

Arlington Diocese Mobilizes For Life

(Special to The Wanderer)

ARLINGTON, Va. — Mobilized through the vigorous and effective leadership of their Bishop, Most Reverend Thomas J. Welsh, the Catholic people of the Diocese of Arlington are preparing a comprehensive and continuing program on behalf of the innocent unborn who are the victims of the abortion plague sweeping the Country.

In an effort unprecedented in any Catholic diocese in this Country, Bishop Welsh and the diocesan pro-life committee chaired by Fr. Franklyn McAfee have developed plans to engage the participation in pro-life activities of the largest possible number of Catholics in the Diocese.

(The Diocese of Arlington has been in existence only six months. Pope Paul VI established it on Aug. 13, 1974 by splitting the Diocese of Richmond. Thomas Welsh, first Bishop to the Diocese's 135,000 Catholics and 49 parishes, was formerly the rector of the Archdiocesan seminary in Philadelphia.)

The first objective of the Arlington program is to secure a massive turnout of Catholics for the Washington March for Life scheduled for Wednesday, Jan. 22nd to protest the second an-

niversary of the Supreme Court's infamous abortion decision on Black Monday, 1973.

Participation of the Catholics of Arlington in the March for Life has been the object of several months of planning. Each parish has a rally coordinator whose duties include scheduling bus transportation to the march for parishioners; providing baby sitters so parents of young children may participate in the rally; and expediting the distribution of pro-life literature in the parish.

Bishop Welsh has written each pastor, personally to invite him to join with His Excellency in participating in the rally on Jan. 22nd at which the Bishop will lead the Arlington delegation. Bishop Welsh has also scheduled a Eucharistic vigil at the Cathedral on the eve of the rally and has asked pastors and parishioners in the Diocese to participate. On the parish level, Bishop Welsh asked each pastor to "plan a Mass, or Prayer Service during the week of Jan. 22nd, and have a special Mass or Service for the grade school children on the day of the March." The Bishop added that "It will be most appropriate, and useful, if you will preach on The Right to Life Theme at the Masses on Sunday, Jan. 19th, 1975."

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In a letter to the principals of every diocesan high school, Bishop Welsh declared: "I strongly feel that our Catholic high school students, future mothers and fathers, should be there (at the Jan. 22nd rally) giving witness to the belief in life which is a vital part of their Catholic upbringing. Since there is so much anti-life propaganda aimed at our youth, we should rededicate ourselves to fostering within them a strong and vigilant respect for life.

"To accomplish this I am asking you to cancel all classes, all

exams, and all extra-curricular activities including athletics or this day both to enable our Catholic youth to attend the rally and also to show our deep sense of mourning on this tragic day. Please make bus transportation available for those going to the rally.

"I would also like you to schedule an assembly in the early part of January on the issue of abortion. . . . Your student council, as Catholic leaders, should act as the principal coordinators of the march for your school."

Also scheduled for the Sunday before Jan. 22nd, was a massive distribution of the excellent brochure "Life or Death" in all the parishes. One of the most effective pro-life messages suggested for display at every parish is a large poster showing, on a large triangular-shaped graph colored in red, the number of babies killed by abortion in America since Christmas. The toll by Jan. 22nd, just twenty-eight days since Christmas? 80,000! In large block type across the top of the poster is the question: "HOW MANY KILLINGS WILL IT TAKE TO GET YOU TO SPEAK OUT?"

Bishop Welsh in a forthright pastoral letter on abortion (see complete text on page 4) which was scheduled to be read at all Masses in every parish in the Diocese on Jan. 19th, clearly stated the reason for mobilizing Arlington's Catholics in an all-out effort against abortion:

"You are the salt of the Earth, Catholic people; if you are in hiding, with what will this earth be salted? You are the yeast of humanity, no one else will be its leaven. I now call upon you as a people to pray for the reversal of this abominable decision of the Supreme Court and for the conversion of our country to God's law.

" 'Your brother's blood cries out from the ground.' (Gen. 4:10) In God's name, act as a people through public witness in defense of His Law and His unalienable gift of life."

Catholics and other citizens of good will everywhere will be grateful to Bishop Welsh and the Catholics of the Arlington Diocese for showing the rest of us in the pro-life movement what courage, imagination, and planning can accomplish.