

'Life chains' challenge abortion

Thousands hook up in 360 cities

By Mimi Hall
USA TODAY

FALLS CHURCH, Va. — In this Washington suburb and in Buffalo, N.Y., in Torrance, Calif., and Wichita, Kan., protesters by the hundreds of thousands formed "life chains" Sunday to peacefully demonstrate their opposition to abortion.

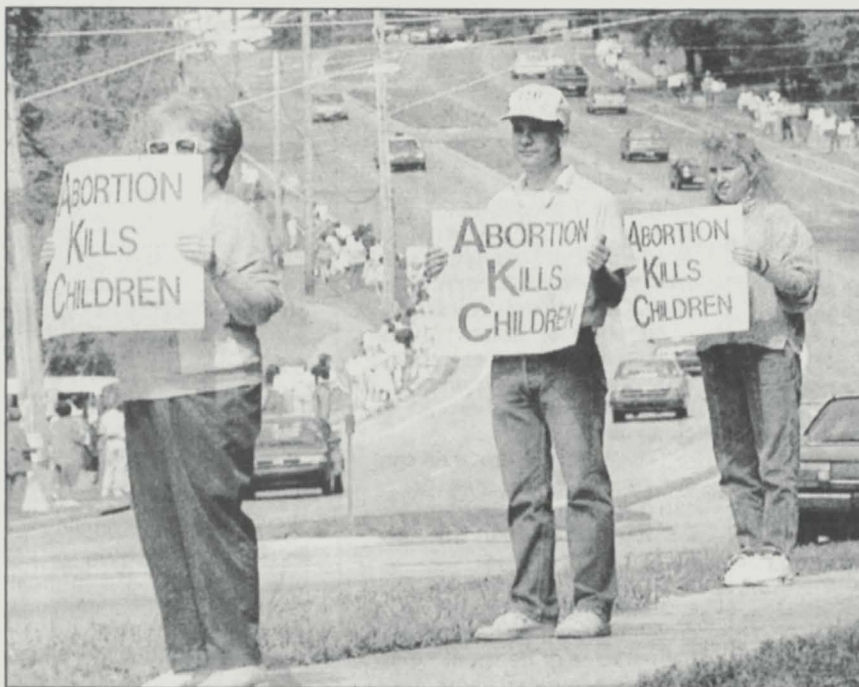
The demonstrations, sponsored by National Life Chain, were held in about 360 cities nationwide. Organizers claimed close to 700,000 participants lined intersections to form large human crosses.

For an hour and a half here Sunday, demonstrators waved signs proclaiming "Abortion Kills Children" and "Jesus Forgives and Heals." Many motorists driving by honked and raised their thumbs in support.

"We're here to demonstrate to all that we respect life and to raise awareness that abortion kills children," said the Rev. Stephen Altman, who brought 116 congregation members.

Lou Sheffield was out with his wife and three daughters to "increase people's awareness of the harsh realities of abortion that the euphemisms have been concealing for years."

Organizer Mary King said demonstrators were asked to comply with a "code of ethics" that told them not to respond to possible taunts and jeers from abortion rights supporters and not to block access to any roads, driveways or buildings.



By Mark Foley, AP

IN FLORIDA: Anti-abortion demonstrators in the capital city of Tallahassee Sunday lined up from the Capitol along six miles of Monroe Avenue and Thomasville Road.

Most organizers reported no confrontations.

In Buffalo, N.Y., where about 8,000 abortion foes lined up for 17 miles in a pouring rain, organizer Patricia Bainbridge said she saw just two abortion rights supporters drive by waving coat hangers — a symbol of the days when abortion was illegal.

In St. Louis, nearly 20,000 demonstrators turned out.

"We hoped to raise public awareness and we felt like our message was very well taken," said organizer Diane Snively.

And in Dayton, Ohio, where 10,000 abortion foes formed a 12-mile chain, "we didn't have a single heckler," said organizer Don Jackson.

Jackson said participants donated 3,700 pounds of canned



AP

IN ARIZONA: Demonstrators in Phoenix formed a human cross for 90 minutes, extending from a major center-city intersection.

food for the city's homeless because "we wanted to show people that pro-life was more than just fighting abortion."

National Life Chain Day was started in 1987 by Royce Dunn in Yuba City, Calif., with a

small local demonstration.

In 1989, Dunn started recruiting other communities and churches, and last year abortion foes made 165 chains in 40 states, the largest in Torrance, Calif., drawing 30,000



By Walter P. Calahan

IN VIRGINIA: Lou Sheffield with daughters Bernadette and Genevieve in Falls Church.

people. Sunday's top turnout was in St. Petersburg, Fla., which claimed 28,000.

"It's a call to the church to stand against the holocaust," says Dunn. "And while standing against abortion, to reach out to help women."

In Falls Church, demonstrator Thelma Bennett, 65, said she took part because the demonstration was peaceful.

She said she opposes more radical protests, like this summer's Operation Rescue clinic blockades in Wichita, Kan., which led to 2,700 arrests.

Sunday in Wichita, 15,000 peaceful protesters turned out.

"I think this is much better," Bennett said. "I don't know whether that does any good being dragged away by police and blocking the clinics."