

Pro-Life Action League Mourns the Death of Founder Joe Scheidler

The Pro-Life Action League is mourning the death of founder Joseph M. Scheidler, widely known as the “Godfather of Pro-Life Activism.” Joe began his life’s work fighting abortion in 1973, shortly after the Roe v. Wade decision, and founded the League in 1980 to recruit and equip pro-life Americans to be a voice for unborn children in their own communities throughout the country and the world. Countless pro-life volunteers and leaders alike credit him with having inspired them to join the movement.

“My father’s proudest accomplishment was the pro-life work of those he inspired to take an active role in the fight against abortion, the greatest injustice of our time,” said Eric Scheidler, Joe’s oldest son, who serves as the League’s executive director. “For years, people have been telling me about the talk or protest where they met my father, and how his words and example prompted them to do more than just talk, but to take responsibility for addressing the injustice.”

Joe was born on Sept. 7, 1927, in Hartford City, Indiana. After serving in the U.S. Navy as a military policeman at the end of World War II, he earned a bachelor’s degree in communications at the University of Notre Dame and a master’s degree at Marquette University. He spent eight years in religious life, studying for the Catholic priesthood at St. Meinrad Seminary in Indiana. After discerning that God was not calling him to the priesthood, he served as a teacher at Mundelein College, during which time he chaperoned a group of students on a pilgrimage to march with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. from Selma to Montgomery in 1965.

"It's fitting that my father died on the day when Americans remember the legacy of Martin Luther King," said Eric. "Seeing the impact that regular Americans could have by taking action against racial injustice inspired my father to mobilize Americans in the same way in the fight against the injustice of abortion." That story and many others from his five decades of pro-life activism are recounted in his 2016 memoir, *Racketeer for Life: Fighting the Culture of Death from the Sidewalk to the Supreme Court*.

Joe's career as a pro-life activist took him to every state in the U.S. and countries on four continents, as well as through countless court battles, including the notorious NOW v. Scheidler RICO case, the longest case in U.S. federal court history and the only one to make three trips to the U.S. Supreme Court, including 8-1 and 8-0 rulings in 2003 and 2006 that fully vindicated him. His 1985 book *CLOSED: 99 Ways to Stop Abortion*, a centerpiece of the NOW v. Scheidler trial, became the manual for pro-life activists throughout the world.

In addition to his pro-life work, Joe was a devout Catholic and daily Mass attendee, history buff with a particular interest in Abraham Lincoln, an accomplished coin collector and very proud citizen of his adopted city of Chicago, where he lived since 1963.

Joe Scheidler died of pneumonia at the age of 93 at 9:45 a.m. on Monday, Jan. 18, 2021, surrounded by his family at his home on Chicago's northwest side. Joe is survived by his wife, Ann, seven children, 26 grandchildren and one great-granddaughter. Funeral arrangements will be announced shortly. {eo}

The Pro-Life Action League was founded by Joe Scheidler in 1980 with the aim of saving babies from abortion through direct action and is now headed by Joe's son, Eric. Not content to await a political or judicial solution to abortion, the League seeks to stop the killing of unborn children right now through all available peaceful means, including public

protest, sidewalk counseling, education, youth outreach and national leadership. Visit to learn more.