

Crossroads pro-life walk goes through Arkansas

written by Aprille Hanson Spivey |



CONWAY — Nursing student Joan Piatt, 21, of Ohio, said she thought it made more sense financially to get a job this summer rather than walk across America to promote life. When her job hunting efforts failed, she said her spiritual responsibility was clear. “Sometimes when God calls us, it doesn’t make sense,” Piatt said. “All the doors slammed and I said OK, I’ll do Crossroads.”

Piatt is one of fewer than 10 people trekking from San Jose, Calif., to Washington D.C., over three months in one of the pro-life walks across America sponsored by the organization Crossroads. The group made a stop at St. Joseph Church in Conway July 9 and stayed over the weekend, speaking at several area churches, including the Cathedral of St. Andrew, Our Lady of the Holy Souls and St. Theresa churches in Little Rock and Immaculate Conception Church in North Little Rock. While in town, Piatt said the group also met with college students on the Catholic Campus Ministry program on the University of Central Arkansas campus and prayed outside the Little Rock abortion clinic. Piatt has also been blogging about their journey, which is posted on www.crossroadswalk.com.

Crossroads was created in 1994 by Steve Sanborn, a former student at Franciscan University in Steubenville, Ohio — Piatt’s university — in response to Blessed John Paul II’s call to youth at World Youth Day in Denver in 1993 to go out into the streets and “take an active role in the pro-life movement,” according to the organization’s website.

“(The goal is) to witness to the dignity of human life, healing as a nation,” Piatt said. “It’s not just about stopping abortion, but it’s our main goal.”

With Pope John Paul II’s beatification on May 1, participant Maria Grove, 21, of Indiana said this year’s walks are extra special.

“It gives you a little warmth in your heart that we can honor him and spread his message,” Grove said.

Since 1995, the organization has sponsored three simultaneous walks a year to Washington D.C. and added a fourth, starting in San Jose, Calif., this year. The walks are more than 10,000 miles through 40 states, according to a brochure.

As Piatt spoke to parishioners at St. Joseph at the 4 p.m. Mass July 9, she explained that participants — which vary in age from teenagers to 30s — walk in shifts about 60 to 80 miles a day, about 15 miles individually. The group, wearing white T-shirts that say “Pro-Life,” walks day and night shifts, Monday through Friday, while safety vehicles follow to provide water and breaks, Piatt said. During the week, the participants sleep in a recreational vehicle. On weekends, they stay at host homes in the community, visiting local churches and praying outside of abortion clinics, Piatt said. The participants also attend daily Mass.

Grove, who’s a senior at Indiana University at South Bend, said she’s done a lot of pro-life activities in her community, but this is her first time joining the walk.

“I feel like I’m growing deeper in my faith,” Grove said.

While walking, participants say the rosary and offer prayers for the unborn. At the end of the walk on Aug. 13, participants meet up with fellow walkers from the other routes — Seattle, San Francisco and Los Angeles — and join in a youth rally at the capitol, Piatt said.

Piatt, who previously participated in the walk for two weeks, said the group picks up and drops people off along the way, but about six people this year, including her, are participating until the end.

“I think you can never underestimate the spiritual element of it,” Piatt said. “There are a lot of sacrifices on this walk. It’s not just about the blisters on our feet and the sore muscles.”

Piatt said youth interested in joining the walk need to “jump up and go.” “If God wants you on the walk, he’ll put you on the walk,” Grove said.