

The Mind-Blowing Reason Churches Should Step Up With Abortion Ministry

Two out of every 5 abortions are happening to church-going women. This means Christians are funding the abortion industry at a rate of \$100 million a year.

So, where is the church?

Pew Research finds that only 4% of sermons shared online in 2019 mentioned the issue—and most of those only once. But pulpit-pounding messages that condemn abortion don't offer vulnerable women much in the way of tangible support, which may be why some pastors steer clear of the issue. Blanket criticism of abortion from a pastor could keep a woman from exploring her options because she may then feel unwelcome in approaching that leader for help.

With that in mind, a new vision is percolating within the pro-life movement, which has deep, faith-based roots. Care Net, an umbrella network for pregnancy centers, recently introduced "Making Life Disciples," a program that trains and equips churches and volunteers to partner with local centers. After initial contact with a pregnancy center, families have the option of connecting with a church, which then becomes their primary source of support and discipleship, indefinitely.

"When it comes to the abortion issue, the church has not really been using that transformative power that it has," said Roland Warren, president and CEO of Care Net. "It's an issue that's been outside of the Church, when the problem is inside—and the Church has a call to the broader culture."

It's a refreshing concept, one that redistributes the weight of responsibility from underfunded pregnancy centers to

churches with more financial resources, volunteers and the ability to invest in people long-term.

Still, pastors can feel conflicted about how to address abortion appropriately, due to its controversial and highly politicized nature. In his research, Mark Campbell, founder of the Vox Project—a ministry dedicated to empowering pro-life pastors—found several reasons for retreat from the issue: Fearing they might be viewed as “too political” or feeling overwhelmed by the enormity of the issue were prominent, noted dissuasion.

“The fear of not wanting to hurt someone in your congregation is a good fear,” he wrote. “But if this fear keeps you from ever preaching on this issue, your inaction will actually hurt those in your church who need to hear the hope of the Gospel applied to a major issue in their lives.”

“Making Life Disciples” and programs like the Vox Project put preaching and practical guidance on the same track. It means pastors won’t be touching callously on an extremely tough, personal issue, but pairing that rhetoric with guidance, support and pathway for hope to congregants when they do so. And though many participants in “Making Life Disciples” come through referrals from pregnancy centers, pastors who integrate pregnancy support into the church agenda, may also end up referring church members toward the pregnancy center for medical support, as the two entities work in tandem.

With nearly 1 million babies lost to abortion each year in the United States, ignoring the problem is hardly an option. As churches begin to undertake other justice issues often considered “political,” like immigration and racism, abortion shouldn’t be excluded. Doing so would disregard the *Imago Dei* of unborn children and the Biblical call to “speak for those who cannot speak” (Prov. 31:8). Now, pastors nationwide can begin to lovingly weave comprehensive pro-life messaging and compassionate action into their church body with credibility.

“For anyone standing for social justice in this world, we must include the right to life,” said Lon Dean, pastor of House of Praise Church in Castleton, New York, in an online interview. “It is the most fundamental of all Christian justice causes.”

With over 350,000 churches in the United States, faith bodies dwarf the existing 2,700 pregnancy centers. And while 2017 saw pregnancy centers provide an estimated 2 million people with free services, imagine the swelling network of support were churches nationwide established as primary resource hubs. If each pregnancy center were connected with multiple churches, the support system would extend far beyond a temporary safety net.

The guiding Christian principle of discipleship—essentially a faith-based mentorship—is what distinguishes “Making Life Disciples.” One of deepest unmet spiritual needs in the Church is this practice. In his book *Faith For Exiles*, Barna Research President David Kinnaman found that people with the strongest faith report feeling loved, valued and connected to older adults in their church. When such important relationships are missing, faith and personal growth is stunted. A discipleship program within the framework of pro-life ministry could go a long way in setting young men and women up for for choosing life *and* a lifetime of deeper faith.

Women coming into pregnancy centers are already benefiting from “Making Life Disciples” in some parts of the country in this way.

“What this program does is—it makes it *not* political,” said Stacey Jimenez, executive director of A Place for Women, a pregnancy center located inside of Calvary Chapel Pearl Harbor in Oahu, Hawaii. “It’s simply asking churches to educate their people, to understand that unplanned pregnancies are to be viewed with the same lens as any other issue—like poverty or hunger or addiction—and know we need to come alongside these people and help them because they all need Jesus.”

Providing for the physical and emotional needs of families, as many pregnancy centers do, is important, but the spiritual shepherding available within the church has everlasting results.

“Medical centers—like a pregnancy center like ours—are not set up for long term discipleship and you are not expecting that from them,” Jimenez said.

The concept may be especially powerful in urban areas, where abortion rates are highest, pregnancy centers are few and women can feel bound to pregnancy termination due to dire financial circumstances. Abortion centers like Planned Parenthood often target low-income areas for this reason. And while there are more pregnancy centers than abortion clinics overall, 42% of unplanned pregnancies still end in abortion. If the churches on every city corner broadcast their spaces as welcoming and supportive, it would be a powerful testament to James’ directive to “look after orphans and widows in their distress” (James 1:27).

The idea is for local churches to mobilize on the front lines like never before, a regional mission field targeting parents, parishioners, students and community members, “seeking justice,” “correcting oppression,” and “bringing justice to the fatherless” (Isa. 1:17). Early reports showcase success in meeting this call.

“One client, who is a new believer, told us she didn’t feel she had anybody, until she met with her [MLD] coach,” wrote Marcia Buterakos Marron, executive director for Life’s Choices Women’s Clinic in Eustis, Florida.

It also offers churches the opportunity to showcase their commitment to life beyond the womb. Although it is a false narrative, pro-lifers are often accused of caring about babies only until birth. Given the prolific presence of Christian-led organizations dedicated to helping families at all stages of

life, this is untrue. For example, Catholic Charities USA—one of the largest philanthropic organizations in the world—caters to immigrants, refugees, homelessness, people with disabilities, suicide prevention, disaster recovery and more, serving over 10 million people annually.

That said, the church's pursuant and dedicated action to helping women experiencing unplanned pregnancy will continue helping to erase the cultural lie that pervades arguments surrounding the legality of abortion. Like churches, pregnancy centers don't officially participate in the legal side of the conversation. And while activists and lobbyists have been successful recently in pushing for bills to help protect the unborn in some states, the heart of the pro-life mission and the church is and will continue to be showing up for people in need: men, women, children, the elderly, the disabled and the very, very small.

Far beyond caring about babies until they are born, the church cares for and cultivates human beings from conception to eternity. The contours of crisis offer unexpected openings for faith to grow, so the church should be readily poised to take the hand of a woman facing what might be the most difficult situation of her life. A church pew should be the safest place she can be—and now churches are ensuring she knows that it is.

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Ericka Andersen is a freelance writer, mother of 2 and author of *"Leaving Cloud 9"* from Thomas Nelson. She is the host of the *"Worth Your Time"* podcast.