

Baptist layman organizes Orlando pro-life rally

By Patricia Bolen

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Central Florida Christians concerned about abortion will gather at a pro-life rally Saturday, March 3, from 10 a.m. to noon at Lake Eola Park in downtown Orlando.

Art Ally, a layman in First Church of Winter Park, is spearheading the effort, which he hopes will draw 3,000 people from the Central Florida area.

"It's not a Baptist rally, but a Christian rally," said Ally, chairman of the Rally for Life committee planning the event. "Although Baptists have taken leadership posts, we've invited other denominations to be involved. The 49 members of our committee represent 15 or 16 congregations from eight or nine denominations."

Keynote speaker for the rally will be Mildred Jefferson, a leading crusader in the pro-life cause. She was the first black woman to graduate from Harvard University with a doctorate. She currently is running for a Senate seat from Massachusetts.

The agenda includes former state convention president Bobby Welch, pastor of First Church of Daytona Beach, who will challenge Christians to become involved in the pro-life movement. The program also features testimonies, skits and a 250-voice choir.

To organize the rally, Ally formed a network of concerned Christians and churches. A survey identified 250 churches in the Central Florida area with pro-life convictions. Each of those churches was asked to appoint a representative to serve as a liaison between the church and the Rally for Life committee. "I believe our key to success is the liaison network," Ally said.

In addition to the March 3 rally in Orlando, organizers are asking church members to attend an April 17 rally in Tallahassee, which coincides with the opening of the Florida state legislature. They also are encouraging pro-life Christians to register to vote and go to the polls in September and November.

At the rally, tables will be set up for voter registration for Orange County residents. There also will be information booths to provide background and support material.

Ally, who is vice president of an investment firm, served on a pro-life committee in Boca Raton before moving to Orlando. "The education and awareness that came out of the Boca rally touched me," he said. "I want to share that here."

He encourages Baptists throughout the state to plan rallies similar to the March 3 event in their areas.

Ally explains his motivation for involvement in the pro-life movement: "When history is written about the time period in which we live, I don't want it to ask the question, 'Where was the church?' And, when I meet the Lord, I want to have an answer when he asks, 'Where were you?'"

"The word 'enough' symbolizes my feelings," he continued. "It's time for Christians to stand up and say, 'enough; this is wrong,' and put their beliefs on the line."

J. C. Mitchell, Florida Baptist State Convention president and Ally's pastor, said: "The abortion crisis is the burning issue in America today. It is most encouraging that laymen are giving leadership to reversing this holocaust in our society. Because of his deep conviction, Art Ally has given himself unreservedly to the cause of saving unborn babies from death. His leadership with others is infectious."

Mitchell calls summit of religious leaders to address abortion

J. C. Mitchell, president of the Florida Baptist State Convention, has called a summit of religious leaders to develop a pro-life strategy for the state.

Ken Conner, president of the Florida Right to Life, will give a brief talk and then there will be a question-and-answer period.

The meeting is scheduled for 11 a.m. Feb. 26 at the Radisson Plaza Hotel in Orlando.