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Abortion foes link up in Orlando

200 churches join ranks of protesters

By Mary Brooks

OF THE SENTINEL STAFF

Afternoon downpours didn't keep thousands of people from lining several miles of busy Orlando thoroughfares Sunday in a peaceful protest against abortion.

Carrying signs reading "Abortion Kills Children" and "Jesus Forgives and Heals," members of more than 200 area churches stretched along Colonial Drive, from just west of John Young Parkway to State Road 436, and then south on 436 past Curry Ford Road.

The hour-long, multid denominational demonstration, called Life Chain, began at 2 p.m. It was organized by the Christian Action Council, said group president Art Ally.

"We're here to make a very silent but very firm statement that abortion is killing children, and killing and maiming women in this country today," said Sunny Mills-Rinker, demonstration spokeswoman.

Organizers saw the chain as a way to give "the mainline Christian who cares about this issue an opportunity on a non-threatening basis to stand up and be counted," he said.

That count, Ally said, would show that most Americans are against abortion. "The heretofore invisible, silent majority is going to be visible here today," he added.

Organizers said they had commitments from

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10,000 people to join the demonstration and that most showed up. An official estimate was not available late Sunday.

The crowd ranged from church officials and anti-abortion activists to retired people and children. "What you see here today are caring, loving families with values," Ally said. "They are not the fanatical fundamentals the abortion activists portray them to be."

In some areas, the chain was thin to non-existent, but the line was so solid in many areas that traffic crept along as drivers gawked and honked at the demonstrators.

Some participants came armed with lawn chairs, umbrellas or rain slickers. Others just stood in their Sunday best or T-shirts and shorts and quietly withstood the rain.

"A little rain is not going to melt us," said Jo Ryan, a member of the Volusia County Right To Life group.

Bishop Norbert Dorsey of the Catholic Diocese of Orlando said abortion is sometimes overlooked amid other concerns.

"We're concerned about the environment, about endangered species of animals, but many forget the important element of human life itself — the most sacred gift we receive from God," he said.

Participant Dawn Yates said she didn't realize just how important that gift was until after she had an abortion. "I've been through it," she said, "but I wasn't informed of what it was. It is killing.

"I was very young and didn't

know any better. I've lived with the shame of it for years," said the Kissimmee resident.

Ryan, a retired nurse, said she joined the demonstration because she has seen abortions firsthand.

"Until you've seen one aborted, you can't appreciate that this is a human being," said the Deltona mother of five. "[No matter what] state of life they're in, once they're conceived, they're human."

Unlike some protests by those who oppose abortion, the chain participants met little resistance from those who support abortion rights. Several members of the Orlando chapter of the National Organization for Women filled in gaps in the chain, holding posters that read, "Keep Abortion Legal."

Meanwhile, NOW's Winter Park chapter drove along the demonstration route in cars carrying banners supporting abortion rights.

"We just wanted to come out here to let them know there are two sides to this thing," said Jean Keyes of NOW. "These people don't live in the real world. If we outlaw abortion again, women are going to start dying again. I'd hate to see us go back to the back alleys."

One passer-by in a van offered a third alternative on the issue: birth control. "Vasectomies save lives!" he shouted at the demonstrators.

Police kept a low profile during the demonstration. Lt. Bob Gregory said the department did not add extra patrols or special units for the event.



DAVID POLLER/SENTINEL

Abortion opponents brought signs and umbrellas to their protest along West Colonial Drive.