

# Pro-life marchers want their message to transcend politics

In a sea of printed signs and huge student groups in colorful toboggan caps at the March for Life rally, Ed York was an outlier.

He'd made the two-hour drive to the National Mall Jan. 19 from his home in Martinsburg, West Virginia, not with a group on a bus pilgrimage, but only with his daughter Autumn and a small homemade placard emblazoned "As a Former Fetus, I Oppose Abortion."

He stood out in his solitary approach, but York, who has attended previous marches, didn't mind.

"This is David versus Goliath, all right," he said. "The media's still pumping out some old stuff about human rights. This (abortion) is going to end one day. But, you know, you have to be patient in life."



**U.S. President Donald Trump**

In remarks broadcast to the March for Life from the White House Rose Garden, President Donald Trump said that his administration "will always defend the very first right in the Declaration of Independence, and that is the right to life."

"Every unborn child is a precious gift from God," he said, his remarks interrupted several times by applause from the crowd gathered on the National Mall.

He praised the pro-lifers for having "such big hearts and tireless devotion to make sure parents have the support they need to choose life."

"You're living witnesses of this year's March for Life theme, 'Love Saves

Lives,'"

His remarks were broadcast to the crowd live via satellite to a Jumbotron above the speakers' stage, a first for any U.S. president, according to March for Life.

During their tenure in office, President Ronald Reagan, President George H.W. Bush and President George W. Bush all addressed the march via telephone or a radio hookup from the Oval Office, with their remarks broadcast to the crowd.

However, on a bright, sunny and almost spring-like morning highlighted by Trump's remarks and members of Congress, there appeared to be little interest from the marchers in political questions. After all, they had all made their travel plans long before they knew the list of speakers.

"Certainly, to have the president show his support for March for Life is encouraging," said Katrina Gallic, a senior at the University of Mary in Bismarck, North Dakota. However, she added, involvement for others is "more than a political stance, but should be seen as an ethic for all of humanity."

The University of Mary sent 200 marchers, clad in blue and orange caps, on a 30-hour bus journey from the frigid northern Great Plains.

Gallic, who traveled separately from New Jersey, began attending marches with her family when she was in elementary school.

"My parents showed us by the way they lived" and dinner-table conversations, she said. "I'm very grateful for it. I think it requires a lifetime commitment on the political level and the cultural level."

Gallic met Vice President Mike Pence at the Eisenhower Executive Office Building before the march. "Our generation is very much behind him, and he has the support and prayers of many," she said.

Abby Johnson, a former Planned Parenthood clinic director who now heads the pro-life organization Then There Were None, said culture change should have a higher priority than legislation.

"I actually think the pro-life movement needs to separate itself from the (Republican Party). That's what we need to be focusing on: opening the tent and bringing more diversity into the movement," she said, citing pro-life Democrats in Louisiana who have tightened abortion restrictions there.

Members of Students for Life from the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago sported yellow umbrellas.

"The yellow stands for joy," student Molly Malone explained. "The umbrella is representative of how we will stand for both mothers and children."

Malone wasn't interested in political discussions either, although "politics is

the means by which we're going to end (abortion) eventually."

Margaret Banloman and Emily Rogge, both freshmen at St. Michael the Archangel Catholic High School in Lee's Summit, Missouri, had a colorful placard with an image of the Mary and the slogan "Our Salvation Began With an Unplanned Pregnancy."

The pair came up with the idea and drew the sign on their cross-country bus ride, which Banloman characterized as "redemptive suffering."

Sean Moberg, who was attending the rally with friends from the Ukrainian Catholic National Shrine of the Holy Family in Washington, waved one of the few visible protest signs, which had, on one side, "Trump - No" and on the other, "I Stand With Catholic Feminists."

"I think that in his life and his politics in general, he doesn't respect the dignity of the unborn person," Moberg said of Trump. "I think he does more harm than good."

Moberg has marched for the past eight years. "I'm always impressed with what a positive event it is."

Caryn Crush, who spent 14 hours on a bus from Louisville, Kentucky, was with a group of 54 from Immaculata Classical Academy, and said she was attending in support of children born with Down syndrome.

Appearing at March for Life and opposing abortion, especially for children born with Down syndrome, was her way to "change society's perception of them and show they do have value."

"We're here to be a voice," she added. "This is more of a celebration of life whether the president's here or not."

First-time marchers included Jerilyn Kunkel of Fishers, Indiana, who made the trip with her husband Larry, a member of the Knights of Columbus. "I got a good night's sleep. That helped a lot," she said.

Father Kurt Young was accompanying 700 high schoolers from the Archdiocese of New Orleans. They were part of what became a 14-bus caravan in a two-day trip that lasted a total of 32 hours because of icy roads in Mississippi.

He said politics and legislation weren't the students' main priority, either. "Everyone here is here to make a peaceful, prayerful protest," the priest said.

Working along the march route were members of the Catholic Mobilizing Network, which opposes the death penalty.

"We're known for our stickers: 'Who Would Jesus Execute?'" said Alexandra Carroll, the organization's vice president. "We use them as conversation starters. They help humanize the death penalty."

Carroll thought it a successful effort.

“We think it’s such an important part of the Catholic faith, this kind of constant pro-life ethic.”