

40,000 at annual West Coast pro-life walk

Valerie Schmalz Catholic News Service | Jan. 25, 2011

SAN FRANCISCO -- More than 40,000 people crowded San Francisco's waterfront boulevard for the seventh annual Walk for Life West Coast on the 38th anniversary of the Supreme Court's *Roe v. Wade* decision legalizing abortion.

"We're here to break the chains of the culture of death," walk co-founder Dolores Meehan told the morning rally Jan. 22, before the 2.5-mile walk along the Embarcadero to Marina Green near the Golden Gate Bridge. "It's awesome to see all of you packed out there," she told the record-breaking crowd.

Speaker Abby Johnson, 30, who walked away from her job as a director of a Texas Planned Parenthood clinic in 2009 after assisting with an ultrasound-guided abortion, told the young people in the crowd, "You are the new generation of pro-lifers and let me tell you something friends, Planned Parenthood and the pro-choice movement, they are shaking in their boots.

"They are terrified because there are so many more pro-life young adults than pro-choice young adults," Johnson said. "You know why? Because it makes sense to be pro-life. It doesn't make sense to be pro-choice. ... Technology doesn't back it up.

"You guys 30 years of age and younger, you guys, you're the movement. You're the next generation," Johnson said. "This is our time; make it count."

"It was really powerful because there was a ton of people on the walk with us," said Devlin Sevy, a 15-year-old freshman at Marin Catholic High School in Kentfield. "There were other people who believed the same things you did, like, all across California. I did not expect there to be so many kids our age."

Participants were still filing out of the plaza to walk toward the Green at 1:10 p.m., an hour after the rally concluded. At one point, the mass of people walking, in many cases 20 across, stretched nearly two miles from the downtown Plaza to Aquatic Park in Fisherman's Wharf. About 140 counterdemonstrators were separated from the pro-life walkers by police.

All of the guest speakers had a history of abortion. "If we care for the baby, we have to care for the mother and father," said speaker Kathleen Eaton, who founded Birth Choice Health Clinics in Orange County after her own abortion 30 years ago. Mary Poirer of Prayerbreaks told the story of her three abortions and her journey to healing through the words of her confessor.

"Everybody suffers in the wake of abortion," said the Rev. Brian Walker of Pro-Life Action Ministries, who said he and his wife Denise chose an abortion four months before their wedding date. "If the person who had been growing in my womb had been recognized by the law of this land as a person, I would have all three of my children," said the Rev. Denise Walker, founder of Everlasting Light Ministries, a post-abortion healing outreach in Minnesota, of her three abortions.

Earlier, an 8 a.m. Mass at St. Mary's Cathedral celebrated by San Francisco Archbishop George H. Niederauer was packed with close to 3,500 people. Ten California bishops attended the walk, including Archbishop Niederauer, Oakland Bishop Salvatore J. Cordileone, Sacramento Bishop Jaime Soto, Stockton Bishop Stephen E. Blaire, Santa Rosa Bishop Daniel F. Walsh, Orange Bishop Tod D. Brown, and San Bernardino Bishop Rutilio J. del Riego, San Francisco Auxiliary Bishops William J. Justice and Robert W. McElroy and retired San Francisco Auxiliary Bishop Ignatius Wang.

The walk was founded in 2005 by a group of San Francisco Bay area residents who wanted to stand up for life but also to reach out to the many women and men affected by abortion in California, said co-founder Eva Muntean.

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