

One Woman's Journey from Abortion Clinic Worker to Pro-life Activist

Judith Fetrow was employed as a “reproductive health specialist” at Planned Parenthood's Hayward clinic near San Francisco. Then she met Jesus and subsequently became a staunch Pro-life activist. The following excerpts offer the best insight as to why there 'must' be a Christian Pro-life presence at every abortion clinic.

JUDITH FETROW: "...I hated you and your friends, and so did the rest of the staff. But the reason we hated the pro-life presence is that it is so effective. Whenever there was a pro-life presence on the sidewalk outside the clinic, it slowed down our procedures to a great extent."

"Normally it takes one-and-a-half to two hours to get a woman through from check-in through the abortion procedure. But on the days that pro-lifers show up, even if they do nothing but hold a sign and pray, it takes two or three hours to get the woman through."

"The women are always stressed and upset, and all of them request Valium. Then, because they take Valium, they take longer in recovery after the abortion. The difference is quite remarkable."

"If there is no pro-life presence, it is just business as usual. But with the pro-life presence, we all get tense and things move in slow motion."

FETROW: "Even if you say nothing at all...We have had women come in who are so tense that it is impossible for the doctor to do a pelvic exam on them, so they are sent home. Some of them don't come back."

"I think that is how God rewards the pro-life presence - by making it difficult for the doctor to get to the baby."

FETROW: "Obviously, we who worked at Planned Parenthood aren't going to run out and say, "Hey, you just had a save!" But, women do change their minds. Not a lot. Ninety percent go ahead and have the abortion, but there are always 5 percent or 10 percent who can be changed."

"A woman who does change her mind might leave the clinic after two hours without having aborted. But by then the pro-lifers might have gone home, so they don't know that she left. And even if they did see her, they wouldn't know if she was still pregnant or had aborted."

FETROW: "The average counseling time is 10 or 15 minutes. I can't speak for how others do it, but I've had an abortion and the counseling I received was useless."

FETROW: "Abortion providers in the San Francisco Bay area are finding it increasingly hard to get doctors to do abortions. I know that of the three doctors we had, one couldn't care less about pro-lifers outside. Another was frightened the pro-lifers might attack the clinic, you

know, hurl themselves through the windows. And the third one was more worried that his name might be publicized."

"With regards to the rest of the staff, first you need to know that no one really likes the abortion business."

"At our clinic, it was policy that everyone had to work the abortion procedures. There were too many staff who would say, "I just do HIV testing", or "I just want to do the vasectomy procedure or general birth control."

"So, the clinic made it clear that we all had to do the abortion work, too. The staff suffer from tension and burn out. They see the body parts of a tiny baby after it has been suctioned out, and they don't like it."

"When pro-lifers are outside, it gets to the conscience of the staff, too. If pro-lifers are holding up a gruesome picture of an aborted fetus, the staff feels guilty."

"It is time-consuming for clinic staff when they have to deal with a pro-life presence - to send escorts out so the women will be brought inside quickly. They used to put a curtain screen up so the women in the waiting room couldn't see the pro-life signs."

"Pro-lifers make the staff miserable, and that causes burnout and turnover in the staff."

FETROW: "We had two Catholics working there. A lot of the staff consider themselves Christians, and pro-lifers give them a complex. But they believe that they are doing a Christian thing by helping women."

"Also, quite a high number of the staff in Hayward Planned Parenthood, including myself, were from backgrounds of sexual abuse."

FETROW: "I think I would have tried the 'Chicago Method'. There, you go to the County Courthouse and find out if there are any malpractice suits against the clinic or the doctors working at the clinic and then show them to the women going in. I think that is probably the most effective way of putting women off."

"I don't know if there are malpractice suits against the Hayward Planned Parenthood, but I think you should find out if there are."

FETROW: "I am all for a pro-life presence outside every abortion clinic. I know that some people say, 'Oh, I can pray at home for an end to abortion.' But if we all said that, there would be no presence at the clinics, and the conscience of the nation would be dead. It would go on being business as usual."

"Part of the value is that people in cars driving by the clinic are being educated. They can see on pro-lifer's signs what a dismembered fetus looks like. And they know that people still care about the abortion issue."

"It doesn't have to be a big group. Your own group is only two or three people. The day my mind was changed, it was only Steve, all by himself out there."

"I realize that it is a depressing business for pro-lifers and that you don't get much feedback on your effectiveness, but you are effective."

"Only the staff inside the clinic know how effective you are. If they are calling the police, you should be reassured that you are causing enough turmoil in their workplace."

(excerpts from an article in the Sunday, February 9, 1992 edition of Catholic Twin Circle)
Interview by Mary Arnold, a freelance writer who lives near Pleasanton, CA.