



THE DIOCESE OF ROCKVILLE CENTRE

# Office of Human Life, Family and Bioethics



January 2021

Dear Friends for Life,

## VIRTUAL/LOCAL MARCH FOR LIFE 2021

These are unprecedented times indeed. For the first time, this Friday, January 29, 2021, we will mark the 48<sup>th</sup> March for Life as a local/virtual event. Please see [www.DRVCMarchforlife.com](http://www.DRVCMarchforlife.com) for the many ways that you can participate from home or at special events in parishes across the Diocese of Rockville Centre.

Certainly, we will miss the usual camaraderie standing shoulder to shoulder at the Rally on the Mall in Washington, D.C. with hundreds of thousands of other advocates for the unborn and the vulnerable. However, the local experience will offer a new opportunity to invite to the March for Life others who might not have experienced it before. The mainstays of the March for Life pilgrimage (**prayer, witness and sacrifice**) remain the same, but will be experienced in ways that accommodate limitations that are beyond our control. The beautiful **“Life is sacred” signs** can be posted in your windows, hung in your public halls, or displayed at your parish or on your front lawns, to show our solidarity with the unborn and unity of witness across our Diocese.

Note that for this year only, you may obtain a **plenary indulgence** for participating virtually in the

1. **National Prayer Vigil for Life** at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the immaculate Conception on Thursday, January 28, 2021 8:00-11:00 p.m. or
2. **Mass for Life** at the Cathedral of Saint Matthew on Friday, January 29, 2021 8:00-9:00 a.m.

Provided that you meet all other conditions: detachment from any sin, Sacramental Confession, Eucharistic Communion and prayer for the intentions of the Holy Father. Links to these events can be found on the website [www.drvcmarchforlife.com](http://www.drvcmarchforlife.com). These events will be televised on **Catholic Faith Network** as well.

Our challenge to you: **invite a family member or a friend to an event** whether it be on-line or in person (observing social distancing, mask, etc. requirements, of course). In this way, **we can open new doors to build a culture of life!**



## ORIGINS OF THE MARCH FOR LIFE

The first March for Life took place on January 22, 1974, on the one-year anniversary of the Supreme Court decision *Roe v. Wade* which essentially legalized abortion across all nine months of a pregnancy. The intent of the first rally was to initiate legislation to protect the unborn, but when this was unsuccessful, the March for Life was incorporated as a non-profit organization with the mission to advocate for the unborn—no exceptions, no compromises—and the commitment to march for life every year until *Roe v. Wade* would be overturned.<sup>1</sup> Sadly, we are still marching 48 years, over 60 million abortions, later.

### NELLIE GRAY: FOUNDER OF THE MARCH FOR LIFE

Nellie Gray was one of the founders of the March for Life, inspiring, educating, and uniting millions in bearing witness to the sanctity of life across the world and across many generations. She had served her country in World War II (Women's Army Corps) and as an attorney for the U.S. government. But at 48 years of age, she retired from the Department of Labor to dedicate the next 40 years of her life to the March for Life.<sup>2</sup> As a faithful Catholic citizen who championed the value of every human life, most especially that in the womb, her legacy became the “Joan of Arc of the pro-life movement.”<sup>3</sup> Through her vision, the March for Life promoted the “Life Principles” which delineated the moral and legal premises which provide the rationale for overturning *Roe v. Wade* and, instead, endorsed a Human Life Amendment.<sup>4</sup>

### BERNARD NATHANSON: ROOT CAUSE FOR THE MARCH FOR LIFE

A few years before Ms. Gray began focusing her work on the defense and protection of the unborn, an obstetrician/gynecologist, Bernard Nathanson, was methodically working to eliminate all legal restrictions to abortion. Nathanson, known as the “Abortion King,” admitted responsibility for 75,000 abortions over his notorious career as an abortionist, including that of his own child. He was convinced that abortion did not involve the destruction of another human being.<sup>5</sup> As a founding member of what would eventually be called the National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL), he, with a colleague, orchestrated what might be considered the greatest deception of the American public—the abject falsehood that Americans needed and wanted abortion to be legal. His influence on public sentiment and the Supreme Court led to the somber decision of *Roe v. Wade* announced January 22, 1973.<sup>6</sup> He later spelled out their devious strategy: repeatedly reporting fabricated statistics, ingratiating the media, denying the science of embryology/fetology, and vilifying the Catholic Church which has been unwavering in its recognition of the sacredness and inviolability of every human life.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> March for Life. “History of the March” Marchforlife.org [History of the March - March for Life](#), (Accessed Jan. 23, 2021).

<sup>2</sup> Judie Brown, “Remembering Nellie J. Gray and the Personhood Principle” *American Life League*. Jan. 21, 2020. [All.org](#), (Accessed Jan. 23, 2021); John Burger, “A Movement Is Born” *Columbia Online Edition Knights of Columbus*. Jan. 1, 2018. [A Movement Is Born \(kofc.org\)](#), (Accessed Jan. 23, 2021).

<sup>3</sup> Adelade Mena, “Remembering Nellie Gray on the One-Year Anniversary of Her Death” *National Catholic Register* Aug. 14, 2013, [Remembering Nellie Gray on the One-Year Anniversary of Her Death | National Catholic Register \(ncregister.com\)](#), (Accessed Jan. 23, 2021).

<sup>4</sup> March for Life. “Life Principles” Marchforlife.org [Life Principles - March for Life](#), (Accessed Jan. 23, 2021).

<sup>5</sup> Stephen Vincent, “Bernard Nathanson Dead at 84,” *National Catholic Register*. Feb. 21, 2011. [Bernard Nathanson Dead at 84 | National Catholic Register \(ncregister.com\)](#), (Accessed Jan. 18, 2021); Brian Jenkins, “The Conversion of Bernard Nathanson” *Quebec Life Coalition*. Dec. 29, 2011 [The Conversion of Bernard Nathanson - Quebec Life Coalition \(cqc.qc.ca\)](#), (Accessed Jan. 18, 2021); Bernard Nathanson, *Hand of God*. (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 2013), pp. xii, 57, 61-62, 127.

<sup>6</sup> Jenkins, “The Conversion” n.p.; Bernard Nathanson, “Confessions of an Ex-Abortionist” *Catholic Education Resource Center Confessions of an Ex-Abortionist (catholiceducation.org)*, (Accessed Jan. 18, 2021); Nathanson, *Hand*, p. 89-95.

<sup>7</sup> Vincent, “Nathanson Dead,” n.p.; Jenkins “Nathanson Conversion,” n.p.; Nathanson, “Confessions,” n.p.

## THE POWER OF PRAYER, WITNESS AND SACRIFICE

In a most ironic twist of fate about the same time as *Roe v. Wade* was decided, the advent of ultrasound changed everything for Dr. Nathanson. With this new window into the hidden sanctuary of a child's first home, suddenly the "blobs of tissue" he had been extracting blindly from women's wombs took on a recognizable form: human beings. And if these were human beings, then what gave him the right to extinguish them? He began to limit his involvement in abortions and by 1979 had stopped altogether. Gradually, he became one of the most persuasive and powerful opponents of abortion; his most notable contribution to the prolife cause was the documentary, "The Silent Scream" in 1985 which exposed exactly what an abortion procedure does.<sup>8</sup>

Throughout this time, Dr. Nathanson described himself as an atheist, but he clearly understood the object of abortion was human life, each distinctly beautiful and unrepeatable human life with inherent rights. He began to work tirelessly to promote that truth and undo the damage he had so carefully calculated before. But tormented by his past "accomplishments," he knew something was missing: genuine forgiveness for the colossal evil he had perpetrated.<sup>9</sup> But how and where could he get it?

A new turning point came in 1989 when he saw about 1200 peaceful witnesses outside a New York City abortion facility selflessly praying for others who could never repay their genuine sacrifice—standing in the blistering cold, being scorned by passersby and even arrested. He knew this sacrifice could only be inspired and sustained by a Divine Power. From thence he began a dramatic spiritual conversion. He was baptized and confirmed into the Catholic Church by Cardinal John O'Connor in 1996.<sup>10</sup>

## THE MORAL OF THE STORY: REDEMPTION

The stories of these two heroes of the prolife movement revolve intimately around *Roe v. Wade* and continue to edify and inspire to this day. Nathanson's villainous efforts to eliminate all restrictions on abortion were undeniably influential in the *Roe v. Wade* decision—and the undoing of this would ultimately become the center of both his and Gray's life work and their legacies. But it is also a story of redemption and of the love and mercy in prayerful witness around which the March for Life was established. Nellie Gray prayed for the protection of the unborn, their mothers, and for those in the abortion industry to abandon their crimes against humanity;<sup>11</sup> Bernard Nathanson's professional and spiritual conversions were affected in some way by her prayers and the example of prayer and witness she emulated for others. He needed those prayers. He also needed those Operation Rescue witnesses – people who gave of themselves to stand for life, just like we do at the March for Life. Our prayers and our witness are not unnoticed. Even when ignored by the media, these efforts may be the only glimmer of hope, of help, of love that may be noticed by a frightened young woman contemplating an abortion, the young person whose friend is pregnant, or the abortionist who knows Something is missing in his life. Most of all, Dr. Nathanson, needed The Church. Here he could find true forgiveness in the Divine Mercy, in the Eternal Word that will have the final say: All Life is sacred!

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<sup>8</sup> Jenkins "Nathanson Conversion," n.p.; Nathanson, *Hand of God*, pp. 8, 129-134, 145-147.

<sup>9</sup> Vincent, "Nathanson Dead," n.p.; Jenkins "Nathanson Conversion," n.p.; Nathanson, *Hand of God*, pp. 193-202.

<sup>10</sup> Vincent, "Nathanson Dead," n.p.; Jenkins "Nathanson Conversion," n.p.; Nathanson, *Hand of God*, pp. 197-202.

<sup>11</sup> Brown, "Remembering," n.p.

Make no mistake about it: we face challenging times ahead—especially as the new Administration has committed to codifying *Roe v. Wade*,<sup>12</sup> the very reason the March for Life began. But we cannot lose hope, and we cannot lose our determination to continue our fervent prayers, witness, and sacrifice for the unborn, their mothers and fathers, those in the abortion industry and our elected officials. If ever there was an example of the hope we have in the power of prayer, witness, and sacrifice, it is in these two figures, Nellie Gray and Bernard Nathanson—heroes for the unborn.

Finally, for those who are suffering from a past abortion, know there is hope and healing in the Project Rachel post abortion healing ministry. If Bernard Nathanson could find peace and consolation, so can you!

God be with you, my fellow Marchers! Know that I am profoundly grateful for and inspired by your perseverance, enthusiasm and love for all human life, created in the image and likeness of God.

### ***A Prayer for Life (from the USCCB)***

*Father and maker of all,  
you adorn all creation  
with splendor and beauty,  
and fashion human lives  
in your image and likeness.  
  
Awaken in every heart  
reverence for the work of your hands,  
and renew among your people  
a readiness to nurture and sustain  
your precious gift of life.  
Grant this through our Lord  
Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you in  
the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
God forever and ever.  
Amen.<sup>13</sup>*

God bless you,



Lisa A. Honkanen, M.D.

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<sup>12</sup> Briefing Room “Statement from President Biden and Vice President Harris on the 48th Anniversary of Roe v. Wade” retrieved from [Statement from President Biden and Vice President Harris on the 48th Anniversary of Roe v. Wade | The White House](#) (Accessed Jan. 22, 2021).

<sup>13</sup> Used with permission, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. USCCB “A Prayer for Life” [A Prayer for Life | USCCB](#)