

# UNBORN

## CC DOWNEY BELIEVERS SUPPORT MANY FACETS OF PRO-LIFE MINISTRY: A LOCAL PREGNANCY CENTER, OUTREACH AT AN ABORTION CLINIC, & SHARING THEIR OWN STORIES OF CHOOSING LIFE

*Story by Christmas Beeler*

Their hearts heavy, believers Melissa and Cory Desselle drove together in silence to meet a seasoned pastor, the father of a friend they trusted. The past six weeks had been a nerve-wracking maelstrom of confusion and fear. Because of her medical condition, Melissa had been told by her doctors to get an abortion—or face a 50 percent chance of losing her life and a 30 percent chance of losing the baby. In fact, all three of Melissa’s specialists told her she would be foolish to have this third child. Melissa was a nurse, so she understood the reality of these risks. She didn’t want to leave behind her husband and their other two children. She couldn’t believe she was facing such a decision—to choose between her life or her baby’s.

She and Cory knew abortion is murder. How could they choose death for this precious new life? Yet even Melissa’s family had assumed that she would terminate the pregnancy for the sake of her other children. A few minutes later, she and Cory were sitting in the pastor’s home, explaining the situation to him and his wife, who listened quietly to their fears and confusion and urged them to pray about the situation.

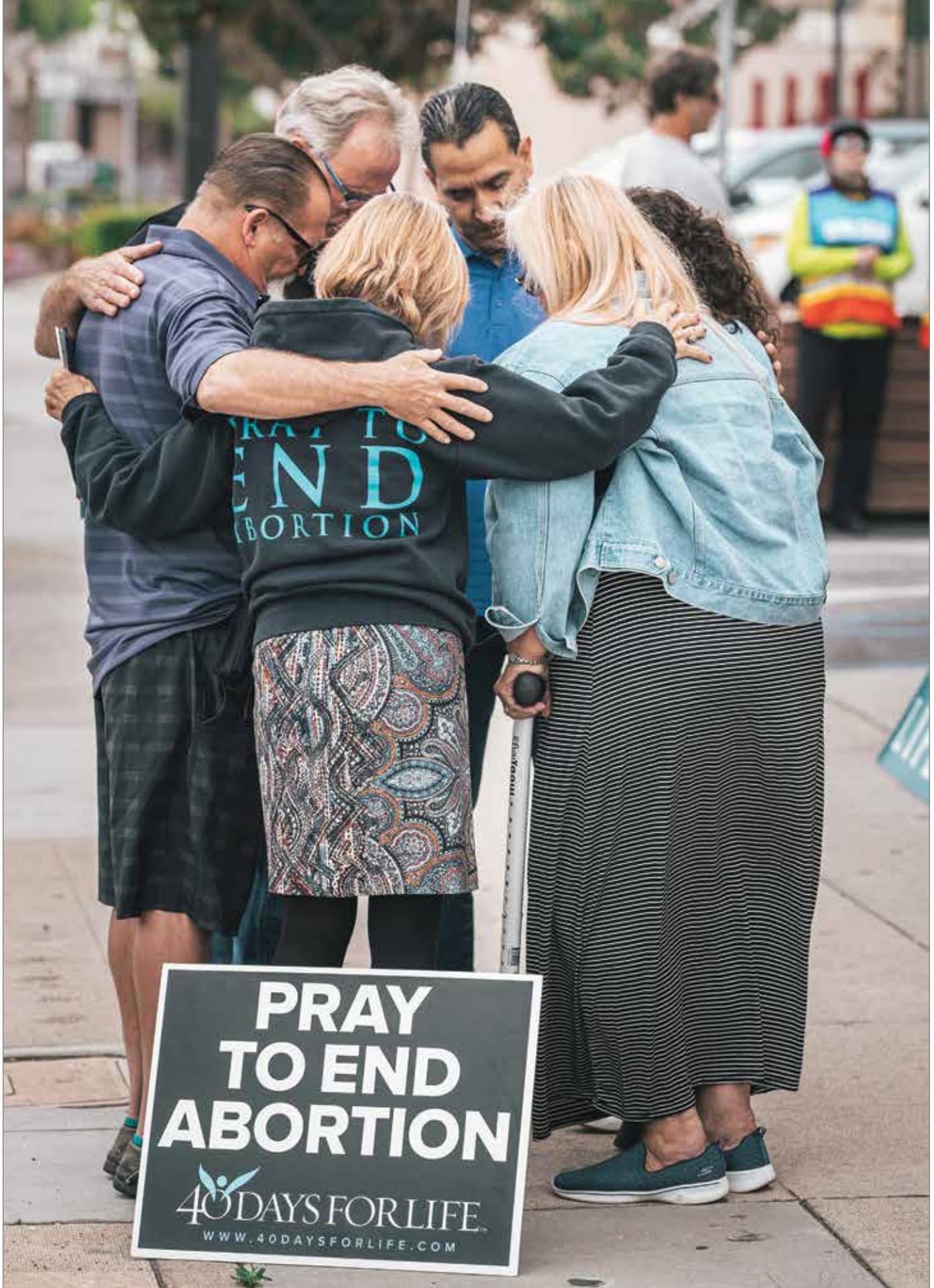
The two couples bowed their heads and prayed for God’s direction and peace. “While we were praying,” Melissa recalled, “I felt this peace come over me, and I just knew that everything was going to be okay. That no matter what happens, God’s got this. He’s got me, the kids—whatever happens is going to be okay.” When they left, Melissa declared, “We’re not doing it. We’re going to have this baby.” Cory’s eyes lit up as he told her that was how he felt. “So

we continued with the pregnancy. I was considered high risk the whole time, had intermittent bleeding, and had to go on bed rest.” Though her daughter Ciara was born six weeks early, she was healthy and above average in weight and development. “It was all God!” Melissa happily told her skeptical doctor on the day they were discharged.

Melissa had been surprised at the amount of pressure she faced to have an abortion. “My Christian family, my co-workers, my doctors—everyone was telling me that we couldn’t have her,” she said. “I never thought my family would say that. I know it was because they were afraid.” She held to her faith and continued to feel God’s peace and presence. Smiling, she added, “And I’m still here, and now my daughter Ciara is 12! She’s my little miracle girl, and we know she and I are both here by the grace of God.” To others who feel pressured to abort their baby, she said, “God is in control. Doctors can quote statistics; they are just trying to do what’s right in their eyes medically. But they don’t have the complete picture. Only God has the reins; only God is in control. It’s in His hands.”

### **Involving the Next Generation**

Melissa grew up going to Calvary Chapel Downey; she and her husband returned there after Ciara was born. On the recent National Day of Prayer, Melissa and Ciara attended a pro-life prayer walk organized by Pastor Tim Hearn, who oversees the pro-life ministry at CC Downey. Tim explained, “We took the CC Downey Christian School 6th graders and spent the day going to the abortion clinic for a couple hours, walked down the



A Calvary Chapel Downey, CA, team prays at the abortion clinic before church on a Sunday morning.

Photo by Steve Shambeck

street to city hall, and spent an hour in prayer there for the National Day of Prayer. We've done it two years in a row. We do whatever we can to get the students out there. They know abortion is wrong, but it's another thing to go out there and pray—to put action to their beliefs."

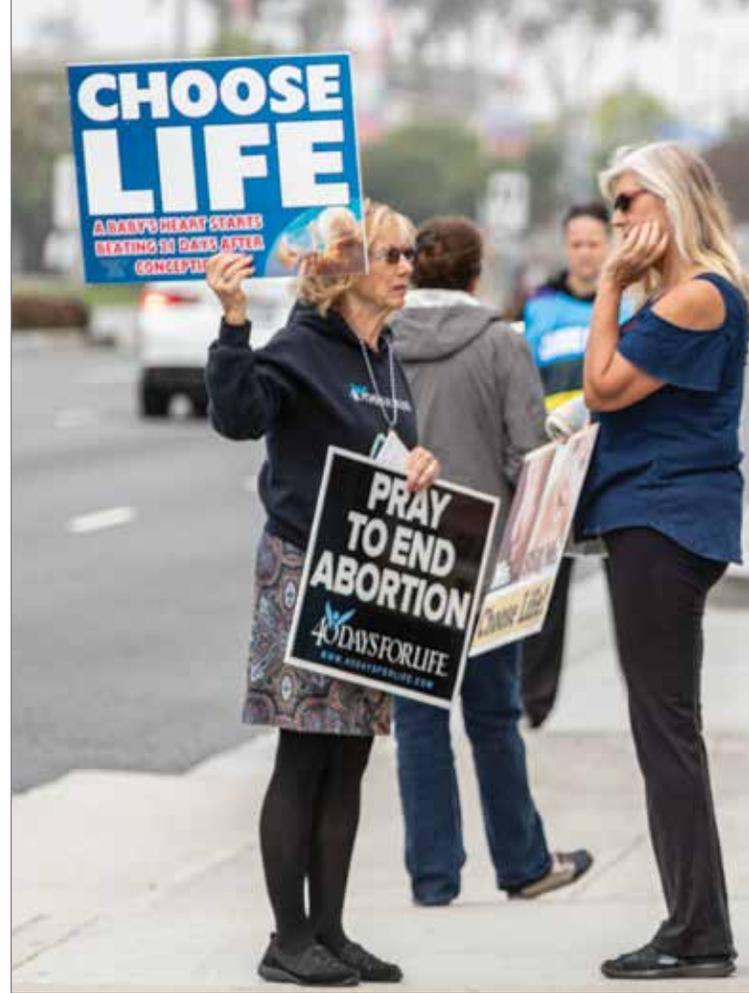
Melissa applauds the school for involving students in pro-life ministry. The Desselles pulled their children from public school after teachers touted the alleged benefits of abortion. At the recent rally, Melissa reported that Ciara and her classmates spontaneously started singing "A Person is a Person No Matter How Small," a song based on a book by Dr. Seuss that was part of their school musical. "That was really amazing, how God connected that for them," Melissa said. "It was a special moment."

### Hearing a Heartbeat

Calvary Chapel Downey also supports a nearby pro-life pregnancy center called LivingHelp Center, which has helped save many lives.

Eva sat at home, confusion and fear gripping her mind. At age 21, she had been accepted to study international business at a school in Paris, France—a dream opportunity. However, she was pregnant. Eva knew her family would be devastated and angry when they found out. Her boyfriend was adamant that they weren't ready for children. She agreed; they weren't. *But is that the baby's fault? Why should this little one have to pay the price for our choices?* she asked herself.

Discovering that Planned Parenthood would charge \$2,000 to terminate the pregnancy, she searched online and found LivingHelp Center. The website offered free pregnancy testing, options information, ultrasound, and baby items. She made an appointment.



Alone and afraid, she walked in. Mari Wingate, the director, "welcomed me warmly, like a friend. She told me I had nothing to worry about and gave me a hug, which felt really warming and helped calm me," she recalled. She was ushered into a comfortable room. Mari listened sympathetically. When Eva said she felt unsure of her choices, Mari reminded her that it was her decision. Then she offered Eva options, including an ultrasound.

"No, no; I can't," Eva said quickly. Mari asked her why. "I'm just afraid that if I hear the heartbeat, I'll want to

**"OUR MISSION IS TO SUPPORT WOMEN AND FAMILIES GOING THROUGH AN UNPLANNED PREGNANCY BY ADDRESSING THEIR PHYSICAL, EMOTIONAL, AND SPIRITUAL NEEDS WITH UNCONDITIONAL LOVE."**

**—MARI WINGATE**



Photo by Steve Shambeck

## BELIEVERS SAVING LIVES: SPEAKING OUT ON BEHALF OF THOSE WITH NO VOICE

*Top:* Other Christian ministries join the CC Downey team as they hope to reach women seeking abortions.

*Right:* Tim Hearron, right, assistant pastor at CC Downey, prays with a man at the outreach. He often meets concerned men.

*Bottom right:* Eva swims with son Damien. Hearing her unborn baby's heartbeat during ultrasound led her to keep her baby.

keep the baby.” Gently, Mari asked her if that would be so bad. She told Eva about her own two unplanned children, how God had provided, and how much she loved them now. Eva thought about it. She realized that she had been pushing away motherhood as something impossible out of fear; but that deep down, part of her longed to bring her baby into the world.

Two days later, she heard his heartbeat during the ultrasound. “In that moment, something clicked. I just knew I wasn’t going to get rid of my baby. Now I’m so thankful to have this little munchkin by my side,” she said of her son Damien. Her boyfriend became supportive, and they married before Damien was born. “Now he comes to church with me, and we always have family time after. He tells me that he is so glad that we chose to have our son.” Initially, Eva had been petrified to tell her father, but now she says, “He loves and adores his little grandson and helps take care of him all the time.” To others with unexpected pregnancies, Eva encouraged, “Don’t be scared. No one ever expects an unplanned pregnancy. I was able to finish my degree, and now I’m raising my child. Look for help, especially at a place like LivingHelp Center. They didn’t judge me at all; they gave me options, support, and comfort. The choice was mine.”



Photo by Steve Shambeck



Family photo



Photo by Isabel Herandez

### Spiritual Care

LivingHelp Center’s director, Mari, explained, “Our mission is to support women and families going through an unplanned pregnancy by addressing their physical, emotional, and spiritual needs with unconditional love.” Mari was a teen mom years ago who chose life. “God showed me that, just as He comforted and strengthened me, I can comfort and strengthen others going through this.” She added, “I know the fear and lies that the enemy wants them to believe: How are you going to do this? Being insecure, afraid, unsure. I tell them, ‘I have been there; we’re going to help you get through this.’”

Many girls come from backgrounds of abuse, neglect, poverty, or addiction. Some age out of foster care and have nowhere to go, making them vulnerable. “It’s all about building trust, showing love, being a listening ear, a shoulder to cry on. Some of the girls don’t have a family; it means so much for them to have a hug because their

mom is not present in their lives. We are truly being the hands and feet of Jesus.” Mari seeks to convey the loving character of Jesus. “God’s heart is so for the heartbroken, the hopeless, the hurting, the downtrodden, the voiceless,” she said. “Our goal is to shine His light, to say: ‘You have people who care about you and want to help you; you are of value to God.’ As they believe that, they start to see that [choosing life] is something that they can do.”

***There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.*** 1 JOHN 4:18

God’s love is key, Mari shared: “God’s perfect love casts out all fear. And they will have the capacity and desire to love their baby regardless of their circumstances.” Many who have been traumatized come for deep, inner-healing prayer. They share about their background, struggles, family, childhood, or trauma. Then Mari prays



“I WOULD LIKE TO SEE EVERY CALVARY CHAPEL HAVE A PRO-LIFE MINISTRY OR SUPPORT A PRO-LIFE CLINIC.”—KARYN JOHNSON



Photo by Isabel Hernandez



Photo by Isabel Hernandez

**Top left: Sarah reacts joyfully to seeing her baby for the first time. Women receive free ultrasounds at LivingHelp Center in a mobile van owned by Horizon Pregnancy Clinic. Hearing one’s baby’s heartbeat can change a mind.**

**Middle: Sarah shares her sonogram image with LivingHelp Director Mari Wingate.**

**Top right: The sonogram shows Sarah’s baby with its thumb in its mouth.**

specifically with them, asking the Holy Spirit to heal. She says, “Those prayer sessions are some of the most powerful times of my Christian walk. It makes way for God’s heart—which is to heal, redeem, and restore.”

### **Saving Lives through Love**

“Many young women who consider abortion are fearful and have no support,” said Karyn Johnson, whose husband Jeff is senior pastor at Calvary Chapel Downey. Karyn urges women to show love and compassion: “Pray and ask the Lord how He would use you to encourage those with unplanned pregnancies to choose life. Perhaps there is a young woman in your church, neighborhood, or circle of friends who could use a Christian friend, spiritual advice, or practical support. Buy diapers for a young mom or single mom in your church. Being there for them is priceless. Jesus taught us to help believers in need: *‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me’* (Matthew 25:40b).”

Women who abort vary in age and religious beliefs. Teens account for about 10 percent of all U.S. abortions while women in their 20s account for about 60 percent, according to the CDC. Teens give birth to nearly 200,000 babies each year. Today, even young women who identify as Christians abort because they feel they have no other option or will be judged instead of supported. In fact, more than 4 in 10 women who have had an abortion were

churchgoers at the time, according to a survey sponsored by the nonprofit Care Net.

Both Pastor Jeff and Karyn have a personal sympathy for those with unplanned pregnancies. “We have four children; three of them were born before we were married,” explained Karyn. “If abortion had been legal at the time, I’m not sure they all would have been born.” After coming to Christ, Karyn was so grateful that God had spared her children; she wanted to do something for other women with unplanned pregnancies. After seeking the Lord, Karyn began the House of Ruth with CC Downey, helping those who cannot keep their unborn children to connect with Christian couples who feel called to adopt.

### **Ways to Engage the Church**

Karyn added, “I would like to see every Calvary Chapel have a pro-life ministry or support a pro-life clinic. Some have no such ministries at all. They [the pastors] believe in choosing life; they just don’t know where to go or what to support.” She noted that ways to support the unborn are endless. “People often imagine pro-life ministry as standing on a sidewalk outside an abortion clinic, but there are many ways to save unborn lives. I’m not a sidewalk counselor,” Karyn said. “I don’t think everybody is.”

For this reason, not only does CC Downey’s pro-life pastor Tim Hearron train believers for local outreaches, but the church offers other ways for students and



Photo by Sinatra Chan

churchgoers to get involved. “Last year we did a ‘Project Moses’ campaign—we put out a big blue tarp that was the Nile River, and a poster with Pharaoh’s daughter picking up baby Moses from a basket. We asked for baby items to send to Israel. You wouldn’t believe how much the church responded.” Forty-five graduates from Calvary Chapel Downey’s Christian school carried several hundred pounds’ worth of items to a pro-life clinic in Israel. “There is nothing like giving a pack of baby clothes to support a child in Israel who will not be aborted.”

Helping out in practical ways also blesses the giver. Karyn said, “Some girls who had abortions [before coming to Christ] come to me and want to do something. I tell them, ‘Help a single mother in the church—donate money for her, buy her diapers.’ One man who pressured his girlfriend to have an abortion years ago is now supporting a child of one of our single moms.” She added, “If you don’t feel called to counsel at a pregnancy center, you can babysit for a mother who does.”



Photo by Sinatra Chan

Mari testified that even a handmade blanket given in Jesus’ name can be a powerful blessing. One young woman who had grown up in foster care fell into drugs and had her baby taken away. LivingHelp helped her find a rehab program. Later, she needed baby items for a visit to see her baby; Mari gave her a crocheted blanket. “We told her the people who donated these items want to help her because they love Jesus. It was so foreign to her. She said, ‘I can’t believe people would just give their time and do something like this for me.’ It brought her to tears, and we were able to lead her to Jesus.”

**Top left: Marchers walk in support of the unborn at the Pound the Ground Walk for Life in Downey, CA.**

**Bottom left: Mari Wingate shares her desire to save babies with congregants at a CC Downey service.**

**Top right: Pastor Neil Travisano is interviewed by a high school student about his stance on abortion.**

**Bottom right: Neil (left) shows new signs used to engage students as they leave campus.**

Another pro-life ministry supported by Calvary Chapel Downey is Save the Storks; a van owned and operated by Horizon Pregnancy Clinic, which partners with LivingHelp to provide free ultrasounds. “Nothing changes the heart of a mother like seeing the beating heart of the child inside of her,” Karyn said. “Call and find out [nationally] where those vans are in your area.” CC Downey has a pro-life ministry called Crossroads with quarterly meetings to pray, plan, and train for outreach. They pray at a local abortion clinic, and they sponsor a “Walk for Life” to raise funds for the ministry and the LivingHelp Center. The church also refers people to LivingHelp



Photo by Geoff Odell

# CALVARY CHAPEL MISSION VIEJO URGES AND MODELS ACTIVE, COMMITTED PRO-LIFE MINISTRY

Center as it ministers to women who have been wounded by past abortions and want to follow Christ. 🙏

Calvary Chapel Downey, CA  
[ccdowney.com](http://ccdowney.com)  
LivingHelp Center  
[livinghelpcenter.org](http://livinghelpcenter.org)

Story by Barb Maher

***Deliver those who are drawn toward death and hold back those stumbling to the slaughter.*** PROVERBS 24:11

As Neil Travisano set up a display presenting a pro-life point of view on a public sidewalk in front of an abortion



Photo by Jeff Odell

clinic, he watched cautiously as a couple approached with a little boy. Neil, the pastor emeritus of Calvary Chapel Mission Viejo (CCMV), CA, recalled, “We were a little nervous as they approached us because we weren’t sure of their intentions.” His group had encountered numerous physical confrontations through years of involvement. She placed her son before the counselors and said, “Two-and-a-half years ago we came by this clinic and saw some pro-lifers here. It might have been your group ... we don’t know. But because you were here, we didn’t abort this little boy. He is our son and would have been killed, but we went home instead. We were high school students and decided to tell our parents. We became Christians and are now married. We want to thank you all for being out here—your presence here changed our lives.”

***The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life.*** JOB 33:4

Calvary Chapel Mission Viejo’s commitment to pro-life action in front of Planned Parenthood and other abortion clinics involves speaking truth about life in the womb. Sidewalk counseling and prayer is just one of the ways the pro-life ministry rescues lives. Neil and Missions Pastor Brian Dagen encourage churches to seek to know God’s heart on the sanctity of life and to be willing to act on pro-life issues. Their model is clearly stated on the church website, declaring a body of believers who recognize that abortion is not just a political issue—but a moral and social issue requiring a church response. “One of the things that we are trying to emphasize more and more with our congregation is connecting them with pro-life ministries in ways that go beyond giving money, as wonderful as that is. If we can, we want to get them out there in flesh and blood,” said Brian, “because the greatest expression of Kingdom life is love; it’s a relational connection.”

***So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.***  
GENESIS 1: 27

The stark contrast between witnessing the birth of his two children and seeing a graphic image of abortion drew Neil into the pro-life movement. In 1989, as senior pastor, he involved his church in supporting Operation Rescue, a national pro-life organization that protested at clinics through peaceful sit-ins and prayer. Over time, potential legal costs and arrests led the church to find different ways to act against abortion. The ministry decided that the best course of action was to offer sidewalk counseling

and prayer to any woman who sought an abortion at clinics within the local metro area.

As the church grew, Neil sought to purchase a property located at an old movie theater near Mission Viejo High School. He credits the church’s stance on pro-life issues for helping the church garner favor with a Christian credit union, enabling them to purchase the property.

The CCMV ministry believes that when a clinic performs abortions, the church should have a legal presence on their sidewalk to offer alternatives and create an atmosphere that hinders a ‘business as usual’ environment. “Throughout the years, the ministry’s pro-life response to abortion clinics ultimately helped lead to the closing of two facilities within the metro area, as abortion providers lost financial support and could not draw clients from the local community,” stated Neil. Three years ago, a Planned Parenthood clinic moved into a suite of offices close to Calvary Chapel Mission Viejo—and across the street from the high school. “Currently, if a student has a crisis pregnancy, the high school counselors will bring her across the street to administer a pregnancy test and



counsel her to get an abortion. We decided that we were going to try to frustrate the clinic's plans."

Sidewalk counseling can be met with opposition. Pastor Neil has experienced numerous incidents of aggression and intimidation at clinics. "On one occasion, we were standing on the sidewalk; a lady drove her car onto it through a parking lot entrance. She aimed her car right at me as I began to wonder what was going on. I stepped out of the way after realizing she was intent on hitting me with her car. So, while we experience positive opportunities for saving lives, we have an abundance of negative interactions with people who do not like our presence at the clinics."

*And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.*

GALATIANS 6:9

Partnering with local churches and The Pregnancy Resource Center of San Clemente, CCMV offers sidewalk counseling, prayer, and free ultrasounds to teenage girls and women seeking an abortion at the Planned



Photo by Geoff Odell

**Top right: Non-confrontational images are used to engage students about the sanctity of life.**

**Bottom: Students survey posters promoting life as they leave the Mission Viejo High School campus.**



Photo by Geoff Odell

Parenthood clinic next door to their church. Volunteers are trained to be considerate toward the women entering the clinic. Neil explained, "I will gently say, 'Good Morning. I have some information that I would like to give to you.' A lot of the women will just say 'No' and walk in. Some will come and talk, and we'll have referral cards to various organizations that can offer options to help them make a decision other than taking the life of a baby. We provide information on organizations including His Nesting Place, The Pregnancy Resource Center, and various adoption services in places such as Calvary Chapel Downey, in Los Angeles." Occasionally, volunteers are able to pray with the women before and after entering the clinic. "We don't argue, call them baby killers, or yell at them. We're only interested in trying to be a

true friend to a lady who is going through a very critical time in her life."

His Nesting Place in Long Beach, CA, is a home for women who are experiencing unexpected pregnancy, homelessness, or are in need of a safe place. Accommodating up to 40 women and children at a time, the facility has housed over 4,000 women and children since its founding in 1983. Christians offer free pregnancy tests, food, baby items, counseling, and the Gospel of Jesus Christ; many women are led to a relationship with Christ. CCMV provides volunteers to help clean the facility and do landscaping, painting, and maintenance work. "It's an older facility with two buildings that need a lot of work. We are able to come alongside the mothers and children and

## ABORTION REVERSAL PILL SAVES CHILDREN'S LIVES

### Reversing an Abortion

More than one-quarter of all abortions are done with medication, according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2015). The good news is, even if this chemical process is started, it may be reversed by taking a reversal pill.

### The Abortion Pill

Medication abortions require a combination of two different pills taken within 48 hours: The first pill, Mifepristone (also called RU-486) blocks the woman's progesterone and stops the baby from growing. The second pill, misoprostol, is then used to induce a miscarriage.

### The Reversal Pill

Thankfully, there is still an option for a woman who has only taken the first abortion pill and decides she wants to choose life. Since its inception, a process called the Abortion Pill Reversal has led to the births of more than 750 babies with another 150 on the way, according to Heartbeat International.

Developed by physicians George Delgado and Matthew Harrison in 2007, the treatment works by giving women extra progesterone up to 72 hours after a woman takes the first chemical abortion pill.

### Lives Saved

Pastor Tim Hearn, who oversees the pro-life ministry Crossroads at CC Downey, shared an example of how believers reached out to a woman who then chose to reverse her abortion through this method.

About three years ago, believers from Calvary Chapel Downey joined in a prayer walk to raise money and awareness for LivingHelp Center. When the group got to the abortion clinic, they stood outside praying. "They began to minister to a lady who had already taken the pill, and she started to cry. They told her about the reversal pill, so they took her to one of the [Abortion Reversal] doctors, and she ended up saving and keeping her baby. Later I was at another fundraiser and met her when her child was 6 weeks old. She spoke [to the group] and shared what God had done; it was awesome."

It's important to spread the word about the Abortion Pill Reversal because many women do not know they still have hope after taking the first dose of the abortion pill, say pro-life leaders.

Those interested may call a 24/7 helpline (877-558-0333) for more information or to be put in touch with one of more than 500 clinicians who offer this life-saving treatment.

[www.abortionpillreversal.com](http://www.abortionpillreversal.com)

1-877-558-0333

## HOW YOU CAN HELP SAVE LIVES:

- Find out whether your church already has an active pro-life ministry or supports a local crisis pregnancy center.
- Check the Internet or phone book to find a pro-life pregnancy center near you. Volunteer at the center or participate in their fundraisers. Or volunteer to babysit for a mother who would like to serve there.
- Organize a fundraiser in your church for crisis pregnancy ministry—either local or overseas. Or use the funds to bless single or unwed mothers in your church.
- Teach teens and college-age students about the importance of abstinence. Volunteer to serve at an event at your church that supports abstinence.
- Christian women can reach out one-on-one to pregnant teens, single moms, or at-risk girls in their church. Buy diapers, babysit, or just be a friend. Having the loving support of a Christian woman can make the difference between life and death for a young woman in trouble.
- Find out if there is a local mobile ultrasound van that allows women to see their unborn baby and have volunteers support their efforts.

show them that we love them and desire to connect with them, beyond giving financially,” said Pastor Brian.

***For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. 2 CORINTHIANS 7:10***

CCMV’s pro-life ministry has a close working relationship with The Center for Bio-Ethical Reform (CBR), an international pro-life organization that presents graphic image displays on college and university campuses through the help of trained organizational staff and CCMV volunteers. The group began the Genocide Awareness Project, which equates historical civil rights abuses and genocide to abortion. CCMV has opportunities to minister with CBR on the front-line positions or behind the scenes with clerical, computer, and support ministries. Neil stated, “I believe the Genocide Awareness Project is the best pro-life plan happening on college campuses, as we gently and lovingly talk to students and bring them to acknowledge truth.” Graphic signs are placed in free-speech zones to stir the minds of students. “The dialogue that ensues from student interaction with the signs is fascinating. Many students will change their minds about abortion when their hearts are touched by the personhood of the baby in the womb,” added Neil.

***If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.***  
JOHN 8:31b

In addition to ministries that support women in crisis pregnancies and engage the culture about the truth of

abortion, CCMV provides post-abortive Bible studies for Christians seeking to be free from guilt. Beyond Bible study, Brian acknowledged the need for ongoing teaching about God’s view on the sanctity of life. “If we are going to call ourselves pro-life, then we need to think about what it means to have a fully formed perspective on this complex, multi-dimensional issue.” Brian believes that many Christians do not know or are not informed about God’s Word and what He has to say about His creation and life in the womb. “We probably need to do a better job teaching, part of which is not just defending the truth but being able to explain how to go a step further with commitment and desire to give of our time and resources.”

Neil encourages churches to keep a long-range view of the work of pro-life ministries. “Many churches say that they are pro-life; but they are not taking action ... in many ways because the church leadership does not have a heart conviction about abortion. More teaching is needed in Sunday schools and youth groups. More importantly, teachings by the senior pastor about God’s heart on the sanctity of life and what it means to be created in His image will go a long way towards rescuing the lives of women and their babies in the womb.” 

Calvary Chapel Mission Viejo  
[cmvchurch.com](http://cmvchurch.com)

His Nesting Place  
[hisnestingplace.org](http://hisnestingplace.org)