



Preventing Abortion at Planned Parenthood: Lancaster, Pennsylvania

“United for Life”

PROBLEM: *Planned Parenthood of the Susquehanna Valley announced in September 1998 that it would begin performing abortions at its Lime Street “health center.” Up to that point, there had been no abortion clinic in Lancaster, PA.*^{1,2}

RESPONSE: Concerned community members organized themselves into Lancaster United for Life (LUFL). Holding strategy sessions over breakfast at a local family restaurant, this group of church leaders, business people, and elected officials spearheaded a multi-pronged effort to keep Lancaster abortion-free.^{2,3}

First, LUFL mobilized Lancaster’s traditionally pro-life community through a campaign of prayer, education, and publicity. The group established a presence at fall farm shows and hosted numerous public events covered by the press, including a January 22 Walk for Life, a ministers’ gathering and walk to Planned Parenthood, public lectures, and prayer.²⁻⁵

To counter Planned Parenthood’s derision that pro-lifers were a “small group,” LUFL began circulating petitions against abortion, which presently have over 30,000 signatures. A local printer

Useful Tool: Zoning Ordinances

A Lancaster judge found that the clinic’s property was not zoned for surgical procedures.



RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

Lancaster, PA

Ingredients

- ◆ Prayer
- ◆ Historically pro-life community
- ◆ Supportive local officials
- ◆ Involvement of churches
- ◆ Sympathetic medical personnel
- ◆ Strong, core leadership group
- ◆ Fund raising potential
- ◆ Proper medical regulations
- ◆ Right zoning circumstances
- ◆ Extensive media coverage

Preparation

Galvanized grassroots. Communicated neighbors’ concern about building codes. Took advantage of a zoning ordinance prohibiting medical procedures. Local hospitals denied Planned Parenthood the Department of Health’s required “transfer agreement”.

Result

Has kept Planned Parenthood from starting abortions since 1998.

donated 10,000 bumper stickers that began appearing all over the community, stating simply, “No Abortion Clinic in Lancaster.”²⁻⁴

The group also received much donated advertising space, included a full page newspaper ad, “Abortion is bad medicine,” signed by 66 local physicians. Demonstrating true compassion for those facing crisis pregnancies, LUFL also promoted alternatives to abortion for Lancaster’s mothers.²⁻⁴

Lancaster United for Life opened a legal front against the abortion clinic as well. Perusing state and local health and zoning laws, pro-life leaders discovered several provisions that they thought might keep abortion out of their city. When the city hesitated to commit to an expensive lawsuit against Planned Parenthood, LUFL hired an attorney that specialized in zoning and conducted an extensive fund raising effort to support the litigation. LUFL advertised its mission and sought donations through phone banks and contacts with physicians' groups and churches, including a campaign asking churches for one dollar per parishioner. Other citizens hosted benefit receptions for the group.^{3,4}

Working within three areas of the law, LUFL has kept Planned Parenthood in court, and out of the abortion business. The key legal roadblock to the initiation of abortion has been a zoning ordinance that prohibits surgical procedures on the clinic's property, which is in a residentially zoned downtown area. Though Lancaster zoning officials initially ruled that zoning laws for the property did not permit abortion, they backed down when Planned Parenthood argued that abortion was a "natural expansion" of its clinic offerings. Lancaster United for Life appealed to the County Court of Common Pleas, which decisively ruled that not only was abortion not permitted on the property, but Planned

Innovative Idea:

66 local physicians signed a full page ad saying "Abortion is bad medicine."

agreements with Planned Parenthood. While Planned Parenthood seeks alternative ways to meet this requirement, the Department of Health has declined to make any certification decision until the zoning case is settled.^{1,3,7,8}

For nearly two years running, the citizens of Lancaster kept abortion out of their community, a success no matter how the court ultimately rules.

Useful Tool:

Health Regulations

Pennsylvania mandates that abortion facilities hold "transfer agreements" with local hospitals for treating abortion complications.



Parenthood might already be violating the zoning code in performing other medical procedures. Planned Parenthood is appealing this decision.^{1,3,6}

In related matters, LUFL also sought to

determine whether Planned Parenthood was violating local building codes. LUFL then gathered the signatures of homeowners and builders who were concerned about these external changes would alter the neighborhood's atmosphere. Though LUFL's two appeals of the building code board's decision proved unsuccessful, this effort helped forestall abortion in Lancaster.^{3,6}

While these legal appeals progressed, Planned Parenthood pursued the permit that the Pennsylvania Department of Health requires of abortion clinics. The Department of Health found that Planned Parenthood failed to meet several requirements that the state places upon abortion facilities. Most salient among these is the provision that all abortion clinics must hold a "transfer agreement" with a hospital within 30 minutes driving distance for the treatment of women suffering complications from abortion. Aware of Planned

Notes

1. Planned Parenthood Federation of America. 6/9/00 *Weekly Report*. www.plannedparenthood.org
2. Ritzel, *World*, 1/22/00.
3. Huber, Jim. Telephone interview. 6/26/00.
4. Lancaster United For Life. Letters and flyers provided by Jim Huber. 6/26/00.
5. O'Connor, *Lancaster New Era*, 1/23/00.
6. Christopher, *Lancaster Intelligencer-Journal*, 2/15/00.
7. Murse, *New Era*, 12/7/99.
8. Johnson, *Intelligencer-Journal*, 12/8/99.



NATIONAL RIGHT TO LIFE
Educational Trust Fund
www.nrlc.org