

ND Response Rally
University of Notre Dame
May 17, 2009
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Past Chairman of the Board of the Women's Care Center

Good Afternoon! It is a joy to be here with all of you today. What a special gathering this is - one that I hope will touch the hearts of many more than the large group we see around us today. It is my pleasure to be here to talk to you about a wonderful organization that is experiencing amazing success! It is The Women's Care Center. I'll tell you as much as I can today about the people served, the volunteers involved and the dedicated staff of this organization. But first I would like to add my thanks to you, the students of Notre Dame, who have transformed this weekend into one filled with prayer and hope and compassion. You have taken a busy time of celebration and added an extra dimension of service and faith to this weekend. I remember being a senior here and I don't think I would have been nearly as wise! You are to be commended on the creation of a thoughtful and prayerful presentation of the Catholic values that you hold firm. I admire you!

Thanks to your efforts, here we are on this brisk but sunny day in month of of May, Mary's month, . . .the month of Mother's day! How fitting it is that we are gathered on the campus of Our Lady to celebrate and support mother's and their babies in this season bursting with new life and joyful beginnings. Yet not all life is started with pure joy.

Every community has young girls, young women, young mothers who are facing the miracle of pregnancy not with joy but with fear and loneliness and confusion. It is for these women and their children that so many have joined with you today. We gather to respect them and the decisions they face and offer our support to them and to all the organizations that work on their behalf.

Well. . . the Woman's Care Center is just one such organization and its roots are deep within this campus. Over 25 years ago, a young professor here at Notre Dame, named Dr. Janet Smith, realized that women facing one of life's major events had no place to go to for support and guidance. Like all of you here who care so deeply, she was compelled to take some action. She realized it wasn't enough for her to say she was pro-life. So she gathered together a cross section of people to provide advice and funding and she founded a crisis pregnancy center just a short distance from this campus - and the good work, the kind of work that can come from one passionate person, began.

She founded what is now called The Women's Care Center and I'm so proud to be able to share the story of their success with you. This organization has grown to be the largest life-affirming pregnancy center in the United States -with fourteen different centers spread throughout Northern Indiana as well as Niles, Michigan and Columbus, Ohio. Nearly 300 women are served. . .every day! Just last year over 10,700 mothers came to us and made a total of over 56,000 visits. They come for counseling and pregnancy tests, ultrasounds, pre-natal vitamins, adoption counseling, parenting skill classes which are taught in English and Spanish and goal counseling classes to help women work toward self sufficiency. The Women's Care Center doesn't just assist in the time of crisis but they stay with these

mother's through the child's age of five. We provide coupons to other agencies in each community so that they can offer incentives for women to better their lives and redeem the coupons for tangible supplies through our CRIB CLUB and BABE stores. They can "earn" cribs, car seats, formula and clothing. In fact we go through about 350,000 diapers a year and that is just part of what we stock .

And in terms of services we have some terrific news. On July 1st at our center down the road on Notre Dame Avenue we will be offering pre-natal medical care for underprivileged and uninsured women throughout all nine months of pregnancy.

The success and expansion of the organization has been stunning and that has been led by another Notre Dame graduate, Ann Manion. Ann has been involved with the Women's Care Center from its inception and when the need arose, as a young mother herself, she left her accounting career and became the President. For 20 years Ann has fulfilled this position, never taking a salary and leading the organization with a grace that is, in fact, amazing. Ann's extremely competent leadership has created the culture of compassion that prevails at every center and ensures that the counselors offer unconditional love to every woman in need.

Sandra is the name of one such mother in need. She and her husband Don came through one of our doors thinking we were an abortion clinic. Don had just been laid off from his factory job. They didn't see any way that they could bring a child into the world. Our counselor Marta, spent over an hour listening to their concerns and offering assistance. When Don and Sandra saw their tiny baby on the ultrasound screen, they were so moved that they said they would do whatever it took to choose life for their precious child. Marta helped the couple enroll in prenatal care and join the Crib Club so that they could "earn" vital baby supplies. They left that day with renewed hope. Since then Don has found some temporary work and Sandra gave birth to a healthy baby girl named Sophia. The Women's Care Center helps countless young couples and mothers slow down and look beyond the panic of the moment and end up with the greatest of joys. In the case of Don and Sandra we helped them realize that a financial setback – no matter how big – does not have to mean the end of their baby's life or their hope for the future.

The stories of these mothers are all different. Some are dealing with abuse, some are so young that they need help just to face their parents, some are being pressured by a boyfriend and some just don't think they can be a good mother. Our goal is to be in service to each of them.

Sadly there is a perception out there that members of the Catholic church and other faiths who strive to protect the unborn are judgmental, not caring about the plight of these mothers who may be poor or out of work or frightened. . . that we are out of touch with the challenges that they face. Yet The Women's Care Center is a shining contrast to that theory. Within the organization there are a few who have family members or have personally experienced the lifelong anguish of abortion. . the grief and the guilt and the sorrow that endures long after the life within has been taken away. The Women's Care center serves these women, welcomes these women and encourages them to counsel others with the wisdom of their experience.

While the number of centers and the services provided have grown, the real measure of the success of the Women's Care Centers comes from the hearts that are touched and lives that are saved. Thanks to the staff that are trained to provide a full range of options to the mother they encounter, women are making the choice that they can live with their entire lives.

Let me give you some exciting statistics! Right here in St. Joe County the abortion rate over the last 10 years has dropped by 37%. In Marshall County it has dropped 30% and in Elkhart County a full 44%! We've haven't been in service as long in some other counties - yet in three years, the abortion rate in LaPorte County has dropped by 21% and in Allen County which is served by the two centers in Ft. Wayne, the rate has dropped by 20% . Pretty exciting results don't you think?

Of course, none of this success could come without the help of donors and that is where so many have stepped forward. From church leaders to community leaders to teams of fundraisers and legions of what we call "Life Partners" we have been blessed with funds we need to grow. And we welcome all who choose to join our ranks. Anyone who would like to learn more about The Women's Care Center is invited to get to know us. Another long term board member and past Chairman is standing by with literature about our mission.

Before I close I want to share one other story with you. It tells of the legacy of love that can come from reaching just one mother. A young woman named Carla came to the center and she was not the typical client. She was actually hoping she was pregnant. She was 23, the same age as the counselor Jacque who administered the pregnancy test. It was positive and Carla was overjoyed. Jacque was puzzled since we so seldom see that reaction. What followed next was the surprise. Carla said. . "You know you guys saved my life". Jacque stood in confusion. Carla said " no, I mean literally. Twenty four years ago my mom came here when it was the little blue house. She was going to have an abortion, but you helped her choose life. My Mom is the one who told me to come here to The Women's Care Center" As it turns out, Carla's mom was one of the first women to walk through the doors when we opened in 1984. Carla is a living testament to the legacy of life that will now pass for generations. All because someone stepped into their faith and lived by their convictions.

Stepping into faith and living by your convictions. That is what all of you here have done. You have chosen to take action. All the good work I shared with you sprang from a few caring people like yourselves, who were willing to step out in faith. The wonderful results are coming from passionate people who move with their beliefs. Not just by feeling strongly about values but by proving them in your life's work. The Women's Care stands united with all who strive to protect life from its earliest stages in the womb. And the path this organization has taken does not focus on the sorrow of the end of life yet rather on the immeasurable love of life. . especially the most vulnerable. They do it in service to one mother at a time. They do it without judgement, with compassion and understanding and acceptance of each person's beliefs and challenges. And it all has flourished with people like yourselves who are called to action. As you leave Notre Dame , I join the many who wish you much success. May

your faith grow and your actions lead to a beautiful life for you and for all. May God Bless you and guide you and may your hearts forever Love Notre Dame!