

## **Best Pro-Life Activity Award - Jackson Diocese: Father Robert Reitmeier Council 8848, Tupelo, MS**

### *Respect Life Day*

On January 22, 2002, our council chose to memorialize the anniversary of Roe v. Wade with a full day of positive pro-life activities commencing with a Respect Life Memorial Service.

The day began early with an ecumenical pro-life demonstration in front of our church. Our parish youth invited those from other churches to join in a peaceful demonstration (holding signs and waving to passersby). The church sits on a hill on a very busy street and many of the hundreds of motorists replied with big smiles and honking horns. Many knights and their families joined in to support our youth. Both the local newspaper and television station covered the event.

Immediately following the demonstration the entire group worked together erecting the approximately 500 Crosses for the Innocent. Our church has a large sign at the street on which we placed a 4-by-20-foot "Crosses of the Innocent" banner, both in English and Spanish (we have a very large Spanish population in our church). It was amazing to see mother and daughter, father and son working together to place the crosses. By 3 p.m. it was time to relax before the 7-p.m. memorial service in the church.

The service began with intercessions and lighting of candles followed by readings and a responsorial psalm. Our priest gave a stirring homily directed primarily to the youth (the entire teenage group was in attendance) which was followed by music and a closing prayer. Following the service the entire congregation was invited to proceed outside to participate in the illumination of the Crosses for the Innocent.

A small white bag with sand and a votive candle was placed in front of every cross. It was a sight beyond description and the hill bit by bit, cross by cross became as bright as daylight. Every person in attendance was in awe as we stood back and admired the crosses. The lights burned well into the night.

The entire day was a success for our church and council in several ways - the Knights became personally involved with the youth and families of our parish. A large percentage of our membership (beyond the typical core group) got involved. And our church took a leadership role in the community and made a positive statement about the Culture of Life. The event was a success in every respect and we are already planning for next year.

A picture is said to be worth a thousand words. One of the oldest and still most successful methods of advertisement is the highway billboard. For a billboard to be effective it must be visible, attractive and short and to the point. Our council is fortunate enough to have our own billboard that is located on a major highway in our area. Department of Transportation statistics show an average of 18,000 cars that pass it daily - more than 6,000,000 yearly. While this sign has been erected for about five years, it is just recently that we had a custom sign made. A vinyl sign, measuring 12-by-25 feet displaying the simple message, "All Life Is Precious" sends a fervent proclamation and announces to all the pro-life stance of the Knights of Columbus. This sign was installed in early January 2001 and will remain till early April 2001 and because of its vinyl composition will be used many times over. If just one like is saved the \$700 cost will be well worth the money spent.