



# Notes For Life

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– Maggie Karner

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**From the Director**

## Restructuring and Life



*An editorial opinion by Maggie Karner, director of Life and Health Ministries with LCMS World Relief and Human Care.*

What impact will the Blue Ribbon Task Force Proposal for restructuring have upon the pro-life witness of the LCMS? Proposal #18 of the plan is the most far-reaching of the proposals as it eliminates all of the ministry boards of the Synod (including the LCMS Board for Human Care which supports and guides the work of LCMS World Relief and Human Care and its program area of LCMS Life Ministries), and more significantly, it replaces them with two boards that report to the

Synod president (not to boards elected by the members of Synod).

Many have suggested that proposal #18 might mean the end of much of the work the Synod is currently doing under the existing structure. The alternative plan proposed by the Blue Ribbon Task Force is to transfer many of these programs to the district level, apparently by asking districts to increase their staff and/or volunteers.

The main reason given by the task force to necessitate this restructuring is financial. However, while alterations to the Synod structure are proposed that include sweeping changes or even possible elimination of much of the work of LCMS World Relief and Human Care (and Life Ministries), the proposal ignores the fact that LCMS World Relief and Human Care receives absolutely no funding from the Synod's unrestricted budget. We rely completely on the generous gifts of individuals and congregations who support the work of LCMS WR-HC directly. In fact, while in the midst of a severe economic downturn, and operating in the middle of a Synod structure that is severely strapped for cash, LCMS World Relief and Human Care has been able to operate well in the black and our organization's financial position is outstanding. This has been possible only because of our wonderful donors and to our fine Board for Human Care which does an excellent job of allowing our organization to build capacity, while remaining thoroughly accountable.

For far too long, the LCMS left their Christian responsibility to initiate this work of educating about the sanctity of human life to the work of the pan-Lutheran organization of Lutherans For Life (LFL). LFL carried that banner boldly for many years beginning in the 1970's and continues to do so to this day, acting with vigor as a voice for life to all Lutherans from a variety of synods. However, it wasn't until the LCMS convention-mandated resolution of 2001 that the Synod took up the responsibility of proclaiming the sanctity of life directly from our offices in St. Louis (through the Board for Human Care) and thereby forming LCMS Life Ministries, that our Synod finally lived up to its calling in this area. While working closely alongside LFL, LCMS Life Ministries has established a number of project-based programs and has instituted and



Mercy forever.

chairs the LCMS Sanctity of Human Life Committee, which was formed by Synod convention and given to LCMS World Relief and Human Care to promote pro-life leadership and guidance in our Synod. Unfortunately, proposal #18 has no plan to deal with, or continue, the Life Committee. After years of solid growth and project development under LCMS World Relief and Human Care, including establishing three international pregnancy centers, LCMS Life Ministries has become a major voice in the domestic and international pro-life movement.

Proposal #18 of the Blue Ribbon Task Force could effectively end this outreach (or, at the very least, diminish its effectiveness) and hinder the vigorous front-line work being done both here and overseas by reducing or eliminating our Synod's arm of mercy (LCMS World Relief and Human Care) which gives our pro-life witness its "muscle."

Many of you may remember Dr. Jean Garton, founder and president emeritus of Lutherans For Life, who now serves as a member of our LCMS Board for Human Care and has tremendous impact upon the witness for life that LCMS Life Ministries is able to proclaim. It is fine leadership like hers that has led LCMS World Relief and Human Care to be at the forefront of discussions of, and advocacy for, life issues.

In addition, much of our work of mercy, such as Life Ministries, must operate on a global level in today's world. We sponsor a number of both domestic and international pro-life projects that necessitate a transcontinental model that seamlessly flows between our U.S. and international partners. Does splitting the work of LCMS World Relief and Human Care that remains after restructuring into "Domestic Mission" and "International Mission" advance the global work of mercy and the pro-life witness of the church?

My greatest fear is that the proposal may have long-term, negative effects to the unified pro-life witness of the LCMS, a witness that is essential for the support, advocacy, and educational message for life. LCMS Life Ministries feels it is vital that this centralized pro-life message must come from synodical leadership itself and not only from district representatives or Recognized Service Organizations such as LFL. We need to ask ourselves honestly, will the restructuring improve Synod's ability to lead, speak, and partner in such a way that God's plan for humankind is advanced and He is honored?

Therefore, we ask delegates to consider prayerfully and with great caution the potential detrimental effects that proposal #18 would have upon the Synod's pro-life ministry — nationally and at the regional/district level.

## The Need for Global Pro-life Outreach

By Maggie Karner  
Director, Life and Health Ministries  
LCMS World Relief and Human Care

Here at home in the United States, the death toll from abortion is staggering ... for all intents and purposes, abortion still remains legal for all nine months — and over 1 million unborn children continue to die *every year* in America.

Thankfully, here in America, we have resources that can address this horrible plague. Maybe you already know that some 1.9 million people each year across our

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#### President Barack Obama

[president@whitehouse.gov](mailto:president@whitehouse.gov)

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Updates on pertinent legislative activities and public policy are available by subscribing to *MercyNotes*, another e-newsletter from LCMS World Relief and Human Care. Subscribe online by registering at [www.lcms.org/enews](http://www.lcms.org/enews). Select *Mercy Notes* from among the "LCMS World Relief and Human Care" newsletters.

nation are assisted by pregnancy resource centers, just like many of you have in your own hometowns. I know I am preaching to the choir when I tell you that they assist with unplanned pregnancies, abstinence counseling and education, community outreach programs and referrals, and public health linkages, among a variety of other services.

And one of the most encouraging facts about the pro-life effort in our country is this: In a country that has had unlimited legal abortion since 1973, there are far more pregnancy resource centers than there are abortion facilities!

But this is what is most stunning of all: All across our nation, the statistics say that 29 of every 30 people engaged in pregnancy center work are volunteers! This amazing, miraculous work is accomplished because of the pure love in people's hearts! This army of volunteers is involved with lay and peer counseling, medical services (including ultrasound and STD testing), center upkeep, fundraising, parenting classes, and programs for healing after abortion.

But too often in America we become so preoccupied with our own culture and fixing our own problems that sometimes we forget the plague of abortion doesn't stop at our shores.

In my work with LCMS World Relief and Human Care, I see the global effects of the abortion culture. The worldwide statistics are staggering. Internationally, every minute 100 women have an abortion, 6,000 every hour, 144,000 every day. This adds up to over 52,000,000 unborn babies who die every year worldwide ... abortion is truly a global plague.

A mother in the Philippines echoed this problem when she said, "I felt guilty, but I thought it was better than having another child that will only suffer because we have no food." Oh ... for a pregnancy resource center in every corner of the world, because the statistics are shocking: Every year over 500,000 women die around the world needlessly during pregnancy or childbirth from easily preventable situations. Oh ... for pregnancy and maternal care programs across the globe, just like those found in almost every major city in America.

A few years ago when I was in Russia, I had tea with some women who were brave enough to share their personal stories with me. I sat there looking into the broken eyes of a young woman ... younger than me, who told me she had already had six abortions. "I thought it was just birth control," she said. "Nobody told me what I was really doing." The woman who sat next to her told me her mother had 12 abortions in her lifetime ... as "birth control." And according to statistics this is common. Post-soviet countries have the highest rate of abortions. And the average Russian woman has had between six and eight abortions in her lifetime. Oh ... for caring, compassionate, committed volunteers who love life. I pray for volunteers who could cover that huge continent of Russia with God's mercy and poke holes in the darkness there.

That's why I am sharing this information with you. With our pro-life work, we can



*Above: LCMS World Relief and Human Care provides grants for projects like this medical center in the Philippines that supports healthy families. Below: Maggie Karner, left, talks with young women about abortion in Novosibirsk, Russia.*

*Staff at the Pregnancy Resource Center in Warner Robins, Ga., donated excess clothing to Maggie Karner (second right) to support the two Lutheran crisis pregnancy centers in Russia.*



start a “wave” of mercy. I know that already, every one of you makes a difference for life in your own small piece of the world. Every one of you models a respect for life in your families and in your neighborhood. Maybe you don’t know it, but you’ve started a wave for life that can have far-reaching effects all across the globe.

I’m sure many of you also support your local pregnancy resource centers in your own hometown. You know that they do incredible work caring for and healing the lives of women and children who come from all segments of this community. In that simple act, you are continuing a bigger wave of mercy that is covering the mountains and the valleys across the United States. And by making you more aware of the global need for pro-life outreach around us, we hope that you will extend that reach across the ocean through organizations like LCMS World Relief and Human Care. We are unified in moving big waters to create a wave for merciful life all around the world. With your support, the wave just keeps getting bigger and bigger! In fact my staff and I recently administered a \$24,000 grant to open a caring pregnancy center in cooperation with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malaysia (see story page 5). Through this grant, LCMS Life Ministries will provide the start-up funding and send mentors on site to assist them with culturally appropriate methods for providing pro-life center outreach and management.

Our international work at LCMS World Relief and Human Care reminds me daily that life issues span a continuum from conception until natural death. There is a lot of “life” in-between those “bookends” that needs God’s grace and mercy. Whether our Mercy Medical Teams are sending doctors into the Nairobi slums to deworm children, finding ways for mothers widowed by AIDS to earn a living, finding housing for single mothers in Brooklyn, or supporting a pregnancy center in Russia; these are all ways to proclaim loud and clear that all life is sacred and precious in the eyes of our Savior.

I find it interesting that the media and other people often categorize “pro-life activists” as those who are out praying and doing sidewalk counseling in front of clinics or working in the local crisis pregnancy center. And in a sense, they are right. Those are certainly the very obvious part of the pro-life “wave”. If a person has the inclination and calling to do those things, that’s great. But I want to encourage you all that simply living out our lives — our vocations — with a pro-life mindset is just as powerful. Sometimes the pro-life wave is moving in less than obvious ways. Being a good parent is pro-life. Telling other people that they are valued and loved by God is pro-life. It is our identity as children bathed in Christ’s redeeming grace and compassion that works as our springboard to a genuine “activism.” This type of activism can start a wave of compassion and love. And that compassion can be wiping the noses and the tears of our own children at home or marching with 300,000 other like-minded pro-life folks to the steps of the Supreme Court during the annual March for Life in Washington, D.C.

Of course, I understand the important place for civic action and our responsibility to speak out publicly for the vulnerable. However, I have never placed my faith in legislative change, but I opt for a lasting change of heart instead. Mercifully and gently, little by little, day by day, hearts are cared for ... and hearts are changed in the process. Arguably, it isn’t very flashy and sometimes doesn’t even have very impressive statistics if you’re looking for numbers. But God grabs hearts. He changes our hearts as we grow in mercy, faith, and compassion in His service. And God grabs at the hearts of the pregnancy center clients who need to see the face of Christ in the midst of their personal crisis. And God does a miracle in those moments. He is there ... right there ... in the merciful eyes of the people who volunteer at pregnancy resource centers — down the street or across the globe.

But we all have our work cut out for us. My work at LCMS World Relief and Human Care has enabled me to see the urgent need for global pro-life work. But God has also used this global problem — and the anti-life culture here at home to remind me of some important truths. If we depend upon the sheer numbers of the death count to be our motivation in pro-life efforts, we will easily be overwhelmed.

I've realized that for Christians concerned primarily with spreading the healing balm of the Gospel, our "work" is — simply — compassion. Compassion that is motivated by the Good News with which we've been entrusted. This Gospel "Good News" motivates us with grace, love, and mercy. This Gospel-driven mercy is the only thing that can prevent us from getting overwhelmed by the darkness and death all around us ... around the world ... or right in our own hometowns.

Martin Luther commented on Psalm 139 saying something I find very refreshing: "Every human ability or power — how we live, what we do, speak, think, wherever and whenever, from where we come and to where we should go — it is all clearly God's work and *art*." God's art. Not my art. God's. That takes some of the pressure off, don't you think?

We don't need to be pressured with the "ought to's" of this work for life. Instead, we are gifted with the privilege of telling the truth and caring passionately about something so fundamental to who we are as Christians and basic to whom we are as humans.

In my view, this is a wonderful time to be exceptionally bold in our pro-life witness. Because, we know that even a small light shines more brightly in the dark. That's why I don't think our pro-life mission has changed at all, despite the change in Washington or even around the world. Our work must still be one baby, one mother, one frightened and needy soul at a time. That is what pro-life work is. That is what Christian mercy looks like.

## Pro-Life Outreach in Asia

### Malaysians Establish Lutheran Pregnancy Resource Center

By Sarah Schafer

LCMS Life Ministries, a ministry of LCMS World Relief and Human Care (WR-HC), is partnering with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malaysia (ELCM), to offer care and counseling to women who believe abortion or "baby dumping" are their only options.

WR-HC awarded a \$24,000 one-year startup grant in April to the ELCM to establish a Lutheran pregnancy resource center in Asia. The Women's Care and Counseling Centre will provide positive life choices and real hope for women by offering health care and referrals, housing and material goods assistance, adoption services, support groups, mentors and peer counseling, parenting classes, and the love and forgiveness of the Gospel.

"The ELCM's outstanding management capacity and strong commitment to *diakonia* — and to this project specifically — made them an ideal choice," said Darin Storkson, Asia regional director with WR-HC.

The grant will cover staff salaries, materials, and utilities, and was made possible by donations from a 2008 Jazz4Life concert in Fort Wayne, Ind., individual gifts, and a \$10,000 challenge grant from Diakonic Foundation of Mesquite, Nev.

"We chose to work with the ELCM for a number of reasons," said Maggie Karner, director of Life and Health Ministries with WR-HC. "One reason was the great need they clearly displayed in their grant proposal."

Abortion is illegal in Malaysia, but Storkson says it is readily available in most Asian countries, whether legally or illegally. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), Asia accounts for 59 percent of the world's abortions, compared with three percent in North America.

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Darin Storkson of LCMS World Relief and Human Care, left, and Bishop Solomon Raja of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malaysia sign a grant agreement to establish the first Lutheran pregnancy resource center in Asia. Behind them are members of the committee that will oversee the center.



The center will be housed in the same building as Good Hope Lutheran Church in Port Klang, Malaysia, near Kuala Lumpur. Congregation members also saw a growing trend of baby dumping in their community, and wanted to do something about it. They will play a large role, referring women to the center and providing counseling services. This summer, LCMS WR-HC staff will provide initial training for all ELCM members involved with the center.

Baby dumping is when a child is abandoned by the mother or another person — perhaps left in trash bins, along rivers, or in other places where they might be found. Members of Good Hope said they want to do something about this practice that often results in the child's death.

“We hope that this first Lutheran pregnancy resource center in Asia can become a model for other partners to start other centers in other areas,” said Storkson. The Asia center was inspired by the success of WR-HC-supported pregnancy resource centers in St. Petersburg and Novosibirsk, Russia, while keeping cultural differences in mind.

The Pregnancy Resource Center of Salt Lake City has “adopted” the center in Asia. “They have provided wonderful support already,” said Karner, who encourages interested LCMS members to support the fledgling center with their financial gifts.

To make a donation for the Women's Care and Counseling Centre, write a check payable to “LCMS World Relief and Human Care,” designating “Asia pregnancy center” on the “memo” line, and mail it to LCMS World Relief and Human Care, P.O. Box 66861, St. Louis, MO 63166-6861; call toll-free at 888-930-4438; or visit <http://givenowlcms.org>.

For more information about LCMS Life Ministries, visit [www.lcms.org/life](http://www.lcms.org/life).

*This article was originally published in Reporter, June 2010.*

## Pro-life Outreach in Russia—Part 1:

### Nastya's Choice: A Russian Story of Hope and Healing

by Olga Ryumina, “Hope” Pregnancy Center and Family Ministry

As a young girl, Nastya grew up in a family of modest intellectuals in Saint Petersburg, Russia. Her parents were Russian scientists and they worked hard. Nastya learned that work ethic from her parents and studied hard to graduate from the university. Everyone thought of her as a “good girl.” She soon got married and worked as an accountant, while her new husband had a good job as a government employee. They lived as all other young families: worked during the day and enjoyed the evenings. They had enough and they lived well.

Following the example of their friends, the spouses became regular visitors at a casino. This became a pattern and led to a gambling addiction. They came to their senses only when there wasn't anything left to gamble with and nowhere to live. Their apartment had already been lost. “Happy” life ended once and for all when Nastya lost her job. Soon, even her husband had disappeared. As it is said in the book of Job, “the joy of the godless is for a moment” (Job 20:5).

Pregnancy is always unexpected at such moments. Nastya learned about her pregnancy while she was in prison, serving a short-term sentence for theft. For many in Russia, an unplanned pregnancy is aborted without hesitation. But Nastya made a firm decision to give birth to this child. With no help from her relatives, she and her baby son, Egor, lived in a cheap apartment for several months. However, she soon found herself



*A children's home in Russia.*

*The late Oleg Ryumin talks with some women in Russia after presenting a lecture on life issues.*



unable to pay even the modest rent. It was a cold, snowy winter already, and they didn't have a place to live. She felt she had only one way to care for her son and make sure he was protected from the cold — to place Egor in a children's home for unwanted babies. She tried to reassure herself that, "It is only for half a year. Then I'll get him back." Even at this point, Nastya still hadn't hit rock bottom. Then the most terrible thing happened — someone robbed her of all her documents. In Russia, without your legal documents you have no identity — you are a "nobody". Nastya wasn't even able to visit her son, Egor, (as she had been doing regularly), because of this.

Nastya had seen the poor homeless girls wandering from shelter to shelter, and now she was one of them. In her depression she decided, "This life is not for me. It is better not to live at all than to live like this!"

But God had a different plan for her. Unexpected help came from somewhere Nastya had never thought to look. Christian charity was completely foreign to Nastya, but someone recommended that she turn to the church for help. She ended up speaking to the pastor in a small Lutheran congregation in the area. She later attended devotions in the little wooden church, and talked at length to the pastor. There she found hope. What's more, everyone in the church constantly prayed for her needs. She started catechesis instruction leading to her confirmation and she prayed to God for her hope of getting her son back. She truly believed that God listened to her as she remembered the passage, "For You are my hope, O Lord God" (Ps.71:5).

According to the recommendation of her pastor, Nastya came to late Oleg Ryumin, the director of "Hope" Lutheran Pregnancy and Family Center. Oleg shared with her the truth that, "The Lord's trials always have a goal. Some day He will show it to us ... And now we only need to believe that God will provide for everything perfectly."

God worked hard on Nastya and kept clearing her life of the trouble and tragedy that seemed to accompany her previous bad choices. She followed the government officials' instructions and tried hard to restore relationships with her relatives and society. After having passed through miles of bureaucratic corridors she succeeded in proving to the government officials that she wasn't an irresponsible person anymore. As you may guess, after a lot of trials, on October 20, Nastya finally regained custody of her baby, and the Lutheran church got two new members – a mother and her son. The child is slowly learning about his new life, picking out of the surrounding noises the words of the joint prayer in worship: "Our Father in heaven! Hallowed be Thy name ..."

Nastya also became part of the Hope Center's Single Mothers Support Project, established and maintained through the generous support of LCMS World Relief and Human Care donors. This project provides ongoing or emergency support for individual mothers and children. Everything from rent, clothing, and shoes for both of them, toys, books, and even legal assistance is available for single mothers in crisis and need. In Nastya's case she received the help of a voluntary lawyer to assist her with regaining her government documents and eventually to regain full custody of Egor. But most importantly, she received the mercy and grace of our Savior to give help, hope, and healing to her life. Thanks to the work of the center and Oleg's work over the years, the Hope Center has provided spiritual support for thousands of women and families just like Nastya. We give special thanks to the donors of LCMS World Relief and Human Care, for this merciful resource that is available to women in the crowded urban St. Petersburg region.

*Editor's note: Oleg Ryumin, the director of Hope Lutheran Pregnancy and Family Center in St. Petersburg, Russia, suddenly passed away November 12, 2009. He was a long-time partner of LCMS World Relief and Human Care. Our comfort comes in knowing he has received the beautiful crown of eternal life and rest at the side of His Savior, Jesus Christ.*

## Pro-life Outreach in Russia—Part 2:

### Russian Family Life: an Interview with Dcs. Gloria Vinogradov

by Rev. Pavel Khramov of the Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church

Recently, in the Lutheran Church of Saint Andrew (Novosibirsk) we baptized little Vsevolod, one-month-old son of Alexei and Gloria Vinogradov. We rejoice about this new citizen of God's Kingdom, and we admire this family, which, according to the laws of our country, officially received a status of a "large family" as Vsevolod is their third child.

The average number of children per family in Russia is about 1.5. Thus three kids make a family large and eligible for different benefits from the government. We asked Gloria about her experience of being the mother of a large family in Russia.



**Q.** Some people say that they cannot "afford" one more child, or even one, and this argument can even move them towards abortions. How does your family look at it?

**A.** A friend of mine once said about this situation: "It's cheaper by the dozen." Our second son, Mikhail, is two years old. Vsevolod "inherited" most of his stuff, we just needed to buy a stroller. Growth of our family stimulated us to look for additional income (my husband Alexei has found a second job) and for new ways to cut our expenses. So, the bigger family inspired us to grow, to move further.

**Q.** Are governmental benefits helpful?

**A.** Not so much as we'd like them to be. For example, kids from a large family are eligible for free meals at school, but here, in Novosibirsk, there is one more condition. We need to get a statement from a social welfare bureau that we are a family with low income, being a large family is not enough here.

**Q.** Some people think that they should give their children "everything" or "the best." That's why one child is the maximum they can care for. What do you think?

**A.** "Everything" sounds very loose. Sometimes parents mean: a new computer, a new cell phone, one of the most expensive schools, trips abroad and so on. But I doubt whether all of this is absolutely necessary. Does material well-being make children happy?

**Q.** Do you see a difference between the first and the third child?

**A.** With my oldest daughter, Margarita, I started to feel real joy and easiness only after two years. Before that it was duty and hard work. With Mikhail it came after one year. Now I really enjoy being mother of all of my children. The only difficulty is to share time and attention among them.

In 2004-2005, Gloria studied in the deaconess program at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind. After returning to Siberia, she ran the "Hope Centre" for two years (2005-2007) where pregnant women in difficult situations were advised and helped to keep their children.

Gloria's personal experience helped her be a good leader. When she was pregnant with her daughter, her first husband left her. It was a very hard time for her, and some "well-wishers" advised her to have an abortion as a way to escape the hardships of being a single mother. But for Gloria it was never the way. And now, when a lot of people in Russia think that you need to be crazy to have three children, Alexei and Gloria prove that "sanctity of human life" are not empty words to them.

## Pro-life Outreach in Germany—Part 1:

### March for Life in Berlin

by Dcs. Rachel Mumme, WR-HC Special Coordinator in Germany

“*Abtreibung ist Frauenrecht. Bei Pro-Life da wird mir schlecht.*” (Abortion is a woman’s right! Pro-life makes me sick!) shouted hundreds of angry protestors lining the route for the March for Life along *Unter den Linden* in Berlin, Germany. The look of hatred and anger would have been enough to convey their message, but the words they spat at the silent marchers communicated even more clearly. “*Kein Gott, Kein Staat, Kein Patriarchat!*” [No God, No State, No Patriarchy!] More than 30 police trucks with hundreds of police in



Participants in Berlin’s March for Life approach St. Hedwig’s Cathedral, where there was an ecumenical service following the march.

riot gear lined the march route, heightening the emotional fervor already hanging so thick in the air. “*Hätt’ Maria abgetrieben, wärt’ ihr uns erspart geblieben.*” (If Mary had aborted her baby, we wouldn’t have to put up with you Christians!) Never had I felt so hated, so disdained, so misunderstood. I felt like so much of the anger and hatred was misdirected, or at least not fully informed. I felt forced into a box that didn’t fit. Pro-life? Yes. A fundamentalist opposed to women’s rights? No.

On September 26, 2009, around 1,300 people met at 1 p.m. in the center of Berlin at *Alexanderplatz* to take part in a march to show their support for human life at all stages, especially for unborn children. The march, called “March for Life,” was organized mainly by the German Association for the Right to Life, a group that seeks to change the German laws to make abortions less readily available. Many, if not most, of the organizations that make up this group are connected to a Christian church body. The marchers were made up of men and women, young and old, some mothers even pushing strollers. After an hour of speeches, introductions, greetings, and some singing, the marchers began to make their way toward the route along *Unter den Linden*, a major thoroughfare in Berlin, which was closed specifically for this event. Marchers dressed in dark clothing, carrying white crosses, and walked the route silently; the crosses to signify those babies who were killed before they were born, and the silence to remember that those children and all of the unborn don’t have a voice. The route wasn’t long — not quite a mile — but silent it was not.

The protestors, around 500–600 strong, had met across the square at Alexanderplatz at 12:45 p.m. in order to organize their protest against the March for Life. In opposition to the dark dress of the marchers, the protestors dressed in loud clothing with voices to match. Some showed up in clown suits with a clerical collar and large cross. Some came dressed in drag. Others played drums and blew whistles. “The protest was also supported by a samba band and by clowns, who did not show up this time as a clown army, but rather dressed up as boxes and cartons with a flap near the stomach. One participant stated, ‘Boxes are much more practical than women. They don’t have their own opinion, they don’t speak and you can do whatever you want with their insides.’”<sup>1</sup>

Gradually the protestors made their way into the pro-life crowd during the speeches and introductions, disrupting the speakers with whatever means possible. People were shouting, blowing whistles, catcalling, and flipping off the presenters. Some tossed inflated condoms around like a beach ball, and dildos were waved like lighters at a concert. Signs and banners were raised high, accusing the marchers of being homophobic, opposed to women’s rights, and fundamentalists while proclaiming themselves to be anti-fascist or feminist.

On the pro-life stage, one brave young woman told her compelling story of being born despite her mother’s attempt to abort her. Eight years ago, she was surprised to find out that she was pregnant and went to a doctor for help. The doctor advised her to act quickly, get the consultation she needed, and make an appointment for an abortion.<sup>2</sup> She did so and struggled for years afterward, having realized that she killed her baby. She remarked that if someone had told her the facts about the life that had

1 [www.jungewelt.de/2009/09-28/039.php](http://www.jungewelt.de/2009/09-28/039.php)

2 In Germany, abortion is illegal, but can be had up to the twelfth week without penalty or punishment. A woman must receive consultation from an official organization and then wait three days before getting the abortion.

*A police barrier and protesters on the square in front of the Cathedral.*

been growing inside of her, she would have made a different decision. As one might imagine, the protesters in the crowd grew angrier as she spoke and yelled, jeered, and made obscene gestures while she was on stage. Her speech was the most convincing — and the most hated — because she did not use religious platitudes to convey her story: what she hoped for was truthful information for those who are considering an abortion.



As the march began, and the white crosses were being distributed to the marchers, some of the protesters also lined up to get crosses, some successfully, some unsuccessfully. All day I had been pondering the idea, “What about those who wish to participate and are not Christian? Would they choose to carry a white cross? Where is the place for non-Christians in such a demonstration?” Some protesters did end up with a cross, decorated it with condoms, and ran to the front of the march, cheering in victory for what they had taken. Some protestors nabbed a cross and held it upside down while joining the growing protest surrounding the marchers. As the protestors yelled and screamed their hateful slogans, I thought about what such behavior actually accomplishes. Lumping all of the marchers into categories like “women haters,” “fundamentalists,” or “patriarchists” seems only to put labels on people where they can then be categorically judged. Yet, doesn’t this happen in the other direction, as well? Think on the phrases “baby-killers,” “liberals,” and “feminists.” Labels and boxes make it easier for us to keep others at an arms length, avoiding conversation and instead making assumptions about beliefs or behavior. What would happen if we actually talked with one another?

While the marchers’ motto was “1,000 Crosses for Life,<sup>3</sup>” the protesters’ goal was “1,000 Crosses in the Spree.<sup>4</sup>” Of the 1,000 crosses handed out that day, about one dozen were taken and thrown into the river, much to the delight of the protesters. At one point, the march simply stopped; later we found out that some protestors had blocked the march route and had to be physically moved out of the way by the police. One of the protesters even lit a Bible on fire and threw it at the feet of the first marchers, sending a clear message of their view of the Bible. Interestingly, this happened at *Bebelplatz* where in 1933 the National Socialists burned thousands of books considered “un-German.<sup>5</sup>” An ecumenical service at St. Hedwig’s Cathedral followed the march, and police were in full force both inside and outside of the building.

While I’ve not yet participated in the March for Life in Washington D.C., I can only imagine that this march in Berlin was quite different. Vocal protesters, armed police, hateful shouting: these are perhaps unique to the German experience. Yet the idea that is common in both countries is that opposition to abortion is portrayed as a so-called Christian issue. As a Christian, one might argue that their pro-life stance is indeed based on the Word of God, and that’s a good start! Yet when we consider the crosses, prayers, and church services that often surround pro-life activities, the very nature of these elements excludes anyone who is not a Christian. If abortion continues to remain an issue that only Christians can speak out against by quoting Bible passages, it seems that making strides in the political realm and in conversations with those who do not believe the Bible to be the inerrant Word of God will be all but impossible.<sup>6</sup> Our challenges, then, are to find ways to advocate and speak for the unborn in a way that can be heard by more than our LCMS or other Christian friends, indeed, by those who stand in support of abortion rights; to engage our communities in conversations based on facts about the beginning of life, about abortion, and post-abortion trauma; and to look for ways to draw in pro-life supporters who hold a different confession or none at all. Whether in Germany, the United States, or in other parts of the world, it is time for all those on the side of life to raise our voices together, making joint efforts to protect the lives of unborn children.

3 This number is intended to signify the 1,000 babies that are aborted each workday in Germany. The official statistical figure for abortions in 2008 was 114,484. Experts, however, estimate this number to be about half of what the real figure probably is.

4 The Spree is the river that cuts through the center of Berlin. The march crossed the Spree in order to get to the final destination of the cathedral.

5 Today, a memorial of empty bookshelves lies underground at that spot with a quotation from Heinrich Heine, “Where they have burned books, they will in the end burn people.”

6 See article from Uwe Siemon-Netto, [www.virtueonline.org/portal/modules/news/article.php?storyid=9179](http://www.virtueonline.org/portal/modules/news/article.php?storyid=9179)

## Pro-life Outreach in Germany—Part 2:

### Euthanasia and Eugenics During Nazi Germany; Thoughts from a Modern-Day German Pastor

by Rev. Stefan Suess, July, 2009

*The Naëmi-Wilke Memorial Hospital and Foundation in Guben is a hospital and Lutheran diakonal church foundation in the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany (SELK). In 1874, Naëmi Wilke, the 13-year-old daughter of a Guben factory owner, died of typhus, devastating her parents. Four years later, they started a Lutheran children's hospital and foundation in the hope that no child in the area would ever have to die from typhus or other treatable diseases. Since its inception, the foundation has also been a place for deaconesses to be trained and to serve. At its high point, over 90 deaconesses were a part of the Motherhouse in Guben, the town on the Polish border home to this hospital. The hospital has taken on different forms in its over 125 year history, but has always remained an institution of the church, and is now the SELK's largest hospital and Lutheran diakonic institution.*

*This article, written by the rector of the hospital, Rev. Stephen Süß, delves into euthanasia during Hitler's rise to power leading up to and during World War II. It shows how seemingly small measures were implemented early on to prevent people with certain illnesses or problems from procreating, and how this led to larger and more brutal results. It also raises questions about the role of the church in challenging ethical and political situations and points to the leadership of brave men who stood on the side of life.*

### The Dignity of Man is Inviolable

On May 30, 1940, 32 disabled young women and children were removed from the Naëmi-Wilke Memorial Hospital and Foundation. The decree ordered by the government was this: "To uniformly regulate the accommodations and care of the mentally deficient residents." Who could have actually known at this time that this was a matter of a meticulously planned and strictly watched secret for the annihilation of "lives unworthy of life" [*lebensunwertes leben*]? There were rumors. There were speculations. There were even statistical anomalies known to a few people in the country. But could one actually guess that the German State of Law could degenerate into an unjust state?

Due to the experiences of the collective injustices in the Third Reich and of the protection of the State of Law, the following portentous article, among other things, was deliberately recorded in the Constitution in 1949: "The dignity of man is inviolable. To respect and protect it shall be the duty of all public authority" (Article 1.1).

The dignity of man shall be protected from now on as "directly enforceable law" (Article 1.3). Never again should other people be allowed to classify human life as livable (*lebenswert*) or unlivable (*lebensunwert*). Since this time it has been fundamentally regarded that one cannot acquire human dignity; one has human dignity, because one is human.

In principle there is a broad consensus in Germany to this end. Nevertheless, this principle is constantly at risk. That may sound contradictory. As always in life, the principle proves itself in the details. How do we think about and relate to people who are chronically ill, those whose lot is a life with a disability, those who have become old and have dementia? How do we think about and relate to the protection of unborn human life?

Euthanasia became possible due to a long history that prepared its way. It began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with medical eugenics positioning itself scientifically. Eugenics, however, has the axiom that there fundamentally exists inferior life. Wherever this kind of thinking is allowed, there a gateway for further, more destructive deeds will be opened. What begins in minds ends in discrimination and — as experienced — also in physical obliteration.

### Eugenics and Forced Sterilizations

In 1883 the Englishman Francis Galton (1822-1911) introduced the term eugenics into the scientific discussion. With it, he initially indicated the "tenet of good inherited predispositions." This tenet was directed toward protecting human genetic material from degeneration and damages. One could differentiate the "positive eugenics", which were understood as the advancement of the

#### Resources on the Web

- C-FAM (Catholic Family and Human Rights Institute): [www.c-fam.org](http://www.c-fam.org)

C-FAM is a non-partisan, non-profit research institute dedicated to re-establishing a proper understanding of international law, protecting national sovereignty and the dignity of the human person. They monitor and affect the social policy debate at the United Nations and other international institutions.

best possible development of good inherited predispositions, from the “negative eugenics”, which were directed toward active abolishment of offspring with hereditary diseases. Eugenics prepared the “scientific” soil for birth control, forced sterilization, and putting disabled people into asylums.

This way of thinking, embellished with the adjective “scientific” and putting itself forward as humane, created the premise according to which one can even think within the categories of health and hereditary sickness in the sense of human beings having full or less than full personal worth. This thinking paved the way for later euthanasia. At the same time it was the breeding ground in which the National Socialists could plant their “racial hygiene”<sup>7</sup> (A. Ploetz 1895).

The “Law for the Prevention of Hereditarily Diseased Offspring” was enacted in July 1933, the year the National Socialists seized power, and in its implementation led to the far-reaching forced sterilizations of people categorized as hereditarily diseased.



At that time this law was received so uncritically, as is shown even in religious statements and further in the uncritical cooperation of religious institutions with regard to sterilizations. The leadership of the Naëmi-Wilke Memorial Hospital and Foundation at that time had no principled ethical objections to these measures. In the hospital of the foundation, forced sterilizations were carried out every year based on this legal regulation. All told, around 126 people categorized as hereditarily diseased — both men and women — were affected, as was later proved.

## Euthanasia

Already in 1929, at the Nuremberg political convention, Hitler called for “elimination of 700,000 – 800,000 of the weakest”. In 1933 when he came to power, “racial hygiene” in the sense of “social Darwinism” remained the internal political goal. In the summer of 1939, in a secret discussion, Philip Bouhler, the head of Hitler’s private chancellery was instructed by Hitler to initiate a program “Mercy Death” [*Gnadentod*], in order to eliminate people with hereditary illnesses. Backdated to September 1, 1939, the beginning of World War II, Hitler enacted his order on private letterhead of the “*Führer*”. That was the only legal basis in the German judicial system that illegally overruled the law currently in effect. Even in the German Empire in and of itself, life was legally protected.

*A copy of the “Führer’s Order” from September 1, 1939: “Reich Leader Bouhler and Dr. Brandt are charged with the responsibility for expanding the authority of physicians, to be designated by name, to the end that patients considered incurable according to the best available human judgment of their state of health, can be granted a mercy death.”*

[A full copy of the order may be found at: [http://de.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Datei:Aktion\\_brand.jpg&filetimestamp=20080310193322](http://de.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Datei:Aktion_brand.jpg&filetimestamp=20080310193322)]

## Action T-4

In a villa in the *Tiergartenstrasse 4* in Berlin, the special headquarters for the action were established. The secret action later got its name from this address – T 4.

<sup>7</sup> Often labeled a form of scientific racism, it is the selection, by a government, of the putatively most physical, intellectual and moral persons to raise the next generation (selective breeding) and a close alignment of public health with eugenics. (wikipedia)

On October 9, 1939, the Imperial Ministry of Health ordered all rehabilitation and care centers in question to provide a list of particular patients by means of a registration form. Thereupon, there were detailed specifications to be made with regard to sickness and ability to work. In one enclosed leaflet, the *criteria for the selection of the victims* were provided:

- Schizophrenia, epilepsy, encephalitis, mental retardation, paralysis, Huntington's disease, people with senile dementia or other neurological terminal conditions, in those cases where patients cannot do any work, or just work involving simple manual tasks.
- People who were already in the institution for more than five years.
- Those who were criminally "insane."
- People who did not hold German citizenship, or were not "of German or related blood."

The affected institutions were left in uncertainty about the actual purpose of this survey and were simply referred to the necessity for a financial planning survey. The return of the registration forms was handed over to the T-4 main office.

Three evaluators decided with a red '+' for death and a blue '-' for life. Those finally responsible were two evaluators in the T-4 main office, who decided about life and death for people they had never seen. The registration forms for the sick slated to die were subsequently given over to the "Gekrat," the non-profit motor vehicle association, who organized their removal.

### Incidents in the Naëmi-Wilke Memorial Hospital and Foundation

On May 30, 1940 the drama of the first removal began for the work with people with disabilities in the Naëmi-Wilke Memorial Hospital and Foundation. The action was announced with an express letter on the evening of May 29, with a reference to "uniformly regulate the accommodations and care of the mentally deficient residents." The short notice left no room for intervention. Together with the death reports that followed, bewilderment and horror dominated. Dr. Jacobskötter, the head of the foundation at that time, received this sobering answer from the Central Committee for Interior Mission upon his inquiry:

Similar incidents to the one you reported from the institution are also familiar to us from other institutions. Unfortunately, we are not in a position to be helpful to you and we also do not believe that an appeal from your side will have success. Heil Hitler!

In Brandenburg, one of the six institutions of death organized especially for this purpose in the German Reich, 9,772 people were murdered in 1940-41, the time when this action "Mercy Death" was operating. Among these were the women and children of the Naëmi-Wilke Memorial Hospital and Foundation. Altogether, this T-4 Action took the lives of more than 70,000.

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*Maggie Karner speaks about medical ethics with students in Poland. The students' family members were alive when the Auschwitz concentration camp was active. Learn more about having someone speak to your group about various life topics on page 14.*



## Was opposition possible?

Naturally, one asks the question, “was it possible to prevent this?” Opposition in a dictatorial system is always dangerous.

Opposition required first of all one’s own clear position in the question of eugenics. Here, one can resort back to the long theological debates of church history, to the biblical teaching of people, and thereby especially to the fifth commandment with the fundamental commandment against murder as well as the command of Christ to receive the sick and needy (Matt. 25). Even today, it is a theological basis for a well-grounded enmity to every form of euthanasia.

But even with an explicit theological stance, it was then not even imaginable that the constitutional state could be in a position to organize such a crime. Nonetheless, the administrative proceeding took place legally. Even institutions run by the church had no “right of ownership” to those for whom they were caring. There were many places to cast doubt, but the authority of the state was not the first place such would be done. First, through the cluster of death notices and correlative reports from the entire Reich, it came to be seen, especially in the Central Committee for Interior Mission, that it was apparently possible that this could indeed be a matter of a planned action of annihilation. Protests from the state church or even from the religious charities were missing all the same. It was individual people who raised their voices that brought the T-4 Action to a stop. People like Paul Gerhardt Braune, the director of the Hoffnungstaler Anstalten in Lobetal (Valley of Hope Institution in Lobetal, Germany<sup>8</sup>) near Berlin, who made a case against euthanasia in his expose. Then there was Clemens August Kardinal Graf von Galen in Muenster, who preached against euthanasia in his sermons, which were quickly published and distributed. Or people like Lothar Kreyszig, who was the only German judge to file charges against Philipp Bouhler, the head of Hitler’s private chancellery.

“Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute” (Prov. 31:8). This is the leading motto for the Naëmi-Wilke Memorial Hospital and Foundation. We are bound by the will of God to protect life in every instance – the human life that God endowed and redeemed – especially to protect that life against governmental force. Here, God must be obeyed more than men.

<sup>8</sup> Translator’s Note: This institution was founded by Friedrich von Bodelschwingh in 1905, the same pastor who founded the institution “Bethel” to help those sick with epilepsy as well as others who needed help. He is often seen as one of the fathers of diakonic work in Germany.

## Did You Know?

### Life Speakers Available

Speakers from the LCMS Sanctity of Life Committee are available to speak to your church or organization on a variety of life topics. Check out our list of speakers and topics [here](#) or contact Maggie Karner at [Maggie.karner@lcms.org](mailto:Maggie.karner@lcms.org), 800-248-1930, ext. 1371.

## Coming up

In the next issue of *Notes for Life*, take a look at the life implications of U.S. health care reform. Not a subscriber? [Subscribe now](#) to receive this free quarterly e-mail newsletter.

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