

Prolife Initiative launched in Baltimore

Concerned that Baltimore women in crisis pregnancies aren't receiving the help they need to carry their unborn babies to term, several regional prolife groups have joined forces to establish "Pro-Life Initiative Baltimore."

Deacon Richard "Monti" Montalto of St. Thomas Aquinas in Hampden, coordinator of the effort, said his group would like to establish two maternity homes and two new crisis pregnancy centers in the city. Other priorities include adding 15 new churches to the Gabriel Network, an ecumenical organization that provide support to women with crisis pregnancies. Deacon Montalto said he hopes his group will attract 100 Christian communities to support the effort by contributing volunteers, finances and facility space.

"There really is a crisis in Baltimore," said Deacon Montalto. "There is only one pregnancy center in the city with a satellite office at St. Brigid in Canton. We should have four centers covering the north, east, south and west."

Deacon Montalto noted that while the Gabriel Network receives thousands of calls for assistance through its hotline, there aren't the resources available to provide proper support to those who call in the city. While there are several Catholic city parishes that are members of the Gabriel Network, he said, "only two are capable of handling any women or families in crisis pregnancies."

Deacon Montalto said he knew of one woman who called for help after she was kicked out of her house when her family found out she was pregnant. The nearest maternity home near her Baltimore residence was in Ellicott City, and it was filled. She had to go to a maternity home in Silver Spring, he said.

"We need to do more and we need to spread the word that help is out there," he said.

Because studies have shown that women who see sonogram images of their unborn infants are much less likely to have abortions, Deacon Montalto said he hopes his

group will be able to raise enough money to purchase ultrasound equipment for pregnancy centers.

Pro-Life Initiative Baltimore will be working with the Maryland Catholic Conference and other groups to lobby Gov. Martin J. O'Malley to put money in his budget for a proposed program called "Real Alternatives." Modeled after a Pennsylvania program, the Maryland program would assist pregnancy centers, maternity homes and social service/adoption agencies.

In addition to Deacon Montalto, representatives from the Baltimore Center for Pregnancy Concerns, the Association of Maryland Families and the Gabriel Network serve on the Pro-Life Initiative Baltimore steering committee.

A series of town meetings will be held throughout the Baltimore area to educate people on ways they can support the initiative. They will be held at the following locations:

Oct. 29 - Cathedral of Mary Our Queen, Homeland, 10 a.m.; St. Agnes, Catonsville, 7 p.m.

Oct. 30 - Seventh Baptist Church, Baltimore, 10 a.m.; Catholic Community of St. Francis Xavier, Hunt Valley, 7 p.m.

Oct. 31 - Shrine of the Little Flower, Baltimore, 10 a.m.; St. Benedict, Baltimore, 7 p.m.

Nov. 1 - St. Brigid, Baltimore, 10 a.m.; St. Rita, Dundalk, 7 p.m.

For more information, call 410-517-3925 or send e-mail to ProLifeInBalt@comcast.net.