

Shock or awe?



Participants in the Maryland March for Life carried yellow balloons with a positive pro-life message. (CR Staff/Owen Sweeney III)



Kay Cole of Holy Family in Davidsonville distributes signs before the Maryland March for Life March 14. (CR Staff/Owen Sweeney III)

Moments before the Maryland March for Life kicked off March 14, I watched a handful of participants move to the front of the line and unfurl a banner with graphic images of aborted fetuses. It was a sharp contrast to the other images that were in abundance that day – pictures of smiling babies, banners with messages such as “Protect Maryland Women” and bright yellow balloons each stamped with a smiley face surrounded by, “Smile! Your Mom Chose Life.”

Someone discreetly told the holders of the graphic banner to step away from the front of the line. They complied, and I don’t think they carried their banners the rest of the day. At least, I didn’t see them as I marched through the streets of Annapolis.

It’s always a big debate in the pro-life community whether graphic messages are appropriate at pro-life events. Some argue that people must see abortion in all its horror for hearts to be changed. Others point out that gruesome images turn people away, preventing them from hearing a positive pro-life message.

The bishops of Alberta, Canada, have decided not to participate in their local March for Life this May precisely because they couldn’t be guaranteed the absence of graphic signs. According to a March 15 article posted on the BC Catholic website, Edmonton Archbishop Richard Smith said the presence of images of aborted babies at the march is not consistent with the message the bishops wish to share about the dignity of human life.

“We think a far more effective image, that would be consistent with what we are

proclaiming, would be the images of unborn living children,” Archbishop Smith said. “That says the same thing and it says it far more beautifully.”

The archbishop was right on track.



Baltimore Raven Matt Birk participates in the Maryland March for Life in Annapolis March 14. (CR Staff/Owen Sweeney III)

This year’s Maryland March for Life was beautiful. Participants were prayerful and enthusiastic. Baltimore Raven Matt Birk gave a compelling personal testimony on why he embraces the sanctity of life. (Check out The Catholic Review story on Birk [here](#)). Pro-life leaders laid out ways participants could work to change Maryland’s permissive abortion laws. A local Christian radio host told the story of how she lived with the pain of having an abortion and how she now works to convince other women to choose life.

Thank God those uplifting messages weren’t marred by graphic signs. Rather than shocking people, let’s awe them.