

# Volunteers walk cross-country to spread pro-life message

WASHINGTON – When school ended for the summer break in May, most students went home and started their vacation. But that was not the case for Carlos Rivas and about 30 others.

Instead of lying on the beach or trying to make a little extra cash, they began walking across the country to spread the message of the dignity of life.

They are part of Crossroads, an organization that sponsors three walks across the U.S., from the West Coast to the East Coast. A fourth Crossroads walk takes place in Canada, this year going from Toronto to Ottawa Aug. 5-15.

The U.S. treks, which began May 24, will end in Washington Aug. 15; a pro-life rally will take place near the Capitol Aug. 16.

According to the Crossroads Web site, [www.crossroadswalk.com](http://www.crossroadswalk.com), the organization was founded in 1994 as a response to Pope John Paul II's call to young people at World Youth Day in Denver in 1993. He urged them "to go out into the streets and into public places, like the first apostles who preached Christ and the good news of salvation in the squares of cities, towns and villages."

The first walk was organized in 1995, with the others added over the years. In the U.S. the primarily college-age walkers are divided into three groups. One takes a northern route starting in Seattle, one a central route starting in San Francisco, and one a southern route starting in Los Angeles.

The walkers stop at churches along the way, the Web site said.

Rivas is the leader of the central walk. In an interview with Catholic News Service, he explained that during the visits to local Catholic churches the walkers ask parishioners for three things: to get involved with the walk, to pray for them and to give any financial contributions they can spare.

They also offer to pray for any intentions anyone might have, he said.

The northern walkers participated in Masses while they were in Ann Arbor, Mich., July 18-20.

At St. Thomas the Apostle Church, two Crossroads members spoke to parishioners before the final blessing, said Julie Mussio, a Mass coordinator at St. Thomas.

"They were present in the front pew at church with their pro-life T-shirts," she told CNS. Then, at the priest's request, she said, the walkers got up and explained what they were doing this summer.

"They talked about how, they, these young adults, all decided to spend their entire summer walking across the United States" to spread the pro-life message, she said.

St. Jude's Catholic Church in Jackson, Miss., also received a visit from one of the walkers taking the southern route while the group was in town July 18-20, said Kelly McGregor, parish secretary.

At the end of Mass, the walker talked about how the group was walking from Los Angeles to Washington "to promote a peaceful resolution to the abortion issue and euthanasia," she said.

As they walk, Crossroad participants also stop at abortion clinics and Planned Parenthood offices to "participate in prayerful, peaceful protests and sidewalk counseling," according to the Crossroads Web site.

"We're there to bring charity to these clinics" and to offer "prayerful presence at the abortion clinics," Rivas told CNS.

Contact with the women entering the clinics varies from location to location.

"(At) some clinics we can't get to the women. (At) some clinics we have to project our voices and ask them to come to us," he said.

The reaction to the Crossroads walkers varies as well, Rivas added. "Sometimes people do come to us willingly and talk to us; sometimes they run scared from us," he said. "A lot of women who go to get abortions are scared in the first place."

As a male, Rivas takes a lot of heat for being involved in pro-life activities, he said.

“The world tells you it’s not a guy’s fight,” he said, that it’s a “woman’s body, woman’s choice, woman’s issue.”

However, being a male pro-life advocate actually helps to promote the dignity of life in a different way, he said. In many cases the women who are getting abortions weren’t treated right by the men in their lives, he said.

Rivas is able to “bring a proper face of manhood to the clinics” and can show women that men are capable of “charity, compassion and love,” he said.