



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on August 19, 2012

Pro-Life Leaders Pay Tribute to “March for Life” Founder Nellie Gray

Pro-life leaders are paying tribute to Nellie Gray (pictured), the federal government attorney turned pro-life activist who founded and led the annual “[March for Life](#),” which has grown over the past nearly 40 years into the nation’s largest one-day pro-life event. “She has been a true heroine of this movement,” said Jeanne Monahan, director of the Center for Human Dignity at the [Family Research Council](#) (FRC) and the interim president for the March for Life. “She was an extremely outspoken and eloquent advocate for the most vulnerable members of our culture.”



Gray, 88, was found dead at her home in Washington, D.C. on August 13. The [New York Times](#) recalled that Gray, who had been a lawyer in the U.S. Labor Department, “was galvanized by *Roe v. Wade*, the 1973 Supreme Court decision that established a woman’s right to abortion. She retired from her legal career and devoted the rest of her life to overturning that decision.”

Gray explained her motivation for entering the fight for the unborn, saying that “it was such a shock to think that anyone would kill an innocent human being.” The *Times* noted that Gray felt that legalizing such a barbarous act as abortion “was out of character for a nation that had recently passed civil rights laws and had helped at the Nuremberg trials to convict Nazis of crimes against humanity.” As a Roman Catholic, continued the *Times*, “Ms. Gray believed that life began at fertilization, and that abortion was murder and not acceptable for any reason: not for rape or incest, for severe abnormalities in the fetus, or to save the woman’s life.”

In 1974, Gray founded the [March for Life Education and Defense Fund](#), and on January 22 of that year, the first anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, organized the first March for Life at the nation’s Capitol. With the battle cry “No Exception! No compromise!,” Gray and other pro-life leaders and activists who joined her over the years had as their ultimate goal the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*.

The feisty pro-life leader was serious about not compromising on the principle that prompted her to enter the pro-life crusade. In 1979, reported the *New York Times*, “when Eleanor Smeal, president of the National Organization for Women, suggested that groups for and against legal abortion should meet and try to find common ground, like promoting birth control, Gray refused, saying, ‘Pro-life people will not negotiate with baby killers.’”

At this year’s March for Life, reported the *Washington Post*, “Ms. Gray referred to abortion as genocide and the *Roe v. Wade* decision as ‘an evil imposed upon our country.’” She told participants that “the government must understand that they are participating in a crime against humanity which cannot be made legal.”

As Gray led the March for Life year after year, in good weather and bad and regardless of resistance



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and ridicule from the pro-abortion, Planned Parenthood crowd, she inspired a generation of pro-life leaders to follow her example. “Nellie Gray and the March for Life had a most profound effect on my life,” said Father Frank Pavone, national director of [Priests for Life](#). Pavone recalled that in 1976 as a senior in high school, he attended his first March for Life, a moment that confirmed his vocation in the Catholic Church as well as his commitment to the unborn. “Every year since 1974, Nellie Gray has mobilized a diverse and energetic army for life,” said Father Pavone, who has attended every March for Life since that first momentous one. “Her own commitment to the cause never wavered.”

Judie Brown of the [American Life League](#) recalled that Gray “was a shining light in my life from the first moment I heard her speak at the 1976 March for Life.... Nellie never wavered from principle and set a standard for every one of us in pro-life leadership. We will miss her, but we thank her for showing us the way to true, meaningful victory for every human being, born and pre-born.”

Representing a new generation of pro-life activists, Kristan Hawkins of [Students for Life](#) called Gray’s passing “a bittersweet moment for the pro-life movement. A great warrior for the pre-born, Nellie Grey, has left this earth and entered her eternal reward. Pro-life students from across the nation will be forever grateful for the leadership that Nellie Grey has provided to our movement, for founding the March for Life, and setting an example of passion and perseverance that inspires us all to dedicate our lives to finishing what she started, abolishing abortion in our lifetime.”

Other pro-life and pro-family leaders added their tributes. Gary Bauer of [American Values](#) noted that Gray “stood firm and brought hundreds of thousands together for the hope of restored civil rights protections for the unborn and for the protection of women and girls who are also victims of abortion.” Carol Tobias, president of the [National Right to Life Committee](#), added that “the indelible mark she has left in this world can be seen in the generations of lives saved as a result of her dedicated work on behalf of the unborn.”

Tony Perkins, president of the Family Research Council, observed that Gray “lived a life of heroic service to the unborn. Nellie will be remembered most for her passionate and ardent protection of every life, without exception.” He said that “as we approach the 40th anniversary of *Roe v. Wade* and the sad reality that 54 million babies have been lost to abortion in America, let us pay appropriate homage to Nellie by recommitting ourselves to do everything possible to protect and defend the unborn.”

Charmaine Yoest, president of [Americans United for Life](#), added that Nellie Gray “had a fierce heart that valued all people — born and unborn — fearlessly working to create a picture worth a thousand words: the sight of hundreds of thousands of peaceful Americans calling on their courts and their legislators to defend life in law. When we march this January in solemn commemoration of the 40th anniversary of *Roe*, we will miss Nellie and her unflagging determination to press on toward the goal. But march we will, with deep gratitude for the example she set of sacrifice and commitment to the human rights struggle of our day.”

Photos of “March for Life” and Nellie Gray: AP Images



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