

CALIFORNIA RIGHT TO LIFE EDUCATION FUND

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Life, Camera, Action!

Students for Life Conference April 21, 2007

By Cecelia M. Cody

Almost 100 university students gathered in the magnificent Ralston Mansion on the campus of Notre Dame de Namur University last month for the annual Students for Life Conference. The theme of this year's conference was "Life, Camera, Action – Myths and the Media."

Dr. Thomas Murphy Goodwin, Chief of Maternal Fetal Medical Division at USC, began the day by addressing the medical issues surrounding high risk pregnancies including: diagnosis of breast cancer where the chemotherapy could cause fetal abnormality, and a positive test result for recent infection of CMV virus (which can cause serious harm to the fetus.) In each real-life situation he presented, a solid case had been made for serious health issues that "pregnancy is contraindicated" and yet, with a bit of research Dr. Goodwin was able to show the percentage of risk was much lower than originally reported by the referring physician, and he ended each case presentation with a picture of the smiling mother and her newborn baby.

He also discussed the diagnosis of fetal abnormality that will lead to the life of the baby being very short (recall our book review "Waiting for Gabriel in our April/May 2004 newsletter). Dr. Goodwin mentioned the joy parents experienced holding their baby, even if only for a few minutes, knowing they allowed their baby to live rather than "terminating the pregnancy" through abortion.

Dr. Goodwin's talk was inspirational; addressing the "hard cases" and showing that high risk pregnancies are often not as hopeless as so often projected, but rather can be hope-filled experiences, and even when there is a short life for the baby, the parents glad they had the chance to hold their baby, even for a few minutes. If you were at the 2007 Walk for Life you

may remember the Gianna Molla award presented to Patricia and Bill Brower who have journeyed through two pregnancies with anencephalic babies – babies born with only a brain stem, that die soon after birth.

I had an opportunity to share a bit of my experience with the media, "Foes or Friends for Life." I shared some pointers and pitfalls to avoid, that I've learned in dealing with the media on a myriad of current news stories. (See article later in this newsletter for a summary.)

Katie Short, "twice" author of the Parental Notification initiative, shared her experiences dealing with the media on one issue, on an ongoing basis - the Parents' Right to Know Initiative in this case. She explained the process of getting an initiative on the ballot, the hurdles she endured in just getting the initiative approved: from the title assigned by the Attorney General's office to the texts published for and against the initiative in the voter's pamphlet. Then she discussed the interviews and debates she did during the attempts to pass Parental Notification (Propositions 73 & 85) in California.

The talks were well received, and several students commented that I had provided some valuable information for dealing with the media: print, radio and TV.

California Right to Life Education Fund also provided a literature table at this conference. We distributed over \$100 worth of buttons, precious feet, silicon pro-life bracelets, stickers, and pamphlets. Your recent donations made this literature table possible. Several students asked me to thank you for providing such great resources.

The Media: Foe or Friend for Life?

Key points from speech to Students for Life

Many of you are doubtless thinking, "But I'll never be called upon to address the news media, so I'll just skip this article." While you may not be called upon to do a full media interview, there are many opportunities to proclaim the culture of life... everyone you meet is a possible "audience" and we all need to be prepared to "give witness to the truth of life." So read on....

Life – Memorize a few key points in fetal development:

The baby's heart begins to function at 24 days after fertilization, brainwaves at 43, precious feet (which of course you wear EVERY day; they are the ultimate fashion statement... If you don't have a set, contact this office and we will get you one right away!) These little feet, complete with toes, are the feet of a 10-12 week baby in the womb - a baby fully formed just needing nutrition and time to fully mature into the human being. The baby in the womb is not a "potential human being, rather he or she is a human being with potential." (Yes, catchy phrases like this are very informative and easy for our audience to remember and repeat.)

Keep your responses short; the media will have less chance to splice and your comments be taken out of context and misunderstood.

Camera/ the interview – This is where we focused most of our discussion...

- Keep your comments short and concise. Stick to comments that can't be taken out of context and project a different message than you intended.
- One to three points - repeat the same points over and over as needed. "From fertilization it is a human life" is one of my favorites.
- Don't try and fill the silence. If you have finished what you want to say and there is silence, just wait for the reporter to ask another question. (This is probably one of the hardest parts of an interview; we all want to fill the silence. This is what the reporter wants us to do, and this is where we will often say things we will later regret.)
- Beware of using humor, especially sarcasm– in fact *don't* do it. Your humor may taken out of context and used against the cause. During the stem cell initiative (Prop 71) large donations were being made by those in favor of embryonic stem cell research (ESCR). Jokingly someone said, "Why don't they just donate directly to the researchers!" This could have been "spun" by the media to say we are not against embryonic stem cell research; we just don't want to pay for it.
- Whenever possible have a "Press Kit," even a single sheet of paper, that recaps your main points, and refers the reporter to a key website. Include a few quotes

backing up our position (example www.ca-aas.org for the current Physician Assisted Suicide issue in the state legislature this term.)

- Assume the microphone is ALWAYS on. An "on camera" interview often ends with the reporter walking with you towards the camera. If the microphone is still attached to your lapel, assume it is on and keep your comments "on topic." (Remember Jimmy Carter's Playboy interview during the 1976 Presidential campaign? He thought the interview was over and microphone was off when the reporter asked if he ever lusted after a woman... No one remembers anything else about the rest of the interview.)
- If you aren't prepared to respond to an issue when the phone rings, either ask for a phone number where you can call back in a few minutes (after you get a few thoughts together, perhaps after calling a pro-life friend, or this office – we try and answer the phone 24/7 or return messages within an hour), or if that isn't going to work for you, ALWAYS try and refer the reporter to another source. We don't want to give the media an opportunity to report that, "the anti-abortion side was not available for comment." We try to always be available.

Action – read the newspaper and listen to the news with a pro-life mind...what in today's news might the media call and ask for a statement. If you have access to the Internet, subscribe to www.lifenews.com, a free news service that provides excellent (although sometimes a bit slow) commentary on life issue news items.

Who knows, some day you may be walking across a shopping center walkway, and a reporter will ask you for your opinion on a recent news story like the recent Supreme Court decision upholding the Partial Birth Abortion Ban. Would you be ready to make a statement for the Culture of Life? Be ready – be alert! Everyone is a possible spokesperson: to family, to friends, with co-workers, and maybe even to the San Francisco Chronicle Question Man!

If you would like to be added to our list of official media spokespersons, contact this office. We are especially looking for people in outlying areas for "on camera" interviews. (We will provide the talking points; you do the interview.)

Supreme Court Decision on Partial Birth Abortion a Good First Step

Abortion is never morally or ethically justifiable; however, it has been the unfortunate reality that killing a pre-born baby for any reason, at any time, for the "Health of the Mother" has been the law of the land. That has been the case until the recent U.S. Supreme Court decision, *Gonzalez v. Carhart*. For the first time there is now a federally adjudicated limit on abortion. While this is a long way from our ultimate objective, it is a strategic victory that could be used to advance the goal of the complete abolition of abortion.

Sadly some in the pro-life movement have lamented the recent Supreme Court decision, possibly because of a misunderstanding of how our courts work. Judges only rule on the narrow legal question presented before them. They do not rule widely on every issue related to a case, but only on the specific arguments made by the parties. The *Gonzales v. Carhart* decision applied specifically to the question of the constitutionality of a ban on live, intact D&E abortions done using one particular procedure (for an illustration of the procedure see www.nrlc.org)

The Court gave the pro-life movement exactly what it was asked for when it upheld the ban on that one, specific procedure. Confusion came because the majority ruling written by Justice Anthony M. Kennedy explained that other abortion procedures fall outside the scope of their decision, leading some to believe that tacit approval was being given to certain abortion procedures.

The *Gonzales v. Carhart* decision did not give new permission or approval to other methods of abortion. Those methods were and continue to be permissible under America's liberal abortion laws, and further approval is not required. Justice Kennedy was simply clarifying the limitations of the ruling. Remember, courts can only rule on the specific legal questions at hand, not on every aspect of a particular subject before them.

Misunderstandings aside, there are several positive facets to the *Gonzales* decision. We have some inkling that unfettered abortion on demand is no longer an untouchable issue with the Supreme Court. This deviation from "stare decisis" is good news! Our next step needs to be enacting legislation that will present good challenges to abortion, so that a decision that is more targeted to the heart of *Roe v. Wade* and its companion case, *Doe v. Bolton*, can be

rendered. The recent loss of the South Dakota abortion ban and its legal challenge was a setback, as that piece of legislation could have hastened a direct challenge to these landmark decisions.

Secondly, the court ruled that a health exception is no longer a constitutional requirement for laws that limit abortions. "Health" exceptions have become massive loopholes, which nullify laws that were enacted in attempts to save at least some pre-born lives. Now the health exception loophole may be omitted from laws, and this could result in lives saved, if the pro-life movement can pass more stringent legislation.

Another bit of good news from this decision is that the abortion industry will no longer be able to use the scare tactic of wildly hypothetical arguments at the U.S. Supreme Court level. Arguments must include real women facing real situations, not blanket "what if" scenarios that have not in the past, and likely will not ever have a basis in reality.

The fourth positive aspect to the *Gonzales* ruling is, because support for the murder of innocent children in the womb is an indefensible position. Debate allows people see through the strained and dishonest rhetoric of the abortion cartel. That is one of the reasons America is becoming increasingly pro-life. However, for this discussion to be effective, we in the pro-life movement must be prepared.

While the ruling may be less than some had hoped, the pro-abortion side certainly views the *Gonzales* decision as a demoralizing defeat. Now is the time for us to develop an optimistic and aggressive approach. The pro-life movement needs to use the positive aspects of this decision in pressing forward the cause of life.

The *Gonzales v. Carhart* case did what it was asked to do, and that is to ban a specific abortion procedure. The health exception ruling and other positive aspects of the case are icing on the cake. It is the first prohibition on any abortion procedure since *Roe v. Wade*, and a good first step by the Court toward abolition of ALL abortion. However, the Court will not reverse *Roe v. Wade* and the companion case *Doe v. Bolton* unless it is presented with a law to rule on that directly addresses that issue. We need to get solid cases into the judicial pipeline now, so that abolition can become a reality sooner than later.

...the decision has spurred public discussion of abortion, and whenever that happens, the pro-life side wins...

Around the Office

We have a new computer for the office! A special thanks to the member who arranged the donation and the generous man who refurbishes computers and donated the new to us Pentium III computer. We also thank him for spending the afternoon installing software and training Cecelia on the finer points of the more modern computer that is now part of our office.

Our “Project Mustard Seed” is approaching 100 members. Each month members receive ONE e-mail to write a letter to the head of ONE organization that supports Planned Parenthood. Once you draft your letter, you can use the same letter each month, just changing the addressee. If you would like more information on this project, contact our office at callife@calright2life.org and we will e-mail you further information.

WHO IS CALIFORNIA RIGHT TO LIFE?

This is the newsletter of California Right to Life **Education Fund**, a 501-c-3 organization established to educate the public about pro-life issues. Donations to the EDUCATION FUND are **tax-deductible** and can be sent to P.O. Box 4343, Walnut Creek, CA 94596-0343.

California Right to Life **Committee, Inc.** is a 501-c-4 organization providing information on legislative issues affecting the right to life, and pro-life political advocacy. **CRLC, Inc. is not permitted**, under IRS regulations, to offer a tax deduction for donations. \$24.99 annually is requested for a subscription to the CRLC legislative email updates list and can be sent to 1920 Monument Blvd #309, Concord, CA 94520.

Both are affiliates of American Life League, headed by Judie Brown, and share the same “no-exceptions, no excuses” beliefs and the same dedication to promoting the Culture of Life, respecting all innocent human life from the single-cell stage to natural death.