Anti-abortion rally in N.O. draws 800

By MARK SEGHERS
Associated Press writer

NEW ORLEANS - A gathering to rally support for weekend anti-abortion demonstrations attracted an estimated 800 people Friday night, including a pastor who said he resigned because his congregation wouldn't come with him and be arrested.

"I'm going to rescue. My wife's going to rescue," said the Rev. Anthony Marquize, former pastor of the Miracle Assembly of God church in Boutteville.

"I couldn't get any of my church people to rescue, so I resigned my church," said Marquize. "I'll find a people somewhere that's willing to rescue."

"Rescue" is the word used by militant anti-abortionists to describe their mission - to save the lives of unborn children whose mothers are candidates for abortion.

Some of the people at Friday night's gathering intend to picket Saturday outside five New Orleans-area clinics which perform abortions, as well as other medical services for women. The protests are to coincide with a nationwide protest.

The rally at the Living Word Church of Greater New Orleans attracted about 800 people to its 1,200-seat auditorium. They ranged in age from newborn infants to grandparents. Their attire ranged from blue jeans and T-shirts to three-piece suits.

They sang, clapped and danced to Christian rock music among the pews and bought souvenir sweatshirts, bumper stickers, posters and plastic fetuses from John Smith of the Gospel Book Store in Marrero. Smith said business was brisk.

Some said they were ministers who had been arrested during the past several months at abortion clinics in Atlanta.

Speaker after speaker condemned abortions and those who engage in the procedure.

"We believe that it's (abortion) the seed for another Nazi Germany," said the Rev. Rod Aguillard, pastor of the New Orleans church. "There's no ending once you can justify the killing of a form of life. We're on the same murderous path."

The number of people at the rally fell short of the 1,000 Aguillard had predicted, and only about 200 of them stood when the clergyman asked how many were willing to be arrested at Saturday's protests.

The demonstrations, patterned after recent protests in Atlanta, are to be part of the nationwide "Operation Rescue" effort organized by anti-abortion groups. In response to that movement, abortion clinic administrators and a variety of others in favor of legal abortion have formed a group called New Orleans Pro Life, Inc. The Right to Choose.

Terri Bartlett, spokeswoman for the group, said four clinics in the area are normally open on Saturday and those four would not close in the face of the protests.

Bartlett said about 60 men and women volunteers have been trained to escort past demonstrators any women seeking abortions.

"We are not interested in counter-demonstrations or any display of force," said Toni Scott, a coalition member and director of Delta Women's Clinic, one of four targeted clinics. "We simply want to make sure that women who want and need these health care services are afforded access to them, as guaranteed by the laws and the Constitution."

Three of the clinics are in the New Orleans city limits. City police, accustomed to handling large and sometimes rowdy crowds during Mardi Gras season, would give few details about how they will handle the anti-abortion protesters.

"We can't speak ahead of time," said Carmine Menchel, a police spokeswoman. "Each situation is handled on its own merit."

In suburban Jefferson Parish, where another of the clinics is located, sheriff's office spokesman Bob Garner said deputies will be ready.

"We're going to have the necessary people to ensure the rights of everyone," said Garner. "But we're not expecting any violence."