

## God, Life, and Everything Planned Parenthood

You may be tired of the whole Planned Parenthood scandal. You know, the abortion place, the place some guy snuck into and supposedly got admissions that they sell body parts. That place.

You have probably already made up your mind as to whether Planned Parenthood is a valuable medical institution focussing on women's health or the den of the devil. People in general are loathe to change their minds, especially when it comes to issues surrounding race, money or sex.

But it is in the news a lot lately, subject of the presidential debates and congressional votes, so we ought to look at it. After all, the House of Representatives just voted to cut off federal funding to Planned Parenthood even though their vote has no chance of becoming law.

So, what is it all about? Do those videos make any difference? And what is "The Church's" take on Planned Parenthood?

Just kidding. There is no such thing as "The Church." There are many different Christian denominations, and they all have their own unique understandings of the work Planned Parenthood does.

My own church has a nuanced position, at least on abortion. Our official policy is that abortion is a serious decision not to be made lightly. Anyone contemplating having an abortion is admonished to consult their clergy to receive pastoral counseling. We won't necessarily try to talk about person out of it, but we will urge anyone to pray earnestly about it and seek God's input.

We also approach it with humility because the longterm consequences can be hard on a person, so pastoral care may be necessary.

Having said that, our church's position is that it is better to have abortion be legal and safe rather than dangerous. We learned long ago that making abortion illegal does not make it happen less - it only makes the death toll higher.

But abortion really is not the issue when we're talking about Planned Parenthood. Yes, most Planned Parenthood clinics provide abortions (though some don't), but it simply is not the main thing they do. One recent report noted that only three percent of their work has anything to do with abortion. The rest of their work is gynecological or other health care. They even provide health care for men, often in areas where there are no other affordable clinics around.

What's more, the votes to take away funding from Planned Parenthood would not reduce abortions because no abortions receive federal or state funding. The two different realms don't touch. Federal law requires that no federal funding ever be used to cover abortions. So that's all private money.

What does receive federal funding is the screening for breast cancer, pap smears, birth control, that sort of thing. In other words, things that often help reduce the number of abortions.

Some of those proposing the cut in funding argue that even if federal money does not go directly to abortion, it helps take pressure off that tiny aspect of their mission and therefore indirectly funds it.

That is flawed logic.

Since the two different types of service are funded independently of each other, all cutting off federal money to Planned Parenthood will do is cut non-abortion services. Sure, many of their clinics may close or have to curtail their availability, but that will mostly mean that a lot of women who depend on them for medical services will no longer have those services. Abortions will be just as available as before and - in the extreme - they might even drive Planned Parenthood to be only available for abortions.

So, why do people want to cut off the funding? Either they have the mistaken notion that it will reduce abortions or they don't care about abortion services in the first place. What if they just don't like these affordable medical services being available to women?

Now, if they really want to reduce abortions, attacking Planned Parenthood (or any abortion providers) isn't going to do it. As I said before, our church certainly would like to reduce the number of abortions in the world.

What will reduce abortions? Here are a few things that have been proven to work.

1. Provide easy and affordable access to birth control. It really does work. If it offends people that women will have sex whether or not they want children, too bad. Disliking it will not make it go away. We've been tut-tutting at women (but rarely men) for thousands of years, and yet extra-marital sex still happens.

2. Education works. Not just sex education where well-meaning teachers show girls how the body works. That's important, of course, but not sufficient. Countless studies have shown that well-educated young women have far fewer unplanned pregnancies and far fewer abortions. In fact, the better educated a young woman is, the later they tend to become sexually active. They're too busy making plans for the future and studying to make those plans reality.

3. Employment works. Studies have also shown that women who earn their own money tend to have fewer abortions. Why? There are several theories from not having enough time to have sex to the realization that they are able to take care of themselves without a man (on whom they might feel the need to depend).

So, what will happen with Planned Parenthood? My guess is that nothing will change. It's mostly election year rhetoric. But if federal funding for the service is cut, it will have virtually no impact on the number of abortions that take place in our country.

Scratch that. With the loss of birth control and prenatal medical care for so many young women, it will probably increase the number of abortions. I can't swear that's what will happen, but frankly I pray that we don't have to find out.