

LUTHERANS FOR LIFE: It's special!

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OUTLINE--LUTHERANS FOR LIFE: It's special!

Introduction

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A miracle it was--life evolving without any help from her, a miracle of God. It had surprised her, when she first learned that she was pregnant, that already her baby, at four weeks, was beginning to form internal organs--heart, liver, digestive system, brain, and lungs. The heart was already beating, although too faint to be heard. All this in a baby no bigger than a quarter of an inch in length! She had marked the measurement on her ruler. At six weeks, when she had move the mark to half an inch, it thrilled her to know that her baby now had arms and legs. By week seven the ears and eyelids were forming, the internal organs moving into place, and the embryo floating in a bag of waters. Now, as she entered the fourth month, she marked two and one half inches on her ruler and tried to imagine the fetus, with fingers and toes, tiny nails beginning to show, hair starting to grow on a tiny head, and teeth beginning to form within the gums. How she wished she knew whether the baby was a boy or girl! Oh, the wonder of it all!!

Being of the male gender it is hard, virtually impossible, to associate with a pregnancy. Being of the male gender the closest one gets to a pregnancy is being readily able to identify any woman that is pregnant and not much more. Being a father is a different situation however.

By God's grace "we" are pregnant. We rejoiced over the news that we received in mid-January that my wife, Christina, was pregnant. Yet I have trouble associating with the idea that "we" are pregnant; a point the any good gynecologist will make. I don't fatigue as easily as she does now. I don't need the extra vitamin and mineral supplements that she takes now. I don't fall victim to the occasional dizzy spells and black-outs that she succumbs to. Indeed, I am not pregnant in the sense that my wife is, but I still am. I know that the fetus inside her will also be my future first son or daughter. I feel the care and concern for that unborn child in my wife as she feeds it and rests for it and exercises for it also. I love that developing embryo as I caress my wife's womb and talk to it and try names out on it.

It seems painfully obvious that a wife and husband would naturally care for their unborn baby. But we are among a fellowship where such a concern is shared and strengthened.^{ed} A fellowship that realizes there is a nine month miracle going on inside of every pregnant woman. A fellowship that knows and cares and loves the unborn and born alike, understanding that each are equally gifts of a loving and gracious God. A fellowship that listens and helps and educates worried and frightened, Christian and non-Christian, young and old, married and unmarried, contented and unsure mothers. That fellowship rallies under the banner of "Lutherans for Life". What is it that sets Lutherans for Life apart? What is it that makes Lutherans for Life special?

Lutherans for Life is special by the confession of Lutheranism it holds and professes. The Christian Church does confess many doctrines and beliefs with unanimity; the chief being that Christ is the God-man come to this earth as the one and only Savior for sinful man. The doctrine of Christ is the Christian Church. Unfortunately, though, the Christian Church does not have a unanimity in the area of the right to life of the unborn, the heritage and future of the Christian Church. Dr. Daniel G. Macquire, a Catholic theologian and professor at Marquette University, Milwaukee, leaves precious little ~~about~~^{hope} that the life of the unborn is precious. In the article, "Abortion: A Question of Catholic Honesty" in the September 14, 1983 issue of Christian Century, Dr. Macquire notes that the National Conference of Catholic Bishops has reversed itself in a recent pastoral letter opposing nuclear armaments, but the same bishops refuse to give consideration to an alternative to the church's anti-abortion stance. Macquire then makes a plea to his church to reconsider its position on abortion. His argument is based on

the assumption that his church's current stand is not moral. He writes, "As a Catholic theologian I find this situation abhorrent and unworthy of the richness of the Roman Catholic traditions that have nourished me."² This is by no means a characterization of the Roman Catholic Church as a whole. This is, however, dangerous, to say the least, when a leader, a shepherd, a teacher with such authority and clout within a Christian Church writes statements of such precedence. Undoubtedly this idea, with shocking little regard for the unborn, has found a home in a church that bears the name "Christian".

By God's grace alone the gift of the unborn which is truly a gift of God is an expression of the Word of God and thus our Lutheran heritage and thus our Lutheran Confessions and thus Lutherans for Life.

The Word of God teaches that human life is a gift of God; that He alone has the right to create and terminate it; and that He gives it as a time of grace, in which souls, lost and condemned by nature, might be brought to faith in Christ as their Savior and won for eternal life... (it) acknowledges and accepts the Holy Scripture of the Old and New Testament... (and) all the confessional writings of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, contained in the Book of Concord of the year 1850, as true and genuine expositions of the doctrines of the Bible.³

The care and concern for the unborn that is Lutherans for Life is only an echo of our confessional forefather, Martin Luther. Luther understood the words of Scripture as they beautifully expressed the wonder of birth, the responsibility and privilege of parents, and our purpose as we carry out the command and promise of a loving God.

Luther laments the fact that because giving birth is "a daily phenomenon" we lose our sense of awe and our appreciation for the fact that every birth involves a miracle.

Thus it is a great miracle that a small seed is planted and that out of it grows a very tall oak. But because these are daily occurrences, they have become of little importance, like the very process of our procreation. Surely it is most worthy of wonder that a woman receives semen, that this semen becomes thick and, as Job elegantly said (Job 10:10), is congealed and then is given shape and nourished until the fetus is ready for breathing air. When the fetus has been brought into the world by birth, no new nourishment appears, but a new way and method: from the two breasts, as from a fountain, there flows milk by which the baby is nourished. All these developments afford the fullest occasion for wonderment and are wholly beyond our understanding, but because of their continued recurrence they have come to be regarded as commonplace, and we have verily become deaf to this lovely music of nature.⁴

Luther expresses an exact reflection of the attitude of Lutherans for Life. That we don't merely yawn as God brings into this world baby after baby around this country and around this world. That we don't merely yawn at the fact the pro-choice legislation is entrenched in Supreme Court rulings and is finding a broad definition in abortion laws that are sweeping through state governments. That we don't merely yawn at the fact that for every five babies born alive, one is aborted. Abortion thrives only in climate that has lost that sense of awe and reverence for God as the Creator and Author of life. First people lose their respect for God and His Word and then they lose respect for themselves in wasting their heritage.

Life has a purpose. Life is a time of grace. We don't rob ourselves of that precious gift and we dare not rob a defenseless unborn baby of it either. In life we have been given a possession that not only may benefit us personally and others on the face of this earth, but also will be our highest good as we receive the blessing of salvation here and realize it hereafter. In life we also have the high honor and duty to our children to also receive God's grace in their life and realize it in their eternal life. As Lutherans our time of grace is

seen as only another assurance of God's grace for all people. As Lutherans for Life the time of grace is a gift that must be given by us in seeing to the birth of every child (as far as is humanly possible) as it is given by God as a promise already at conception. Luther states this as he encourages us to lift our sight on the full picture in the meaning and purpose of life.

Alas, must I rock the baby, wash its diapers, make its bed, smell its stench, stay up nights with it, take care of it when it cries, heal its rashes and sores, and on top of that care for my wife, provide for her, labor at my trade, take care of this and take care of that, do this and do that, endure this and endure that, and whatever else of bitterness and drudgery married life involves? What, should I make such a prisoner of myself? O you poor, wretched fellow, have you taken a wife? Fie, fie upon such wretchedness and bitterness! It is better to remain free and lead a peaceful, carefree life; I will become a priest or a nun and compel my children to do likewise.

What then does Christian faith say to this? It open its eyes, looks upon all these insignificant, distasteful, and despised duties in the Spirit, and is aware that they are all adorned with divine approval as with the costliest gold and jewels. It says, 'O God, because I am certain that thou hast created me as a man and hast from my body begotten this child, I also know for a certainty that it meets with thy perfect pleasure. I confess to thee that I am not worthy to rock the little babe or wash its diapers, or be entrusted with the care of the child and its mother. How is it that I, without any merit, have come to this distinction of being certain that I am serving the creature and thy most precious will? O how gladly will I do so, though the duties should be even more insignificant and despised. Neither frost nor heat, neither drudgery nor labor, will distress or dissuade me, for I am certain that it is thus pleasing in thy sight.

A wife too should regard her duties in the same light, as she suckles the child, rocks and bathes it, and cares for it in other ways; and as she busies herself with other duties and renders help and obedience to her husband. These are truly golden and noble works. This is also how to comfort and encourage a woman in the pangs of childbirth, not by repeating St. Margaret legends and other silly old wives' tales but by speaking thus, 'Dear Grete, remember that you are a woman, and that this work of God in you is pleasing to him. Trust joyfully in his will, and let him have his way with you. Work with all your might to bring forth the

child. Should it mean your death, then depart happily, for you will die in a noble deed and in subservience to God. If you were not a woman you should now wish to be one for the sake of this very work alone, that you might thus gloriously suffer and even die in the performance of God's work and will. For here you have the word of God, who so created you and implanted within you this extremity.' Tell me, is not this indeed as Solomon says (Prov 18:22) 'to obtain favor from the Lord,' even in the midst of such extremity?5

Indeed, Luther emphasizes the position of a parent by highlighting the fact that every task performed for a helpless child is a service offered to an omniscient God. Luther stresses the fact that a faithful Christian should not only be zealous of being a faithful Christian parent but also desirous of the blessing of being a parent at all.

Today you find many people who do not want to have children. Moreover, this callousness and inhuman attitude, which is worse than barbarous, is met chiefly among the nobility and princes, who often refrain from marriage for this one single reason, that they might have no offspring. It is even more disgraceful that you find princes who allow themselves to be forced not to marry, for fear that the members of their house would increase beyond a definite limit. Surely such men deserve that their memory be blotted out from the land of the living. Who is there who would not detest these swinish monsters? But these facts, too, serve to emphasize original sin. Otherwise we would marvel at procreation as the greatest work of God, and as a most outstanding gift we would honor it with the praises it deserves.6

These are very strong words by Martin Luther, but yet they are words that need to be spoken. This quotation more clearly speaks of birth control, but the attitudes are just as prevalent in the flippant attitudes toward abortion. This quotation is spoken to the careless and despising people of Luther's day yet apply to those same weak arguments that are still heard today. God told Adam and Eve to "be fruitful and multiply". That does not destroy the earth but use the riches and richness of the earth for your support and the support of your neighbor within reason. Children are included in that divine command. Children

are not a burden or a drain or a fear for as we look to preserve and conserve this world. Children are a gift, the greatest work of God. This is a message that must be heard in a world that has been overwhelmed by torrents of humanism and materialism with our children, more importantly our unborn children, becoming the unwitting victims. Human birth is but a few of God's mystifying miracles which He allows people to witness from inception to fruition. Parents are blessed as witnesses. God is gracious in allowing parents to take part in His plan. This is a message that is being spoken by faithful Christians, faithful Lutherans who are concerned for life.

Lutherans for Life is special by allowing no substitute for the personal approach of their help. It would be fair to say that our fellowship is rather new in the field of social concern. The primary focus of our church and our Synod is the welfare of the soul as it always should be. The unborn, though, could not be ignored. The purpose is to take specific steps in the direction of a positive answer to the abortion problem. Just try to convince fellow citizens that there ought to be a law against open abortion is certainly not going to solve the problem. Unwanted pregnancies would legally continue before enactment of the law and illegally and unsafely continue after enactment. The law would not help the people with the problem. That is something we as Lutherans have done about abortion. We are helping those need help, both mother and child, and not simply closing our eyes to the problem in the hopes that it will disappear. As Jesus befriended and ministered to the publicans and sinners, we, His disciples, follow His example. Instead of speaking more clearly for those who have a weak

voice, concerned Lutherans speak for those who have no voice and God has blessed that concern.

Lutherans for Life have set up counseling operations in nine locations around the country with more in the planning stages. One, though, that is unique is the Lutherans for Life counseling center in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. Fond du Lac is a medium-sized town with a population of 35,000 people. There was no crying need for a pro-life counseling center in town; women were not lining up around the block for abortions. Yet there were signs. In a five-year period starting in 1977, there was a significant increase in abortions performed at the only hospital in Fond du Lac, St. Agnes Hospital. There were certainly more abortions performed for area residents with other hospitals serving the Fox River Valley. Another startling development was a sharp increase in pre-marital pregnancies in the area in direct proportion with the abortion rise from available statistics. In order to stem the tide and pool the resources of concerned area Lutherans an organizational meeting ^{was held} at Faith Evangelical Lutheran Church in Fond du Lac in February 1982 with the other Lutheran churches of the city invited. The purpose of the meeting was to realize the hope of establishing a monthly meeting schedule with the formation of a speaker bureau. This is the primary step of beginning a means of education for fellow WELS members so they might be able to help an individual in a given situation.

Their work in Fond du Lac found God-given success. Early in 1983 the goals of the fledgling group began to change for the better as they expanded their horizons of outreach. A full-time operating Pregnancy

Counseling Center was the aim and that aim was achieved as the doors of the center at 10 4th Street Court opened in October of 1983.

The blessing have been bountiful on this chapter of Lutherans for Life. The organization has an annual budget of \$18,000 with a volunteer work force of over 50 and an outreach to several hundred each year. The chapter meets every other month with an educational meeting. They serve as an educational service to WELS congregations of the area. A speaker bureau which gives presentations to organizations within local churches has proved to be informational and useful. The bureau also has given presentations to grade schools on the topic of abortion. The center also sponsored a Pro-Life Week at Winnebago Lutheran Academy, an area Lutheran high school, in order to instruct the impressionable students on options and procedures in the case of an unwanted pregnancy. The week culminated in a rally for students, parents, and all other interested parties with people attending from Appleton and Manitowoc as well as Fond du Lac. Presentations were given concerning medical viewpoints on abortion, counseling techniques, the trauma of abortion and what is going on in Planned Parenthood. The keynote speaker for the day was Professor Wayne Mueller presenting his paper, "God's Plan for Parenthood". Already there are firm plans for a midsummer event called "Kids Day" when members of the area WELS churches will be invited to celebrate the blessing of God's gift of children.

Education, information, and special events are an important part of the center but the main thrust of the chapter is the day-to-day operation of the center. Six days per week the center is open. Counselors can choose whether they want to work one, two, or three days per month. In counseling the level of effort is high, but so are the

rewards. Some days the trained volunteers battle the devil at his fiercest, but they know that they are not alone as God gives them support. Sometimes they win, sometimes they lose, sometimes they don't even know the outcome of the counseling session, but they do handle each session with prayer and let God do the rest. God's reward is the miracle of understanding and guidance that He grants liberally.

Receptionists are a vital part of the operation providing the extra pair of hands that counselors often need on a busy day as they answer telephones or run pregnancy tests. The receptionist allows the counselor to spend optimum time with the clients and often provide input on particular cases. The rewarding experience of receptionists is apparent as many of them become counselors within a few months.

In times when the center is closed, the hotline is crucial. Volunteers, through call-forwarding, answer the center's telephone at home serving as an answering service on an 18 hour shift of duty. They are trained to set up appointments but not to counsel except in crisis situations. The level of involvement is lower than the counselors and the receptionists since the "hotliners" can usually carry on normal household duties, but still these volunteers have the satisfaction of "being there" in the time of need.

A regular part of the center's work is correspondence. There is a necessity of maintaining contact with current and past clients in order to help, educate, and encourage them. The monthly newsletter reaches over 500 households with news, activity announcements, and general pro-life literature. Many individuals contribute articles or items of interest for the publication.

Other activities of the center are numerous. Training, befriending, babysitting, clothing distribution, and general support round out the work of the organization. All of this is done in order to help women with serious questions in the time of pregnancy.

In the five years since the Fond du Lac center opened they have helped or counseled over 1500 clients with some very significant figures included in that total. Over 50% of those helped were under 20 years of age as 758 women were helped and given sound advice in a time of life when questions are many and answers are few while circulating in peer groups where Christian guidance is a precious commodity. As expected, Lutherans were a large number of those that were helped but not the largest; 4 out of 10 clients were Roman Catholics, 1 out of 6 had absolutely no religious affiliation at all. This statistic alone points to the value of the center merely as an arm of outreach in a small community whose character has not been motivated and energized in thoughts toward canvassing and evangelism. The offer of pregnancy testing seems to be a key draw as 2/3 of the clients came to take advantage of this service. In some situations and counseling centers this service is abused and the relationship is ended as soon as the results are known. As is common in all Pregnancy Counseling Centers of Lutherans for Life, a relationship on the part of the counselor or receptionist is begun at the first visit and continued, or at least attempted to be continued, through personal visits, telephone calls, or the monthly newsletters regardless of the outcome of the testing.

In Fond du Lac, the care and concern is manifest. True to the roots of Lutheran confessionalism and true to the objective of personal concern, the Fond du Lac chapter of Lutherans for Life is a beautiful

and thriving blossom. The care and concern is seen in the activities of the members in their community and the facilities of the chapter agency, but the care and concern is felt and experienced in the results, the one-on-one counseling that, in this case, ended up in a most gratifying way.

Jane Niedfeldt, a counselor at the Fond du Lac chapter, relates the following story.

Sparkling eyes reflected the 21 candles glowing on a big decorated cake while smiling lips sang "Happy Birthday". It was a typical American birthday party with many children and adults crowded into the living room enjoying ice cream and cake. And yet, it wasn't a typical party for my family and me.

The big difference wasn't that we were in a low income apartment or among many strangers. One of our children was the first to verbalize it when he whispered in my ear, "Mom, I wish they wouldn't talk like that!" I silently nodded and then continued my conversation with the birthday party celebrant, Koe. At that time our conversation was the only one in the room using their native tongue, Laotian. Koe and the others were friendly to us and happy to talk with us in fairly fluent English, but when they talked with each other, they naturally reverted to the language that came easier. Even though we were slightly uncomfortable, we didn't really mind the language barrier--it was a privilege to just be included in the celebration.

I first met Koe's wife, Mae, a year ago at our Pregnancy Counseling Center when she came in for a pregnancy test. I didn't need to counsel on the dangers of abortion because Mae would never have considered that. Even though she was only 20 and pregnant with their third child (reason enough by the world's standards to abort), she valued children. Mae probably wondered how she would cope with another baby, but her hesitant smile told me she was not just expecting a baby, but a treasure.

At that time another baby was not Mae and Koe's only concern. They had recently moved to Fond du Lac and were sharing a two-bedroom apartment with the five members of Koe's brothers' family. They were also sharing their in-laws' food stamps. (A sad fact of many refugee families is that they are trapped in welfare; our local Laotians are no exception.) As Mae was sharing these details with me

that day at the Center, I knew she needed a friend and gave her my phone number (a "no-no" usually for our counselors).

A few days later Mae called for help--help them figure out the delay in their welfare checks, help them feed their family, help them find furniture (all four were sleeping on a twin mattress). How could I satisfy that big plea for help? I considered bringing their needs to our church, but decided to wait with the church until Mae and Koe realized their spiritual needs. Surprisingly, only a few phone calls to our local charities satisfied their temporary physical needs...and began a friendship between us.

Since then, we have been with Koe and Mae in several capacities from tutor/student relationships to fishing friends. I've been careful to keep our friendship an equal give and take. They're striving for financial independence (Koe will soon be graduating from MPTI, a local technical school) and I don't want to hinder that by pampering them along.

Our friendship has now grown to the point where Mae and Koe will drop in to say, "Hi!" They're relaxing their guard. Mae used to accept unchallenged anything I'd say (a frightening situation for me), but the other day she actually laughed at me and my American ways. I'd been sitting in the sun, trying to tan. Mae laughed at the absurdity of it and explained, "When the sun's very hot, I wear long sleeves and a hat so I stay light. Why do you want to be dark?"

That's probably one of many points we'll never truly understand about each other. We've come from such different backgrounds, but that's OK. What really excites me is that we're heading in the same direction--heading toward heaven! Koe and Mae are presently taking Bible instructions in our church. They're learning to know Jesus and will, hopefully, pass it on. Remember that roomful of birthday friends? The foreign missions fields are ripe and the harvest is in downtown Fond du Lac!?

This is not a guarantee; never in every one, not in one out of five, not even in one out ten, not to the success, not to success in this degree. This is not a guarantee, but it is a start, a beginning, an opening, an encouragement, an assurance of the workings of God's grace. This is the work of God and the proof of His blessing on the tiny organization of Lutherans for Life in only one example from only

one counseling center in a small Wisconsin town. Make no mistake, though, Lutherans for Life is special; God sees to that.

I hope I will make it through the remaining 4 months we have until the due date of our baby; the excitement and anxiety might just do me in! I know, though, that I'll have my wife at my side and all the well-wishes of family and friends to encourage me until that final month and week and day when our first child will enter into the first day of its life. It's a comfort to know that, as Lutherans, we all have a support system. It may or may not be in our family but it is in our fellowship as Lutherans for Life is special by its confession, by its personal involvement, and by its example.

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2. Daniel G. Macquire, "Abortion: A Question of Catholic Honesty", Christian Century (September 14-21, 1983), p. 806.

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6. Ibid, Vol. 1--p. 118.

7. Jane Niedfeldt, "Various interviews and correspondence" (January-April, 1988).