

March for Life organizers heartened by response to virtual events

Organizers of this year's Alberta March for Life say taking events online has broadened its pro-life message even further and taught them lessons for the future, even though COVID-19 crowd limits prevented public witness in the streets.

"Our efforts are ongoing and continue beyond the effort and witness of merely one particular day: with an online presence, the reach becomes virtually limitless," said Gregory Amerongen, a Alberta March for Life board member.

"This year's experience provides us with new insight about how to expand the presence of pro-life initiatives through the internet and how to make effective use of limited resources or expand our reach."

In Ottawa, the national candlelight March for Life vigil alone had 12,000 views.

The March for Life is the largest single pro-life event in Canada each year. It is held on May 14, marking the passing on that day in 1969 of the omnibus bill that allowed abortion on demand in Canada.

However, the March for Life movement focuses beyond the issue of abortion alone.



Mary Hunt

"We support babies. We support mothers. We support elderly people. We support sick people. We believe that God has given us all the gift of life and that we should view it as precious gift and not to be discarded," said Mary Hunt, chair of the [Alberta March for Life Association](#).

"It covers medical assistance in dying. It covers euthanasia. It covers anything that takes away from the gift of life that we have been given.

"During this pandemic, we are reminded of how precious life is and how life should be cherished for the gift that it is from conception to natural death," Hunt said.

"The March for Life is a way of sharing these beliefs with others so they too think about sanctity of life issues."

Hunt and supporters of Alberta March for Life took a photo on the legislative grounds, normally packed with hundreds of people on May 14, to show symbolically that the movement is still strong even though physical marches were cancelled.

Among the local events, Red Catholic Regional Schools organized its own [Virtual Walk for Life](#) for students, parents and staff.

Nationally, this year's virtual [March for Life](#) events included the National Mass for Life from Ottawa's Notre-Dame Cathedral, the broadcast of a [Be Not Afraid Canadian Pro-Life Special](#) on the EWTN TV network and a virtual pro-life rally.

The pro-life special has had more than 25,000 views, and the national candlelight vigil in Ottawa has been viewed more than 17,000 times. All of the events will be posted on the national March for Life website.

The physical marches have been replaced by online events at both the diocesan and local levels, which broadened the pro-life message from Canada's bishops, Amerongen said.

Alberta's bishops celebrated Masses livestreamed on the Internet and broadcast on TV.



Edmonton Archbishop Richard Smith celebrates the Mass for Life May 14 at St. Joseph's Basilica. Lincoln Ho, Grandin Media

"We cannot march this year because of the coronavirus that places limits on movement. Yet because of the other contagion that lethally restricts the right to life itself, it remains incumbent upon all of us to look for any and every opportunity to witness to the truth of God's own love for life," Archbishop Richard Smith said in his [homily for the Mass for Life](#) at St. Joseph's Basilica in Edmonton.

While the world has been grappling with the COVID-19 coronavirus for months, Archbishop Smith warned against "another juggernaut that is far more horrifying and lethal than any virus."

"I speak, of course, of the worldview that affirms the autonomous Self over all other considerations, the mentality whose spread has increasingly overwhelmed moral sense, resulting in a situation where we have in Canada no law against abortion and a Criminal Code increasingly attenuated to expand access to legalized euthanasia. Far from promoting distancing measures that would separate us from this infection, governments and vast swathes of society are at pains to escalate its reach."

Access to abortion varies by province. The [Canadian Institute for Health Information](#) reports that 94,030 abortions were recorded across Canada in 2017, including 12,706 in Alberta. In the last decade, the highest number reported in any year was 108,844, in 2011.

And Ottawa is in the process of amending the Criminal Code to permit greater

access to assisted suicide. The amendments are in response to a Quebec court decision last September that struck down parts of the existing law as unconstitutional.

Amerongen said the downside of online events is that the national and Alberta March for Life are less visible to media, legislators and the public, adding there's "no substitute for personal interaction and public witness."

Nevertheless, this year's online events have strengthened the resolve of the pro-life movement and broadened its appeal to a younger generation. And he expects even greater numbers with the anticipated return to public marches next year.

"Our message will focus on doubling the effort and raising the witness. After all, people are far more aware of how fragile life is with COVID-19, so people will have reflected a great deal and likely rethought the easy positions on life and human rights," Amerongen said.

"The future of the March for Life will find new strength and vibrancy within school divisions and their students: Catholic, Christian, and others who wish to join. The March for Life is definitely a human rights issue for the next generation. Those who wish to take up the cause and ensure justice is offered to all and not merely to a select few."