

THE CHURCH'S FAITHFUL WITNESS



providers of so-called “women’s reproductive health.”

From left, Revs. Dr. Kirk Clayton, Jeff Hemmer and Bruce Keseman lead prayers during a vigil near Planned Parenthood in Fairview Heights on March. 20.

Often, protesting abortion gives opportunity for the devil, the world and our own sinful flesh to direct us away from our original, sanctified motivation. We let our sadness over abortion get the best of us. What begins with good intentions veers off into an unsanctified display of religious anger, all in the name of Jesus, of course. It turns into an ugly and

poor witness to who the real Jesus is, what He truly desires for sinners, and who we are as His church.

Is there a better way?

Prayer

There is a pattern we see established by Jesus and continued in His disciples. Jesus never allows for evil things to be acceptable. In the face of sin and evil, Jesus responds with compassion. He warns of sin and its eternal ramifications. He preaches repentance, forgiveness, new and eternal life in Him. He also warns of hatred and prays for enemies, sinners, the deceived, and teaches His disciples to do the same:



“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.” — **Matt. 5:43-45** (see also *Rom. 12:9-21*)

We know Jesus’ words from the cross well:

“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” — **Luke 23:34**

In the very moment of His greatest pain and suffering, Jesus desires mercy and prays for his enemies’ benefit. We see this emulated in Stephen when he becomes the first martyr of the church in the book of Acts:

Continued on next page

Prayers, not protests

By Rev. Tim A. Sims
Senior Pastor, St. John, Chester

Protest

We live in a time of protest. It’s a trend that’s all the rage. Various groups gather to protest this thing or that. Sometimes these protests remain peaceful. Often the frustration and anger of the group steps over a boundary of civility and turns violent, or even deadly.



When this happens, does it usually help or hurt the cause they had gathered to promote?

Even if we sympathize with the original cause, or news commentators spin their reporting to minimize the damage done, the story is no longer about the cause. It’s about the inappropriate behavior of the “protestors.” The message is significantly tainted. No level-headed person with any courage or conviction has their hearts or minds changed in a positive direction by such tactics. At best, concern about tactics overcomes sympathy for the cause. At worst, people see those backing the cause as nothing more than a group of angry, vengeful anarchists, and they shut their ears to the message altogether.

I think that’s why I have never attended an anti-abortion/pro-life protest at an abortion clinic. It’s not that as a pastor, a Christian or as a human being I support abortion. There is no question: abortion is murder. Even pro-abortion advocates have had to admit in recent years, with the help of ultrasound technology, that abortion ends a human life. As the Bible would define it, abortion is the “unlawful killing” of another (God’s definition of murder, not the state’s). Therefore, we Christians should stand against it.

We should detest abortion for the physical damage it does to the baby, and the emotional and spiritual damage it inflicts on mothers, fathers — entire families — and the abortion providers themselves. Yet, individual Christians and the church should not be fueled by hate or rage toward individuals choosing abortion. Our motivation should be the compassion and mercy of Jesus Christ. Our goal should not be vengeance against mothers who have either willingly, or by deception, headed into such a devastating decision. Nor should we desire vengeance against those who have been the willing perpetrators of such violence against the unborn — Planned Parenthood and other such

And as they were stoning Stephen ... falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep.
— **Acts 7:59-60**

Likewise, the New Testament instructs us to pray for those who have rejected Christ and/or have embraced sin. Paul urges Timothy that:

Prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.
— **1 Tim. 2:1-4**

This pattern continues well into the early centuries of the church. Isaac the Syrian writes the following in a sermon recorded in the 7th century: “Do not foster hatred for the sinner, for we are all guilty. ... Hate his sins, and pray for him, so that you may be made like unto Christ, who had no dislike for sinners, but prayed for them.” (**Homily 57**)

What a beautiful reminder.

How does this pertain to the church’s witness to the world in response to abortion?

Prayer vigil

The pattern of mercy and prayer first put into place by Christ, emulated throughout the New Testament, and continued in the early church is alive and well. I witnessed it firsthand on March 20 at Planned Parenthood of Fairview Heights. A group of about 150 brothers and sisters in Christ, led by several Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) pastors, engaged in fervent prayer.



The choir from St. Paul Lutheran School, Hamel, sang hymns with those in attendance.

“Why are we here?” asked Monica Shannon, district Advocates for Life coordinator, before the vigil began. In the midst of the darkness of abortion we had gathered to “shine the light of Christ in prayer ... to advocate for life and serve our neighbor.” In words that echoed those of Isaac the Syrian she reminded us all that we gathered as sinners who ourselves need the mercy of Christ and desire that others have this saving grace as well.



Monica Shannon, Advocates for Life coordinator, speaks during the vigil.

Revs. Jeff Hemmer, Bethany, Fairview Heights; Bruce Keseman, Christ Our Savior, Freeburg; and Dr. Kirk Clayton, Zion Mascoutah, led us all in prayers. Not a single hateful word was spoken. There was no message of vengeance against Planned Parenthood or any of their “patients.” Instead, there were songs and prayers that clearly focused on God’s gift of life and His desire for forgiveness and mercy for all in His Son Jesus Christ.

In Jesus Christ there is forgiveness and new life for those who have made such a devastating mistake as abortion. His mercy knows no boundaries. “Jesus Christ loves and died not only for all of us here, but for everyone on the other side of this fence,” Pastor Hemmer said while motioning toward the Planned Parenthood facility and those entering.

This event is a trend that stands against rage. LCMS members and others who have joined with us are setting a more Biblical, Christ-focused trend: Prayers, not protests.

May the Lord of Life continue to move us in this trend for the sake of the unborn, their mothers and fathers, and all who are impacted by the deception of abortion, that we may all rejoice in the saving light and life of Christ.

Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.



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