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# The Clinic Across the Street

Crisis pregnancy centers set themselves up as helpful, innocuous “alternatives” for pregnant women who might otherwise seek an abortion. But some CPCs are just a few steps away from the most heavily targeted abortion clinics—and they’re either operated or have been frequented by some of the most infamous of anti-abortion extremists.

BY KATHRYN JOYCE

**T**HIS PAST JANUARY, WHEN SCOTT ROEDER stood trial for the murder of abortion provider Dr. George Tiller, he described his preparations for the crime. For years, Roeder had gathered information about Tiller’s schedule and habits, not just by looking for his home in a gated community or through surreptitious attendance at his church, but also by showing up outside Tiller’s Wichita, Kan., clinic, Women’s Health Care Services, as a “sidewalk counselor.”

At the same time that Roeder was “counseling” on the sidewalk—trying to talk women out of having abortions—he was beginning to determine if there was a “window of opportunity” that would leave the doctor exposed. He testified that for years he had been mulling over how and where Tiller could be murdered—at the clinic, could the doctor be hit with a car, or shot “sniper” style from a rooftop?

Just next door to Tiller’s clinic is the crisis pregnancy center (CPC) Choices Medical Clinic. Choices, like many CPCs, appears to be a medical facility, but its main mission is dissuading women from having abortions. As a sidewalk counselor, Roeder tried to steer abortion patients away from Tiller’s clinic and over to Choices—if he did, he explained in his testimony, that was considered a “success.”

The deceptive tactics of many of the country’s CPCs—which are estimated to total between 2,300 and 4,000

centers nationwide—have been well-documented: They often mislead women about whether they perform abortions, mimicking the style or names of abortion clinics and operating in close proximity to them. Some provide misinformation about women’s pregnancy status or due date, or suggest unproven links between abortion and cancer, infertility or suicide. A 2006 congressional report requested by Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.) found that 87 percent of CPCs that receive federal funding provide false information—prompting both local and proposed federal legislation to mandate truth-in-advertising standards for CPCs [see sidebar, page 29].

Scott Roeder (center) was a “sidewalk counselor” outside Dr. George Tiller’s Wichita, Kan., abortion clinic.



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Despite these fraudulent practices, CPCs have received millions in funding from both federal and state coffers and enjoy support from certain politicians and churches. CPCs present a public persona that is woman-friendly, compassionate and “empowering”—a love-bombing alternative to public images of angry protestors berating women entering abortion clinics.

However, this image is belied by the reality at a number of the nation’s most heavily-targeted abortion clinics, where neighboring CPCs have close ties with extremists and sidewalk counselors, who function as an outreach arm that works, with or without acknowledgement, to draw CPC clients in. In Roeder’s testimony linking the work of anti-abortion sidewalk counselors—the unofficial foot soldiers of the CPC movement—with his own violent vigilantism, he bared the troubling intersection of some of these seemingly innocuous centers with a number of the anti-abortion movement’s most notorious members.

CPCS HAVE LONG HAD CONNECTIONS WITH THE MOST extremist anti-abortion cohorts. The zealous anti-abortion group Operation Rescue, which doggedly pursued Dr. Tiller, has long urged its supporters to get involved with CPCs and sidewalk counseling. In its 1990s guide “How to Stop Abortion in Your Community,” Operation Rescue of California (which later moved to Wichita and changed its name to simply Operation Rescue) recommended volunteering at the local CPC and sidewalk counseling “right at the doors of the abortion mill”—along with picketing at abortion doctors’ homes, filing lawsuits and conducting clinic blockades (called “rescues”

in anti-abortion parlance). The latter, they wrote, “helps buy time for the sidewalk counselors.”

Just the presence of a CPC in the vicinity of an abortion clinic ups the potential for violence. A recent survey by the Feminist Majority Foundation of women’s reproductive-health clinics nationwide found 32.7 percent of clinics located near a CPC experienced one or more incidents of severe violence, compared to only 11.3 percent of clinics not near a CPC. (Severe violence includes clinic blockades and invasions, bombings, arson, bombing and arson threats, death threats, chemical attacks, stalking, physical violence and gunfire.)

A who’s who of anti-abortion extremists have been involved with the CPC movement:

—**Cheryl Sullenger**, Operation Rescue’s “senior policy director” in Wichita, who served two years in prison for conspiring to blow up an abortion clinic in California in 1988, began her path to radical activism at a CPC. As she told anti-abortion activists gathered in Omaha, Neb., for a training during Operation Rescue-organized protests in August 2009, “Very soon I realized that there were so many women that fell through the crisis pregnancy center safety net and never approached those places; they went straight to the abortion clinics. And I thought, ‘Who is gonna go to the abortion clinic to help them?’” (Sullenger’s phone number was found in Scott Roeder’s car after he fled the Tiller murder scene.)

—**Michael Bray**, a convicted abortion-clinic bomber and author of the “justifiable homicide” tome *A Time to Kill*, cofounded the Bowie Crofton Pregnancy Clinic (a CPC) in 1982 in Bowie, Md. Bray is “lifetime chaplain” of the extremist group Army of God, whose adherents have been responsible for the murders of abortion doctors and for clinic bombings, including a fatal 1998 bombing in Birmingham, Ala.

—**Chet Gallagher**, a former police officer who has been arrested dozens of times for trespassing and abortion-clinic blockades organized by Operation Rescue, lent his anti-abortion star power to a fundraising benefit this past April for Gabriel’s Corner, a Council Bluffs, Iowa, CPC. It was a brotherly act: The CPC is run by his sister, Christine Wilson. Wilson herself draws no lines between sidewalk counseling and CPCs, saying that CPCs exist as a resource to bolster the effectiveness of the counselors, who can intercept abortion-bound women and then take them across the street to close the sale.

—**Joan Andrews Bell**, a “justifiable homicide” supporter who spent five years in a Florida state prison for invading and vandalizing the Ladies Center clinic in

Eugene Frye (center) in front of Dr. George Tiller’s abortion clinic in 2007.



Pensacola, Fla., and who has been arrested repeatedly since for clinic blockades, has long been involved with CPCs. Her husband, Chris, founded Good Counsel Homes, a string of five homes for unwed pregnant women in New York that also “responds to crisis pregnancy situations.”

—**James Kopp**, the convicted murderer of abortion provider Dr. Barnett Slepian in 1998 (and the prime suspect in the attempted murders of four other doctors in Canada and New York), founded a CPC in San Francisco and worked for Chris Bell’s Good Counsel Homes. Kopp has been affiliated with several of the most extremist groups in the country, including Operation Rescue and the Lambs of Christ, and is believed to be a member of the Army of God.

Vicki Saporta, president of the National Abortion Federation (NAF), argues that Kopp’s escalation of tactics—from starting a CPC to engaging in blockades to making attempts on the lives of four abortion doctors to finally murdering Slepian—is not an uncommon progression. “Some of the anti-abortion extremists got their start in establishing CPCs,” she says. “And one of the best examples is James Kopp. His evolution mirrored the evolution of the anti-choice movement.”

AID FOR WOMEN, AN ABORTION CLINIC IN KANSAS City, Kan., is where Scott Roeder got his start in anti-abortion extremism, repeatedly super-gluing the clinic locks and being part of the group of regular clinic protesters/sidewalk counselors.

Across the street is the Your Choice Pregnancy Resource Center, a CPC once owned by Eugene Frye—an anti-abortion veteran who was one of Roeder’s most frequent visitors in prison and who told *The Kansas City Star* he was helping Tiller’s assassin consider a “justifiable homicide” defense.

Frye, a 66-year-old contractor who has been arrested repeatedly since 1991 for various unlawful anti-abortion actions, including clinic blockades, can be found outside the Aid For Women clinic most Saturday mornings, including one in early August, leaning on a table-sized poster of a dismembered fetus and calling through a bull-horn to women entering the clinic, his voice audible for blocks around, “Mommy, I don’t want to die. ...Please don’t let them kill me, Mommy. I’ll be a good child.”

Although Frye—whom clinic manager M. Jeffrey Pederson calls “the number one guy around here”—no longer owns Your Choice, there are still discernible ties between the center and clinic protesters. For years, Pederson has butted heads with Frye over property lines and harassment tactics, but the new owners of Your

Choice—apartment lessors James, Gordon and Ruth Peterson—seem to want to distance themselves from protesters like Frye or other extremist faces outside the clinic. (Those include Army of God member and convicted conspirator in clinic arson attacks Jennifer McCoy, formerly a regular protester at Dr. Tiller’s clinic, who now travels cross-state to protest at Aid For Women.)

“I’m not really supposed to be involved in [sidewalk counseling] as an employee here,” says Robin Marriott, Your Choice’s current director, who tells me she takes issue with “the screamers and yellers,” and claims ignorance of the tenor of the Saturday protests put forth by Frye and others. “But I’ve tried to encourage churches...to be

## Deceptive CPCs in Legal Heat

In the past few years, legislators at local, state and federal levels have taken note of how crisis pregnancy centers operate, particularly their use of deceptive advertising to draw in women seeking abortions. The facilities certainly warrant such scrutiny, considering that some receive state and federal funding for their activities through family-planning and abstinence-only sources, tax credits and “choose life” license plates.

Now lawmakers have begun to act: In December 2009, Baltimore became the first city in the country to pass a truth-in-advertising law requiring CPCs to post signs stating they do not perform abortions, give abortion referrals or provide birth control. Under the law, CPCs will need to post two signs in the waiting area, one in English and one in Spanish, or pay a fine of \$150 per day.

Not long after the Baltimore bill passed, the city of Austin, Texas, followed suit. The Austin law also requires CPCs to post signs stating that centers do not provide abortion or contraceptive services. However, this bill carries a larger fine, \$450 per offense, and the CPC directors can be charged with Class C misdemeanors.

Rep. Carolyn Maloney (D-N.Y.) and Sen. Robert Menendez (D-N.J.) want to attack the problem on a federal level as well; they recently re-introduced the Stop Deceptive Advertising Women’s Services Act (SDAWS). Under SDAWS, the Federal Trade Commission would consider it “an unfair or deceptive act” for a CPC to advertise as a health-care provider.

But CPCs aren’t going to pay even small fines without a fight. In Baltimore, the Catholic archdiocese—which provides funding for some of the local CPCs—is suing the city, saying that the law against deceptive signage violates freedom of speech and religion. The archdiocese claims the ordinance “targets for speech regulation only one side of a contentious public, political debate” and that its centers do provide birth control information through natural-family-planning counseling—and therefore should not be required to state that they do not offer birth control.

Reproductive-health professionals would disagree. As Rep. Maloney told *Ms.*, “Deception shouldn’t be permitted, especially on such a topic. That’s why there needs to be a law.”

—NOELLE WILLIAMS

# 32.7% of abortion clinics located near a CPC experienced one or more incidents of severe violence.

[involved in sidewalk counseling]. I've said what we really need is sidewalk counselors."

Frye understands their reticence. "I think they'd like to see themselves as autonomous," says Frye. "They don't want to be associated with any violence. Scott Roeder used to come over here with us. He was here two weeks before he shot Dr. Tiller, and obviously they can see the connection: that he was from here."

SINCE DR. TILLER'S MURDER, EXTREMISTS' ACTIVITIES have escalated at a number of abortion clinics nationwide. In Bellevue, Neb., the clinic of Dr. LeRoy Carhart has become the chief target of Wichita-based Operation Rescue, the group that conducted a seven-year campaign against Dr. Tiller (and in whose activities Scott Roeder claimed to have participated). In the heated atmosphere there, the involvement of extremists with the local CPC is laid bare.

In August 2009, Operation Rescue and Nebraska anti-choice group Rescue the Heartland staged a well-publicized "Keep It Closed" demonstration at Carhart's Abortion and Contraception Clinic of Nebraska (ACCON) to protest Carhart's plans to keep Tiller's clinic open. The neighboring CPC, A Woman's Touch Pregnancy Counseling Center, played a leading role in an Operation Rescue salvation story that has reached the level of anti-abortion mythology.

In the story, which I heard five versions of between Kansas City and Bellevue, a woman coming for her abortion appointment at Carhart's clinic was frightened off by clinic defenders shouting her name through a bullhorn. She was gently diverted by sidewalk counselors to the CPC, where she viewed an ultrasound picture and fell in love with her unborn child. (Free ultrasounds are one of CPCs' main lures these days.) The woman then requested that dozens of copies of the ultrasound be printed and distributed to the media and pro-choice clinic defenders. When Operation Rescue president Troy Newman waved the photos, pro-choicers shrunk from the picture like vampires from a cross, claimed Rescue the Heartland founder Larry Donlan. In some versions of the story, the woman has twins.

"It was a total set up," says Mary Carhart, Dr. Carhart's wife and colleague, of the tale. She says the woman didn't even have an appointment at the abortion clinic that day, and clinic defenders weren't carrying bullhorns. Reporters on the scene also expressed skepticism at the tale when they were denied an interview with the woman, or even her name. But the ease of Operation Rescue's coordinated publicity with A Woman's Touch is more proof to the Carharts of the connection between CPCs and anti-abortion protestors—something they've believed for years as they've watched their chief antagonists go in and out of

the CPC, sometimes through the backdoor. Many routinely park their cars at A Woman's Touch and seem to use it as base camp for demonstrations.

Similar tactics were used in Wichita, says Carhart, who, for many years, traveled to Wichita monthly to work at Tiller's clinic. He noticed that those participating in demonstrations went in and out of the Wichita CPC next door to Dr. Tiller's clinic. "In fact, [protestors] would stand on the porch of the CPC and use a megaphone to yell at patients over the fence," he says. "And when we worked in Ohio, the protesters we had in Dayton bought the old gas station next to the clinic and converted it into a CPC. It's just an extension of their ways to try to deny women access to the services that are available."

The Bellevue CPC was started, in fact, by stalwart anti-abortion protester Liz Miller, whom the Carharts report has reappeared on the sidewalk in front of their clinic since ceasing full-time management of the center. Miller is still on its board of directors, though, along with attorney Matt Heffron, who glides smoothly between representing the CPC on property tax matters and representing one of ACCON's longtime chief protestors: Father Norman Weslin. A Catholic priest who founded a number of unwed mothers' homes and heads extremist anti-abortion "rescue" group the Lambs of Christ, Weslin is known for traveling around the country with Kopp, Donlan and other anti-abortion extremists to blockade abortion clinics. He was arrested in 2007 when he invaded Dr. Carhart's clinic for the second time.

Joan Aylor, the peer-counselor director for A Woman's Touch, further adds that the center was founded in 2002 "by a group of women...who had on their hearts to do something for abortion-minded women and to perhaps provide a little shelter for those sidewalk counselors—those brave people who are out there at all hours of the day, in whatever weather."

One of the other frequent protestors outside Carhart's clinic is Rescue the Heartland founder Donlan, a longtime anti-abortion extremist who drove one of Operation Rescue's raucous and graphic "Truth Trucks" through neighborhoods where Carhart's employees live—prompting the establishment of a nuisance law in Bellevue, transparently aimed at him. He also has written threatening letters to Carhart's employees, warning them that unless they resign their positions, he and his Rescue the Heartland group will begin a "campaign of exposure"—including circulating flyers with their photos and holding vigils in front of their houses and throughout their neighborhoods.

Meeting me outside ACCON one day, Donlan underscores the casual connection he has with A Woman's Touch, referring to it in terms of "we," "us" and "our"—

an affiliation that he doesn't officially acknowledge, even as he was able to produce a client of A Woman's Touch to meet with me on short notice. At one point he notes, "It's not unreasonable to think that [abortion clinics] look at us [CPCs] as competition that's more successful."

But he demurs when asked about his official ties to A Woman's Touch. "I'm one of those people who will talk to a gal and if I can bring her over here [to the CPC]," he adds, "I'll do that, but that's as far as my affiliation goes."

SOME ANTI-ABORTION LEADERS ADMIT THE PARTNERSHIP between themselves and CPCs is sometimes seamless, but sometimes strained.

"We, the church of Jesus Christ, are an army, and CPCs are triage, the Red Cross. They're always in the back of the lines, and they help the wounded to get well," explains Flip Benham, director of Operation Save America/Operation Rescue (not to be confused with the Operation Rescue in Wichita). Benham, who has been arrested many times for blockading clinics and is currently facing criminal charges for stalking an abortion doctor, himself began working with the Dallas CPC network Last Harvest Ministries in 1984.

He explains how Operation Save America (and its Las Vegas coordinator, Chet Gallagher) worked "hand in hand" with a local CPC, First Choice Pregnancy Center, to host Operation Save America's 2009 National Event in Las Vegas. He complains, however, that other CPCs try to keep the connection fuzzy—perhaps out of fear of lawsuits or loss of stature and funding.

A lot of "churches don't want to go further than the back lines," he tells me over the phone from the sidewalk outside an abortion clinic in Charlotte, N.C. The city is where, since Tiller's murder, Benham and Operation Save America have escalated protests against the three local abortion clinics and held a "siege." They've set up ladders to peer over the privacy fence and amplify their protests at the Family Reproductive Health abortion clinic. They also stand in the driveway, holding STOP signs up to entering patients, whom they attempt to direct to the local CPC, Pregnancy Resource Center—often driving patients there themselves.

Benham and Operation Rescue have also printed and distributed WANTED posters with abortion doctors' photos at the doctors' homes and offices and in their neighborhoods—a terrorizing tactic that, when carried out in Pensacola, Fla. in the 1990s, preceded the earlier murders of two other abortion providers and a clinic volunteer. Those posters were ruled as true threats in a civil

lawsuit, under the FACE Act (Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances).

Meanwhile, the back lines—the CPCs—remain untainted by such activities. The back lines are "clean," says Benham. "So you'll see great financial support for CPCs. We, the people who are out front of the abortion mills, are the 'ugly,' 'dirty' pro-lifers. ... You look at the reports in the media and you'll see that we are the people who blow up abortion mills, kill abortionists; we're the Timothy McVeighs. ... When all arguments fail, they resort to *ad hominem*."

However, the borders between extremist sidewalk counselors and even CPCs seeking to keep distance from them might not be that solid. As NAF's Saporta notes, while CPCs likely seek to "maintain a façade of some kind of legitimate medical facility" to keep receiving federal funds, abortion-clinic staff have recognized the faces of their regular protesters as CPC employees.

It's a demonstration of the labyrinthine connections in the anti-abortion world that seem to prove Dr. Carhart right when he argues that the camps are one and the same. "They have two different spheres. The underlying theory of both is never let the truth stand in the way of getting your point across. If you distort facts to women, there is no difference."

And if you distort facts to the public, which is providing funding for some of your activities, the public deserves to scrutinize both your activities and the company you keep.

What such scrutiny will uncover, Carhart predicts, is that "There is no difference. It's the same people." ■

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Protesters at Dr. LeRoy Carhart's abortion clinic in Bellevue, Neb., are often seen going in and out of this CPC.

