommon. “We live in a society that has a need for perfection status, and depending on how many chromosomes you have or what your DNA looks like (determines) whether you are perfect or not.”

The good news, Hawkins told a cheering crowd that included a large number of teens and young adults, is that younger generations are embracing the pro-life message. For the movement to get stronger, she said, pro-life advocates must recruit more members and begin envisioning a nation without abortion.

Hawkins’ keynote address on Lawyer’s Mall in the shadow of the State House was the culmination of a march that began with a first-ever youth rally attended by approximately 150 young people at St. Mary’s High School in Annapolis. A large contingent of Middies from the nearby U.S. Naval Academy was present, dressed in crisp uniforms.

Following the rally, St. Mary Church hosted a Mass for Life at the same time the school offered a Protestant service.

In his homily at the Mass, Bishop Denis J. Madden, auxiliary bishop of Baltimore, said the pro-life movement in the Catholic Church is about “overcoming indifference – indifference to the suffering of a woman in a difficult pregnancy and indifference to the voiceless child who is at risk of being part of that awful statistic of a million killed in the womb each year.”

To view a slideshow from the event, navigate the arrows below.

Quoting Pope Francis, Bishop Madden noted that no life is more valuable than another. The pro-life movement is characterized by a special love for the poor, the marginalized and the suffering at all stages of life, he said, “especially when it is in danger of being discarded.”

Recalling a Frederick talk given by Nellie Gray several years ago, Bishop Madden said the founder of the national March for Life noted that the pro-life movement will be a success not only when abortion clinics are closed, but when pro-life supporters love those who disagree with them – even abortion doctors.

The 37th annual march through the streets of downtown Annapolis was inaugurated by blowing a shofar, a ram’s horn symbolizing a call to listen to the voice of God. Marchers carried bright yellow balloons emblazoned with a simple message: “Smile! Your Mom chose life.”

March organizers urged participants to contact their lawmakers in support of the “Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act,” a measure now under consideration in Annapolis that would outlaw abortion after 20 weeks.

In emphasizing the sanctity of life from conception to natural death, they drew particular attention to another bill now under consideration that would legalize physician-assisted suicide in Maryland.

Jeff Meister, a lobbyist for Maryland Right for Life, warned marchers that the “Death with Dignity Act” has no mandatory requirements for a psychiatric evaluation of someone requesting a prescription to end his or her life.

“The other side will say this is a way we give dignity to people at the end of life,” Meister said, “and we agree that we want to give dignity to people. But we also say that suicide is not the way to give dignity to the individual.”

A senate committee will hold a March 10 hearing on the assisted-suicide bill. O.J. Brigance, a former player with the Baltimore Ravens who now serves as senior advisor to player development for the team, is expected to testify against the measure. Brigance has Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), a progressive neurodegenerative disease also known as Lou Gehrig’s disease.

The Maryland Catholic Conference, legislative lobbying arm of the state’s Catholic bishops, is also expected to testify against the bill.

### **All life has value**

Maria Johnson, a parishioner of Our Lady Queen of Peace in Middle River, said she

participated in the Maryland March for Life to show others human life has value. Johnson had an abortion while in college, she said, and suffered emotional pain in the years that followed.

“Every year for 10 years after that,” the 57-year old Filipino immigrant said, “I kept thinking about it.”

Johnson believed at the time of her abortion that a pregnancy was similar to erecting a building – that you could change your mind “in the middle of construction” and end it. It wasn’t until after having an abortion, she said, that she realized her mistake. Today, she tries to explain to young women that “once you make a mistake, it’s really hard and it does affect you later on.”

Education is what the march is all about, according to Maddie Friesl, a 14-year-old eighth-grader at Our Lady of Mount Carmel School in Essex. Young people can take the pro-life message home, she said, and “tell their friends if they don’t know how bad abortion can be.”

Tracy Tiernan, a radio host on 95.1 Shine FM, challenged marchers to “be a friend” to those considering abortion.

“A good friend doesn’t tell a friend what they want to hear,” said Tiernan, noting that she regrets her abortion. “A good friend speaks the truth.”

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