5,000 attend anti-abortion rally at governor's mansion

BY ANGIE FRANCALANCI

The crowd waving over their heads more than 5,000 anti-abortion activists sang and prayed on the front lawn of the governor's mansion in Baton Rouge for the souls of the "unborn dead" in the United States.

As the crowd sang America and Glory Hallelujah, palm branches waved in the symbolic Infant-cradled coffin and an adult coffin onto the stage. The Rev. Larry Stoeckell of Bethany Baptist Church, who led the rally, said the flag was a symbol of all the babies aborted in the U.S. and the adult coffin was to represent the cost of the women who died recently at a local abortion clinic.

"Is there a crime when our Jewish-Christian life ethic has been replaced by the law of the jungle?" he asked.

"We're on the slippery slope that Germany followed under Hitler - beginning with abortion, then eliminating children with Down's syndrome and finally ending in genocide," he said.

The well-organized crowd was led by the Heartland Council, a national anti-abortion organization with chapters in New York and Washington, D.C. Several other groups comprised the pro-life network, including Jeremiah Life, Baton Rouge Right to Life and the Baton Rouge Coalition for Life.

The massive rally was interrupted only by a small group of "pro-choice" protesters who were shouting on the edge of the crowd.

Stoeckell said the purpose of the rally was to fulfill one of the biblical prophecies of the anti-abortion movement from Deuteronomy 21:17, which foretells of a day when men will be shown to others as a "reprobate" (v. 16) and those who are killed in their cities. He said the anti-abortionists ignored the small pro-choice group and joined in a song with country and western singer Peggy Lee.

At Mr. Lee's request, a young girl named Ronna went on stage and told how her mother's abortion experience caused her abortion. "I could see the face of my baby," she said.

Stoeckell said last Sunday that he would have had two daughters, "...if I had been born," he said. "I would have had six children.

"...and I was not free today, and I thank you Jesus," she said.

Mr. Lee, who lead "I believe in Life," group, said he became active in the anti-abortion movement in June 1973 after he tripped over a headstone in the Stoeckell cemetery.

"There was only one word on the stone and that was 'Baby,'" Mr. Lee said. "And for some reason I started to weep, and whoa! I was on fire," he said.

Ms. Lee said she felt that God had given her a message through the anti-abortion song she wrote, "Baby, I'll Remember You." She now works for a group that tours the U.S. for the anti-abortion cause.

At the edge of the crowd teared at the governor's mansion, a small confrontation erupted in the pro-choice group chanting and the anti-abortionists screamed epithets at them.

The pro-choice group was comprised mainly from members of Hill Street, the headquarters of the Louisiana Abortion Rights Organization for Women.

A spokesperson for the group said they support the Supreme Court's 1973 decision that made abortion legal in the United States.

If abortion is made illegal, that will not work, it will make them more underground and secretive," Doris Weikert said. "It will mean that women that are economically disadvantaged will continue to have saving abortion but women who are economically disadvantaged will be forced into illegal or back alley methods of abortion," she said.

Across the street, the pro-life protesters shouted down the building of Bishop Stanley Joseph O'Rear's words to the crowd by saying, "Our Father.

The two-hour rally ended with a song from children of Bethany Baptist Church who had memorized short scriptures.

"I'm six weeks old now," another child said. "Look at me. I'm a hard-nosed baby. I have a little brain and a big heart," he said.

Mr. Stoeckell, who works with the children's church at Bethany Baptist, said the children learned in church about abortion.

"They know that life is and they've seen the pictures of the abortion and seen the babies in the abortion clinic. They do understand that there are a lot of them and they're not being allowed to be born," he said.

Asked if he knew what abortion means a second grade said, "it's where the mothers kill their babies.

Ten policemen held up traffic as the marchers swung out for a mile down Spanish Town Road and across the overpass that connects 1142 and the Capital Access Road. They sang songs and joined in prayer. "Dear Father, save our signs displayed their message to passersby, and so did their children who had collected signs around the area that read, "A prod of compassion."

The Rev. Larry Stoeckell of Bethany Baptist Church leads the group in prayer.

A small group of pro-choice protesters carry signs in opposition to the rally.