

Religious groups join women's rights march: Prayerfully Pro-Choice Interfaith Worship Service

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Standing at a worship service shortly before the official start of the March for Women's Lives held in Washington, D.C., pastry cook Theresa Helfrey held two signs stapled together, one declaring the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)'s call for justice and another supporting NARAL, a prominent abortion rights organization.

She said the juxtaposition of the two signs was completely appropriate for the massive rally for reproductive rights that brought throngs of supporters to the nation's capital on April 25.

"We believe in our God," said Helfrey, 22, of Hollywood, Florida. "And we also know that that being gave us the power to choose, and for the government to take that away from us is just ridiculous." Helfrey joined hundreds of others next to the Capitol's reflecting pool for the "Prayerfully Pro-Choice Interfaith Worship Service" that the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice hosted hours before hundreds of thousands of people marched and rallied through downtown Washington.

The service was one of several that combined prayer with protest as others got ready to march in Washington's first large-scale abortion rights event in 12 years. "I believe God stands with women as they end pregnancies, just as God stands with women who deliver babies and with women who give their babies to adoptive parents," declared Mark Pawlowski, a member of the Clergy Advisory Board of Planned Parenthood Federation of America, reading from a "pro-choice credo" at the service. He was joined by clergy and laypeople of Jewish, Unitarian, Buddhist and Sikh traditions, and the crowd sang "Dona Nobis Pacem" in Latin, English and Hebrew.

Prior to the prayer service, people from a range of faiths took part in a 24-hour vigil the coalition organized. Debbie Harris, a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church

in America from Palmyra, New Jersey, said her daughter encouraged her to attend the vigil and the march in a first-time demonstration of her views about reproductive rights. "Justice and fairness, I think, are all part of faith," said Harris, a construction company bookkeeper, standing in the shadow of Capitol. -*Religion News Service*