

Quid Novum

March 8, 2011

Office of the Archbishop ...

A Notice Regarding the 2011 Alberta March for Life

The Alberta Bishops have decided not to participate in the 2011 Alberta March for Life. Since we have had over the last few years a visible role of leadership and support in this march I feel it is important that we explain the reason for this decision.

My fellow bishops and I have worked closely in recent years with the March for Life Association to promote the march and foster its growth. United and joyful public witness in defence of all life is necessary, and we have been generally pleased with what has been accomplished thus far. At the same time we have observed the presence of large images of aborted children on increasingly prominent display in the march. In our estimation the public display of large, graphic images of aborted babies offends the dignity of the human beings pictured and so is at odds with our mission to promote and protect that dignity. Such displays can also be extremely upsetting to mothers who have suffered through abortion and to children – both of whom we want to encourage and support through our pro-life activities.

We have no issue with the March for Life organizers. Like us they are deeply committed to defend the dignity and sanctity of all human life and express that commitment in many beautiful ways. However, from many discussions over this issue in the last several months, it is clear that the March for Life organizers are unable to pledge that the event will proceed without the graphic displays. It is not that they will not do so; they simply cannot because it is beyond their control. Therefore, the Alberta Bishops have chosen not to join in the march this year. The visible leadership that we have given to the march, together with the practice of preparatory consultation between the March for Life Association and my office, would lead many naturally to the conclusion that the Bishops support the display of graphic images. We want to make it clear that the Bishops are not affiliated in any way with such expressions and do not approve of them.

Of course, people have a right to free expression. Nevertheless, the graphic images are a particular form of expression which, in our view, is not in keeping with what has otherwise been a very positive public affirmation of the dignity and sanctity of human life. The Bishops will not interfere in anyone else's decision to participate in the march.

As you may know, at St. Joseph's Basilica in Edmonton we have held a vigil on the eve of the March for Life, and a Mass for life the following morning. We shall continue to do so, and I encourage our Catholic priests and lay people to participate in both. I pray also that we will all remain united in prayer and will continue to reflect on ways we can move forward together in the future in the cause of life.

Richard W. Smith

Archbishop of Edmonton