

Prayer and Political Savvy

Andrea Lafferty knows what it takes to mobilize people of faith and keep them informed about the most critical issues facing our nation.

Andrea Lafferty is a bit of a contradiction. At an age when most women are preparing for an empty nest, she has reduced her travel schedule to raise her 4-year-old adopted son.

She also demonstrates the “compassionate” in “conservative,” starting her church’s homeless ministry, caring for numerous children from broken or unstable homes, and mentoring teens.

And though her job includes pressing evangelical values with Washington, D.C., lawmakers, she doesn’t think the United States will turn toward righteousness via the legislative process.

“I don’t see it happening through votes,” says the executive director of the Traditional Values Coalition (TVC), the grass-roots organization founded by her father, the Rev. Louis Sheldon. “If we had a country that was on its knees, we wouldn’t have to worry about abortion [or other issues].

“But, because of the condition of our culture and the condition of our church, we’re having these problems. The church needs to take responsibility. Unless there is a revival [and] their hearts are turned to God, and unless we cry out and ask for forgiveness and ask God for direction to heal our land, things are just going to get worse.”

Though that makes her sound like an evangelist, Lafferty has earned respect as an effective political advocate during 17 years with the coalition, which her father formed to influence pro-family legislation and policy.

Although the former Presbyterian pastor pens many of its position papers, his daughter is often its public face, calling on skills honed as a member of two previous presidential administrations.

She has debated others in such widely watched arenas as The Today Show, Good Morning America and the Fox News Channel, and has been interviewed by everyone from the Washington Post to Time magazine.

Not only has Washingtonian magazine called her an important conservative lobbyist, congressional representatives such as Todd Tiahrt say Lafferty has made TVC a force on Capitol Hill.

"Andrea occasionally visits with me or my staff about issues of importance to me and other people of faith," the Kansas congressman says. "She is intelligent, articulate and committed to furthering the coalition's goal of 'empowering people of faith with knowledge.'"

Though reluctant to discuss many specific cases, Lafferty mentions a contact the day Congress was sworn in last January. After praying for a divine appointment, she met briefly with a Democratic newcomer who invited her back the next day to discuss stem cell concerns.

She returned with a couple experts. Later, a staff member called to say that the congressman would be voting with the coalition's position.

"It wasn't my doing," Lafferty says. "It was the Lord's doing, being available to Him, listening and going where He would have us go. We could have gone to other offices and skipped this one, and we wouldn't have gotten that vote."

BUILDING BRIDGES

Such influence isn't limited to the nation's capital, since Lafferty remains in touch with a number of Christian ministries, including some of its 43,000 affiliated churches

from a dozen denominations.

Since Kimberly Daniels of Jacksonville, Florida, met her about three years ago, the leader of Spoken Word Ministries says Lafferty has kept her intercessory prayer teams informed about key issues in Washington.

"She has invited me to meetings that I would never have access to on Capitol Hill," says Daniels, the author of Give It Back! (Charisma House). "Before I met Andrea, I did not understand the urgency in getting involved with the issues at hand...that affect our rights as believers."

Lafferty sees such efforts as part of the bridge building that makes her group a true coalition. Part of her interest in crossing boundaries comes from her father. As TVC's chairman, he may speak to fundamentalist Baptists in the morning and a charismatic church in the evening.

That includes working with other racial groups, too. Not many pro-family groups have had as much minority participation as TVC. Among pastors it has worked with are TV preachers Frederick Price and Bishop Eddie Long and Miami pastor Guillermo Maldonado.

Maldonado met Lafferty and Sheldon about two years ago after sensing God directing him to defend ethical values in government. The megachurch leader said the pair has been key to opening doors to speak to political leaders about supporting moral values.

"There are very few organizations that work towards defending ethical values in the government," said Maldonado, noting that TVC also helps his church identify areas for prayer. "They stand strong for the morality of this country."

Such links with ethnic minorities expose the lie that people from certain colors or backgrounds can't believe in traditional values, Lafferty says.

"We come together, not based on the color of our skin, but our identity in Christ and our acknowledgement of more orthodox theology," Lafferty says. "We believe that pastors, particularly African-Americans, can address some of these issues and be helpful in turning the country around, especially on homosexual marriage."

In addition to forging such alliances, the North Dakota native strives to serve as another voice for women. Although such figures as U.S. Sens. Barbara Boxer and Hillary Clinton—the early front-runner for the 2008 Democratic presidential nomination—often claim the title, Lafferty objects.

They may speak for some women, and there even may be agreement on some issues, but Lafferty points out that they don't represent all women on such policies as right to life, children or same-sex marriage.

And speaking up is a crucial element of life in Washington, home to countless special-interest groups and highly paid lobbyists.

If a particular bill isn't relevant to the coalition's cause, the TVC stays out of the fray. But if it concerns things such as funding for abstinence education, stem cell research or religious liberty, Lafferty voices her group's position.

Earlier this year, she sounded the drum on an attempt to force any group (including churches) speaking on political issues—even if it involved moral concerns—to register as lobbyists. Though it failed, Lafferty calls it a sign of the current Congress' lack of support for religious freedom.

"The way you get heard is you get your message out," she says. "Not just by going and talking to staff or members of Congress. You get on television and radio and talk to reporters. As congressmen and staff see the news and read the paper, it can be a way of advocating your position."

GOING AGAINST THE GRAIN

This year's congressional shift from Republican to Democratic control has had a practical impact on Lafferty's work. She notes that the ruling party favors such things as abortion and homosexual rights while opposing abstinence instruction. Key Democrats also successfully bottled up legislation in committee in the last session that would have outlawed non-relatives transporting minors across state lines for an abortion.

Lafferty asks how someone would feel if the mother or aunt of the boy who impregnated their daughter took her to an abortion clinic in another state without that parent's knowledge or consent.

"I think that goes against parental rights, the rights of parents to bring up their children," Lafferty says. "We passed something, but the Democrats saw it and they wouldn't allow it to go to conference.

"There's a lot of these little inside-baseball tactics that we can be praying about, or we can be active in educating our elected officials of our position."

Despite the setback traditional values adherents took in the 2006 elections, Lafferty doesn't think it's time to throw in the towel. She mentions such progress as the ban on partial-birth abortion that caused millions to reconsider the ethics of this practice.

Still, the task of going against the grain is spiritually heavy, some days as stifling as the summer humidity in Washington. That calls for prayer on her part and others, Lafferty says, asking that SpiritLed Woman readers intercede for her.

"I've been doing this job for a long time and have seen many victories and many defeats," she says. "I don't always understand why things happen. I just have to trust that God is

in control. Prayer is very important, but we also need to put feet to our prayers. We need to be active, knowledgeable and discerning.”

LOOKING AHEAD

Because of its tax status, the coalition doesn’t get involved in endorsing candidates. So, it won’t be backing a particular presidential candidate in the 2008 election as much as advising citizens to be informed about the long slate of hopefuls.

Although Sens. Clinton and Barack Obama are the leading Democrats, the Republican side has a host of contenders.

Lafferty doesn’t expect former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani to maintain his lead in early polls over Sen. John McCain, but hasn’t decided on the best GOP candidate.

Former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney’s Mormon beliefs have turned off some evangelicals, and though Sam Brownback is a “solid” candidate, she says the Kansas senator may not have the financial backing it takes to win the presidency.

“There are a lot of factors and I think people are unclear about what to do,” Lafferty says. “I would hope that those who are unclear will be praying about it.”

Regardless of who ascends to the White House or controls Congress come 2009, the coalition’s director hopes Christians will keep all elected officials in their prayers. Such intercession is vital because of Washington’s strategic role in the nation’s destiny.

Although Washington can be a discouraging place for traditional values supporters, its importance keeps Lafferty going in spite of the daydream of casual days filled with shopping and dinner with friends. That and thoughts of her son, Daniel, and husband, Jim, a public relations and crisis management specialist. Her family is just one of millions

affected by what happens in the corridors of power, which is where she feels called to be a watchman.

“Even before I became a mother, I had a heart for children and protecting them,” Lafferty reflects. “If the mama bear is mad, watch out. That is what I strive to do—educate the mama bears about a variety of issues. Activating moms could really make a difference.

“It does get discouraging at times. I just know that this is what I’m called to do. God doesn’t call us to easy things.”

Still, He does call His children to rewarding tasks. Just ask Andrea Lafferty. § Ken Walker is a freelance writer from Huntington, West Virginia. For more information on the work of the Traditional Values Coalition, go to .

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