

# Exposing the Deeds of Darkness

In the 13 years since she resigned as the director of a Planned Parenthood clinic, Abby Johnson has become the nation's largest abortion provider's worst nightmare.

Reaching out to women who recoil at the reality of abortion once their eyes are opened, the Austin, Texas, resident has helped over 625 leave the industry through her ministry, And Then There Were None. She released an account of their experiences in the 2018 book, *The Walls Are Talking: Former Abortion Clinic Workers Tell Their Stories*.

Her memoir, *Unplanned*, sold over 150,000 copies after its release by Focus on the Family's imprint with Tyndale. The Chicago-area publisher licensed Ignatius Press to publish an edition for the Catholic market.

In 2019, Tyndale produced an expanded edition to coincide with the release of the *Unplanned* movie. Released by Pureflix, the film grossed over \$21 million on a \$6 million budget.

Earlier this year Baker Books released her latest, *Fierce Mercy: Daring to Live Out God's Compassion in Bold and Practical Ways*. Living out such compassion includes ProLove Ministries, the outreach Johnson launched in 2019. Its first major project is the LoveLine crisis hotline (open 24/7). This year it expects to serve 3,000 women and impact over 6,700 children.

All this activity, coupled with national media attention, prompts 40 to 50 speaking invitations annually. Johnson has four in November alone in Missouri, California, Arizona and Canada.

"I would say she is the most influential pro-life voice in the

world, not just America,” says Pam Whitehead, executive director of ProLove and LoveLine. “I believe it’s because of her testimony and her radical conversion. She gives her life away to this movement in so many ways.”

Mary Szoch, director of the Family Research Council’s Center for Human Dignity, says one of Johnson’s impressive initiatives is the pro-life leader’s call for justice and healing for women injured by abortionists. Partnering with the Thomas More Society, Johnson is working to provide referrals for legal consultation for victims.

“As we enter a post-Roe era, efforts to extend the love and mercy of Jesus to women who have had abortions and to bring the abortion industry to justice are key in working to create a culture of life in our country,” Szoch says.

### **Doubling Down on Efforts**

Given her profile, when Johnson warns that—despite the favorable June 24 Supreme Court ruling overturning abortion—the battle is just beginning, pro-lifers should pay attention.

“We’ve gone from one battle at the federal level to 50 battles at the state level,” she told the Christian Broadcasting Network the day after the Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization ruling. Declaring the right to abortion was not deeply rooted in our nation’s history or traditions, it reversed 1973’s Roe v. Wade decision that threw open the floodgates to abortion across the country.

Still, Johnson believes it’s time to “double down” on efforts at the state level, telling CBN: “There will be many states where abortion will be illegal, but that doesn’t mean the fight is over.”

Indeed, lately the tide has taken a negative turn:

In early April, Colorado became the sixth state in the country to legalize abortion up to the moment of birth when its legislature passed the Reproductive Health Equity Act.

On Aug. 2, Kansas voters rejected an attempt to overturn abortion as a constitutional right in that state by a resounding 59-41% margin. That despite registered Republicans outnumbering Democrats by 44%-26% (unaffiliated voters are another 29%).

The week after the Kansas referendum, *USA Today* released a poll saying most Americans would like to vote on abortion; if given a chance, respondents would oppose efforts to ban it by an almost 2-1 margin.

Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren and others in Congress have introduced legislation designed to shut down crisis pregnancy centers, claiming they engage in false advertising and “torture” pregnant women.

Johnson, whose speaking tours often take her through Kansas, says there is no way liberals outnumber conservatives there. Yet she says the results show how in many situations pro-choicers show up, assemble and strategize, but too many pro-lifers stay home, expecting someone else to do their job.

“I think it’s that we don’t like to be uncomfortable and we’ve been taught not to rock the boat,” says Johnson, who grew up in a Southern Baptist church in a modest-sized Texas town. “It’s also just a sense of apathy. That’s why we continue to lose battles like this one in Kansas. We just don’t step out of our comfort zone and do what is necessary.”

If ever there were a call to arms, the Kansas results symbolize the challenge ahead for pro-lifers. On Nov. 8, voters in five states—Kentucky, Vermont, California, Montana and likely Michigan—will face referendums on whether to retain abortion as a constitutional right.

(Note: At press time, Michigan authorities were still determining if a petition to place a constitutional amendment on the Nov. 8 ballot contained enough valid signatures).

Not all come from a pro-choice direction. In Kentucky, Republican legislators pushed Amendment 2. If passed, it would declare that nothing in Kentucky's constitution creates a right to an abortion or requires government to fund it. But in Vermont, a state that allows abortion throughout pregnancy, a yes vote would protect the right to "personal reproductive autonomy."

Carol Tobias, president of National Right to Life, says numerous lies promoted by the abortion industry have proliferated since the Supreme Court decision. These include the theories that a woman could die from an ectopic pregnancy because a doctor would be afraid to treat her, be penalized if she miscarried or be jailed for having an abortion.

### **Emphasizing Key Elections**

As voters head to the polls Nov. 8, the question is whether the red wave predicted in pre-Dobbs days will turn blue because of the kerfuffle over abortion.

Johnson thinks not, saying she doesn't know that it will affect the outcome because the public is more concerned about the economy.

"I think that, by and large, society is far more concerned about the money flying out of their bank accounts because of rising inflation and gasoline prices," she says. "I'm not sure it's going to be the deciding factor for the bulk of people. ... I hope the [earlier predictions] are true and there's a true conservative wave in November, but you can't ever tell who's going to show up and vote."

The FRC's Szoch says whether or not voters face a referendum in their state, pro-lifers must work to ensure that unborn

children are protected, a key component in winning upcoming elections. She says conservatives must elect pro-life legislators to safeguard protections for the unborn, especially since congressional Democrats are so strongly pro-choice. But it's not simply federal elections that matter, she adds; state and local elections also play a key part in protecting life.

"Since the Dobbs decision, across the country, state attorneys general and governors have talked about their decision not to enforce laws protecting unborn life," Szoch says. "State supreme courts have ruled against life. These leaders in government need to be voted out of office in November."

Tobias is also outspoken about the need to elect pro-life legislators. Even though Right to Life is officially a nonpartisan organization, its president says those who want to protect unborn children in any way should vote Republican on Nov. 8.

"If leaders like [Senate Majority Leader] Chuck Schumer and [House Speaker] Nancy Pelosi are in charge again next year—and Schumer has one more Senate vote where he can do whatever he wants—we are going to have a national law: abortion on demand for all nine months of pregnancy for any reason, paid for by tax dollars," Tobias says.

### **Shifting the Focus**

Emotions surrounding abortion run so high that the political uproar can easily become distracting. This is where Abby Johnson's presence reminds us that the well-being of women is more important than the outcome of an election.

One way the fight has shifted lies in the approach that crisis pregnancy centers and other pro-lifers must take. When ultrasounds became widely available years ago, centers launched fundraisers to acquire the machines. While scans of healthy fetuses saved thousands of babies and changed many

hearts, over the past two years Johnson has discovered they are losing their effectiveness.

“We knew spiritually things were changing in the hearts of culture; something was changing in the hearts of women,” she says.

“This is biblical, that women’s hearts would grow cold,” adds Johnson. “Women now do look at their children on an ultrasound screen, see the heartbeat of their child and still do abortions. They still say, ‘Well, I’m in too difficult a position, and I’m still choosing abortion.’ So what do we do now? That is the question.”

Johnson seeks to change women’s hearts by digging deeper into their life situations. When her ministry discovered 75% of women had abortions for financial reasons, ProLove Ministries hired pro-life counselors and trained social workers to help females work through obstacles. She says if they can get to the root of women’s poverty problems, help empower them financially and provide scholarships or other academic opportunities, these women are more likely to choose life.

This can take practical avenues such as paying back rent or utilities or helping them find a reliable car so they have transportation to their job. This is life-saving work, Johnson says, adding that if she has to pay \$2,500 in back rent to save a baby’s life, she’s willing to do so.

“This is the kind of movement we have to start focusing on,” she says. “This is what pregnancy resource centers have to start focusing on. The movement has changed, and we have to be willing to change with it. Ultrasound isn’t making a difference anymore. So what is? Case management. We have to be ready to do something different to serve these women and these children.”

The ministry’s various branches do all this with a staff of five, plus a contract therapist, a director of development and

20 volunteers spread across 16 states—among them Connecticut, North Carolina, Kentucky and California.

ProLove is a virtual remote ministry, says Whitehead, a resident of Houston, where her husband is on staff at a nondenominational charismatic church. Starting right before the COVID pandemic, when lockdowns suddenly appeared in early 2020, her team marveled at God's timing. Since the lifting of pandemic restrictions, ProLove's executive director has traveled to 11 different states to train pregnancy care centers in case management. Though the tool is new for many, Whitehead says it's necessary in a post-Roe world.

As for the funding needed to operate an outreach that can get quite expensive, she says they have never had a problem with fundraising. People who work every day and can't be part of a pro-life ministry still want to help make a difference, and giving to ProLove is one way they can do it.

"We've never had to tell a woman no," Whitehead says. "In Malachi 3, He tells me if you bring the tithe into the storehouse, He will open up the windows of heaven. I tell the Lord, 'Bring money in from the north, south, east and west.' When people see we're a ministry of integrity, they have no problem giving into it."

## **Presenting the Truth**

Reaching out to women who work at abortion clinics is another crucial aspect of Johnson's work, an idea many pro-lifers see as anathema. But since she spent years volunteering for and then working with Planned Parenthood, she has a heart for those as deceived as she once was, thinking the organization's support for contraception and other measures was helping women.

Nor is her concern restricted to Planned Parenthood. After Philadelphia abortionist Dr. Kermit Gosnell was convicted of three counts of first-degree murder in 2013 for taking babies'

lives after they emerged from the birth canal, Johnson connected with former clinic worker Adrienne Moton. Moton testified against Gosnell at his trial and served 28 months for her role in the grisly procedures that took place at his clinic.

Arrested in January 2011, Moton experienced a spiritual rebirth in prison, describing how a peace flooded over her and she knew she would be alright throughout her ordeal. She rededicated her life to Christ during a prison chapel service and today attends a nondenominational church in a Philadelphia suburb.

A woman Moton met in prison gave her the phone number of a pro-life organization. When she called it after her release, a staff member told her, "We can't help you, but here's someone who can," giving her the number for And Then There Were None.

That touched off regular communication between Moton and Johnson. After Moton was off parole and able to travel outside the state, she flew to Austin to attend a healing retreat, one of several ATTWN hosts annually for ex-clinic workers.

"I'm very proud of her," says Moton, who has participated in three panel discussions with Johnson, most recently at a June women's conference in Indianapolis. "I love her boldness. She's very courageous. She's like a giant. I love how strong she's going for life. She has very thick skin, which is awesome."

Johnson also has a strong faith. Her walk with Christ started in the Southern Baptist church and shifted to Episcopalian, since the liberal denomination didn't object to her Planned Parenthood ties. But after she changed her mind, her Episcopalian priest told her: "If you're going to be publicly pro-life, then this is not the church for you."

After an extended search, Abby and her husband, Doug, joined a Catholic church. They occasionally visit a charismatic



Catholic congregation in Houston, part of her affection for a variety of worship styles.

But in appealing to women from a host of backgrounds, Johnson doesn't tout her faith in a particular church. She tells them about the Savior who forgave her for her divorce, two abortions and helping facilitate over 22,000 of the procedures.

She loves helping those who work at abortion clinics see the light and leave the industry behind. ATTWN has done that by presenting them with the truth—and with Christ, whom Abby says presented the truth in love.

"I tell people Christian people, 'Live for Him,'" Johnson says. "We want to draw people to Him and say, 'Go and sin no more.' That's what we're doing. That message works. It's worked dozens of times with some of the hardest people out there. If it works with them, it's going to work with anybody."

*A freelance writer and book editor, **Ken Walker** most recently wrote about North Carolina's first Black lieutenant governor, Mark Robinson.*