

Reflections
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Marching for a Pro-Life America

On January 19, some 20,000 students attended an early morning Mass and youth rally, and then joined several hundred thousand pro-life advocates on the National Mall in Washington, DC. After encouraging remarks by political and social leaders, the overwhelmingly young crowd from all over the country marched to the Supreme Court for the 45th annual time to bear witness for life at all stages.

Ever since *Roe v. Wade* legalized abortion in 1973, the pro-life movement has peacefully prayed outside of abortion clinics, counseled pregnant women, shown them ultrasound images of their children, provided free housing for mothers-to-be, stressed the alternative of adoption, exposed the depraved techniques of abortion, filmed the illegal sale of baby parts, and lobbied for laws to protect both mother and child. The results are indisputable. The number of surgical abortions has decreased dramatically. Children are being saved.

In 1996, an estimated 1.36 million children were killed in the womb; by 2015, the number had dropped to 908,000. Last year, 27 surgical abortion centers closed or stopped doing abortions, continuing a long-term trend. In 1991, there were 2,176 surgical abortion clinics in the country; today, only 490 remain. As a result, over 90 percent of the counties in the United States no longer have an abortion provider.

And very encouraging, in the past year there have been a host of federal government actions to promote the sanctity of life. On January 23, 2017, the President reinstated the Mexico City Policy, which prevents U.S. foreign aid from going to non-governmental organizations that provide or promote abortion services abroad.

Then, on the morning of the 2018 March for Life, the President announced two major pro-life policy changes. First, the Department of Health and Human Services is rescinding an Obama-era guideline that forced states to make Medicaid reimbursement payments to Planned Parenthood, rather than to local community health centers which do not perform abortions and serve more people with more health services.

Second, the Office for Civil Rights proposed a new policy to protect conscience rights and religious freedom of doctors, nurses, and other medical professionals so that they would not be coerced into participating in medical procedures, such as abortion, sterilization, or assisted suicide, that violate their consciences.

That same morning, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the *Born Alive Abortion Survivors Protection Act (H.R. 4712)*, which requires, under penalty of possible criminal and civil actions, health care practitioners to provide the same standards of care, including admission to a hospital, to a child surviving an abortion as would be expected for infants who were not subjects of an abortion.

The President has called upon the Senate to pass that legislation, as well as the *Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act (H.R. 36)*, which passed the House in October 2017, and he will sign both. The latter bill makes it a crime for any person to perform or attempt to perform an

abortion on any unborn child 20 weeks or more after conception. These bills would virtually eliminate abortions nationwide after five months of pregnancy.

The recent government actions are in-line with public opinion. A Knights of Columbus-Marist poll conducted in January 2018 found that 76 percent of American adults, including 60 percent of those who identify themselves as pro-choice, want abortions restricted to the first three months of pregnancy or limited to cases of rape or incest or to save the life of the mother. This confirms a Gallop survey released at the time of last year's March for Life, which found that although there is strong support for abortion in the first trimester majorities oppose it strongly in the second and third trimesters. The majority of Americas favor significant restrictions on abortion, such as waiting periods, spousal agreement, and the consent of one parent for a minor's abortion.

The March for Life is more than an annual symbolic demonstration. As Cardinal Timothy Dolan said at the youth Mass preceding this year March, "Our elected representatives, executive and legislative, and the judiciary they appoint, need to see and hear and feel the grassroots power and sincere voices of millions...we will not give up."

The National March in Washington, DC, has spawned more than 60 sister marches in communities and states across the nation, almost all held on or near January 22, the date when the Supreme Court legalized abortion. And other countries have followed the example. Marches for life are being held in at least 20 nations on six continents, making this a global movement.

Although progress has been made in protecting the sanctity of life, there still is significant opposition from pro-abortion providers, the entertainment industry, and much of the main-stream media. Marching alone will not win the battle for life.

Lila Rose, founder of Live Action, when asked a few years ago to advise a first-time attendee at the March for Life, expressed the need for continuing involvement: "If you're here, that's fantastic — but we need you tomorrow; we need you the next day; we need you on Sundays at your church; we need you at your schools standing up for life; we need you voting for life; we need you encouraging and working with your friends to make sure they're not having abortions...We need you every day, not just today."

Action also must be coupled with prayer. As the President said in his remarks at the March, "this movement can only succeed with the heart and the soul and the prayer of the people." With prayer, fasting, wide-spread public involvement, and trust in God, America will be a land that protects life from conception until natural death.

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