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The Culture of Life in Focus — Crisis Pregnancy Centers Make Cover of TIME

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TIME magazine is out this week with a cover article on “[The Abortion Campaign You Never Hear About](#).” The magazine’s focus is the work of crisis pregnancy centers and the lead reporter, Nancy Gibbs, gets to the magazine’s real question — are these centers “playing fair?”

Here is how Gibbs introduces the article:

The pregnancy-center clinic, with its new ultrasound machine, has been open only since December, but already the staff can count the women who came in considering an abortion and changed their minds: five women converted, six lives saved, they declare, since one was carrying twins. “They connected,” nurse Joyce Wilson says, recalling the reaction of the women who saw the filmy image of their fetus onscreen. “They bonded. You could just see it. One girl got off the table and said, ‘That’s my baby.’”

“Another got up,” Deborah Wood says, “and said, ‘This changes everything.’”

Wood is the CEO of Asheville Pregnancy Support Services in Asheville, North Carolina, one of the thousands of crisis pregnancy centers in the U.S. that are working to end abortion. Hers is the new face of an old movement: kind, calm, nonjudgmental, a special-forces soldier in the abortion wars who is fighting her battles one conscience at a time. Her center helps women navigate the social-service bureaucracy, sign up for Medicaid and begin prenatal care. She helps pregnant girls find emergency housing if their parents threaten to throw them out. Free pregnancy tests and ultrasounds are just the latest service.

“They’ve been fed these lies, that it’s just a bunch of cells that’s not worth anything,” Wilson says. “But those limbs are moving. That heart is beating. You don’t have to say anything ...” She brings out a black velvet box that looks as if it holds a strand of pearls. Inside are four tiny rubber fetuses, the smallest like a kidney bean with limbs, the biggest about the size of a thumb. This is what your baby looks like, she tells clients; this is about how much it weighs right now. “When we do the ultrasound, we ask the girl how she’s feeling,” Wilson explains. “I ask what she would like to put on the picture for her baby book. One girl put ANGEL. Some put the name they’ve picked out for the baby.” She points to the translucent image on the screen. “One put LITTLE MIRACLE!!!!”

Welcome to what TIME calls the “grassroots abortion war.” An estimated 2,300 crisis pregnancy centers now dot the American landscape — more than the total number of abortion clinics. These centers, whether associated with a national organization or standing alone, reach out to the one-half of all American women who will experience what is so often called an “unplanned pregnancy.” According to TIME, one third of American women will have an abortion before age 45. These centers are working hard to reduce that number by helping women to make the decision to keep their babies.

Nancy Gibbs understands the larger implications of the crisis pregnancy phenomenon:

The latest trend is to convert pregnancy centers into health clinics that offer free pregnancy tests, ultrasounds and testing for sexually transmitted diseases. What they will not offer is referral for birth control. Married clients wanting information on contraception are referred to their own doctor or pastor. But, as Wood explains, most clients are

unmarried, and “the Bible clearly states that sex outside of marriage is against God’s will for our lives.”

That alone is enough to discredit the centers in the eyes of many pro-choice groups, which have always argued that the best way to prevent abortions is to prevent unwanted pregnancies in the first place. They are hoping that with the Democrats in control of Congress, legislation like the Prevention First Act will reduce the need for abortions by promoting comprehensive sex education and expanding access to contraception. At Planned Parenthood clinics, fewer than 1 in 10 clients is there for an abortion; the vast majority are there for birth control and reproductive health care (98% of American women have used contraception at some point in their lives). But because promoting abstinence before marriage is a part of the CPC mission, centers are eligible for federal abstinence-education grants, which in some cases have instantly doubled or tripled their budgets. In 2005, roughly 13% of Care Net affiliates got state or federal money; their average budget was \$155,000.

The growth in the movement has raised other alarms with pro-choice groups. They point out that while counselors at crisis pregnancy centers lay out the physical and psychological risks associated with abortion, they don’t mention that the risk of death in childbirth is 12 times as high and that many women who get abortions experience only relief. Both sides talk about the importance of complete information and informed consent, then argue over what that means. Each side challenges the other’s motives: pro-life activists say abortionists are in business for the money and don’t care about women; pro-choice advocates counter that crisis pregnancy centers are in the business for the ideology and don’t care about women either.

The abortion war has now raged for at least three decades in American life. The legalization of abortion after the *Roe v. Wade* decision in 1973 caught many by surprise. There was no large and influential pro-life movement until near the end of the 1970s, and now the movement refuses to go away. The development of crisis pregnancy centers is a sign of the movement’s maturity — and of the recognition that helping individual women in crisis is just as important as working for legal and social change.

Interestingly, the fact that many crisis pregnancy centers are now using technologies like advanced ultrasounds has revealed new dimensions of the abortion question. The goal of the centers is clear — to help women considering abortion to realize that the life within them is not merely a mass of cells, but a human infant. Many women, given the opportunity to see the amazing images of the baby within them, choose not to abort.

But the emergence of ultrasound technologies in these centers has also revealed the fact that the abortion rights movement does *not* want women to see these images. They complain about the “medicalization” of the centers. Perhaps more amazingly, they argue that the experience of having a baby is often dangerous to a woman’s health — that childbirth is supposedly twelve times more dangerous than an abortion. Dangerous to whom? This is an argument of desperation.

Look also at this section of Gibbs’ report:

The movement toward “medicalizing” the centers particularly concerns groups like Planned Parenthood that define their mission as offering the most accurate information about the most complete range of reproductive options. The motive behind offering free ultrasounds, which would typically cost at least \$100, is more emotional than medical, critics argue, and having them performed by people with limited training and moral agendas poses all kinds of hazards. “What is really tragic to me is that a woman goes into a center looking for information, looking to be able to make a better, healthy choice, and she doesn’t get all the facts,” argues Christopher Hollis, Planned Parenthood’s vice president for governmental and political affairs in North Carolina. “That’s taking someone’s life and playing a really dangerous game with it.”

Note carefully the effort to disguise abortion as “a better, healthy choice.” The only reason a woman would choose not to abort, some pro-abortion advocates seem to say, is that she didn’t “get all the facts.”

The TIME report looks more closely at developments in Asheville, North Carolina as a snapshot of the national reality. But the big story is that TIME saw the crisis pregnancy center phenomenon as a matter of front-cover importance. Christians should be encouraged by this fact and should support these noble efforts.

FOR FURTHER READING: My articles [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).

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