

# Webster couple's pro-life commitment tops their agenda

By Jeanne Gehret

David and Diana Long spell their pro-life commitment with a capital C. They risk not only their family livelihood but David's legal freedom as well, all in the name of protecting the lives of the unborn.

Last week, David Long turned his tire business — the family's sole source of income — over to the management of an employee so that he could devote his full attention to serving as director of Project Life, a non-profit ecumenical group that since last November has operated the Problem Pregnancy Center at 3254 Lake Ave. in Charlotte (see related article).

Two years ago, the Webster couple adopted Angela, now two years old, who narrowly escaped being aborted in the second trimester of her mother's pregnancy. The Long household also includes a young mother who had no place to live after becoming pregnant.

But the Longs' pro-life commitment doesn't end with their home life. Through Project Life, both husband and wife have engaged in such lawful activities as picketing, marching and counseling young women entering abortion facilities.

David has also conducted what he terms "rescue operations," in which demonstrators take over and occupy rooms in which abortions are conducted. This form of protest is illegal because it involves trespassing.

"Sometimes the rescuers will chain or handcuff themselves to the abortion table to make their removal more difficult and time-consuming," David Long wrote in his Pro-Life Action Report. "The longer they can occupy the room, the more lives they can save. Consequently, when the police arrive, the rescuers 'go limp,' requiring the officers to actually carry them from the building,



In this room, David and Diana Long counsel women with problem pregnancies. The center shows clients a film entitled "A Matter of Choice" — a still from which is visible on the screen in the background. taking up more time."

In April, 1986, David was arrested with 105 other demonstrators for conducting a "rescue operation" in St. Louis. This month he and three other members of Project Life again courted arrest with a sit-in at The Genesee Hospital.

Saturday morning demonstrations at The Genesee Hospital have drawn as many as 120 pro-lifers from all different religious denominations. David would like to recruit that many for his rescue missions, too, because there is greater safety in numbers. "I was scared to death last week when I occupied

that abortion room," he explained. "And when the security guards removed us, they roughed us up a quite a bit."

Beyond such instantaneous, physical repercussions, David Long and his fellow "rescuers" face a possible maximum sentence of one year and a \$1,000 fine for each offense. Large groups, however, are less likely to be imprisoned because the county jail is already overcrowded, he noted.

David emphasized that such acts of civil disobedience are not theatrical gestures, but "a serious baby-saving work done in obe-

dience to God's word." Quoting Proverbs 24:11, he said, "Rescue those being led away to death, hold back those who are being dragged to the slaughter."

David defined civil disobedience as placing God's law above the laws of men. Again citing Scripture — Acts 4:19 — he said, "But Peter and John answered them: 'Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge ...'"

While David and other "rescuers" are taking their chances inside abortion facilities, Diana is outside with other "sidewalk counselors" attempting to dissuade prospective abortion clients from entering the building.

Diana calls this work "a woman's forte," because women can often establish better rapport with abortion clients than men can create. "Our group goes every Saturday from 6:30 a.m. to 9 a.m. to Genesee Hospital when many abortions are performed. We stop cars at the entrance, give the women literature about their babies' development and tell them what abortion can do to their own bodies," she said.

"Pro-choice groups lie to women, telling them that, up to 12 weeks, the fetus is just a mass of tissues and that abortion is a simple procedure with no long-range repercussions. We try to give them all the facts about abortion," Diana continued, adding that some women turn away from the abortion facilities, saying, "I can't believe I almost killed my baby."

Although she considers disobedience and demonstrations to be important because they let people know what's going on in area hospitals, Diana acknowledged that they are really "last-ditch efforts." Both husband and wife hope the Problem Pregnancy Center will be a means to reach pregnant women before they decide to have abortions.

"The Problem Pregnancy Center was one of our first desires when Project Life was started in 1984," David said. "But it just wasn't possible then, because we needed church support and volunteers. We went to the streets first to raise the profile of pro-life work locally. We figured all we had to do was offer a tiny bit of leadership, and people would come, and indeed they did."

Although Project Life has many supporters in such evangelical religious denominations as Bethel Full Gospel and Grace Christian Fellowship, the group also attracts many Catholics, David said, adding that "Father Anthony Mugavero is one of our best sidewalk counselors.

"In my opinion, Catholics are the forerunners of pro-life work," he added. "Traditionally, they have taken a low-key, behind-the-scenes approach, but now that the work is becoming more intense, they've been tremendously supportive."

One of the most-active Catholics involved with Project Life is Ray Buonemani, a member of Holy Cross Parish in Charlotte. He had served on the board of Rochester Area Right to Life before joining Project Life, and now handles publicity for the group's demonstrations and works with the Problem Pregnancy Center.

"Ray headed a group that prayed the rosary every Saturday morning at Genesee Hospital for two years before we started," David Long noted. "He was frustrated just praying every week and not seeing a lot of results, although we believe their prayers brought us into play. He was so excited to see somebody aggressive and activist-minded come on the scene."

Project Life needs volunteers and contributions. Interested persons may contact David or Diana Long at (716)671-0406.

## Center offers pregnant teens an alternative to abortion

Imagining the predicament of a 17-year-old girl who suspects she's pregnant. Seeking help in the Yellow Pages, she first turns to Planned Parenthood. But when she learns that the agency charges \$150 for a pregnancy test, she hangs up. She spends her last few dollars on a new pair of striped pants, and there won't be any more allowance money until the end of the month.

But wait, baby's another place. It's on Lake Avenue, not too far from school, and the sign says right by it. The lady who worked there was nice, and she told her she'd be coming for free, too.

The doctor's assistant is courteous to most clients of the Problem Pregnancy Center. There is a waiting 17 and 22 years old, they get a pregnancy test, information, direction, and counseling, and, often, they don't have to pay.

But when a girl arrives at the Problem Pregnancy Center, she isn't greeted by the sort of impersonal, clinical approach one might expect to encounter at Planned Parenthood. At PPC, she'll be required to watch a 22-minute film on abortion, even before she learns whether the test results are positive.

The film, "A Matter of Choice," presents information on fetal development, contains footage of actual abortions, and outlines the physical risks and possible complications a woman may experience following an abortion.

The producers of the film say that 90 percent of the girls who are death-minded before viewing it are life-minded when they finish," said David Long, director of

Project Life, the pro-life group that runs the center.

"Some people say it's not fair to make the girls see the video," Long's wife, Diana, remarked. "But some form of counseling is required at all abortion counseling centers. We're not making up statistics to save the baby, all our facts come from the American Medical Association. We give more abortion information than the abortionists do — because we give the whole story. When the girls hear the truth, it's shocking news for many of them."

After the film is over, the counselor sits with the pregnant teen. If the girl is pregnant, "we try to find out where she's at, what she needs," said Cheryl Williams, director of the center. "Is she emotionally distraught? Does she need financial assistance, a friend to accompany her to doctor's appointments, a place to live, someone to help her look the news to her parents?"

"We lay out all the options — besides abortion — including adoption. Whatever she needs to help her continue her pregnancy, we'll supply. We have 12 counselors right now, but we need more because they all get so involved with the girls," Williams explained.

The counselor doesn't drop the girl once the baby is born, either, Williams said. The agency continues to provide free assistance with baby clothing, transportation, formula and parenting skills.

Clients come to the center with overwhelming needs, she continued. "Their desperation is very real; many

times it's the peak crisis of their lives. They need someone to be honest with them about the baby and their own situations, about how they're living their lives.

More than anything else, though, they need someone to care, center staff members emphasize. What the young women really crave, they say, is their parents' concern, as they begin to realize that boyfriends may leave, but that parents are there forever.

As at other crisis pregnancy centers, a negative pregnancy test leads to talk about birth control. But PPC's approach to preventing conception is quite different from that of centers whose emphasis is not on protecting life.

"We're not tremendous advocates of birth control, because it's inconsistent with our pro-life stance," Diana Long explained. "Most birth-control methods can cause abortions if there is a fetus in the womb."

"Instead, we counsel teenagers about chastity. They've rarely heard the message that it's OK to say no, to remain a virgin. We tell them the advantages of waiting for sex until they're emotionally ready for it, have found the right man and are married.

"Then they don't have to worry about finding themselves in this frightening situation again," she concluded.

The Problem Pregnancy Center, 3254 Lake Ave., can be reached 24 hours a day at (716) 865-0360.

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