

## Murder, Culture, and Dignity

By Rev. Paul T. Stallsworth, United Methodist Church

We are from Kansas. Western Kansas. Garden City, Kansas. When she was in high school, Marsha, my wife, moved with her family from Wichita to Garden City. Years before that, when I was about ready for kindergarten, my family had settled in the same town.

Back in the 1950s, Garden City was a tree-covered town of 10,000 residents. It was a good town in which to grow up. From the vantage point of a boy, the character-building institutions in town seemed quite strong. Families thrived. Jobs for fathers (and some mothers) were plentiful, or so it appeared. Churches were numerous. Schools were demanding enough. Scouts were active. Businesses and services were dependable. Playing the seasonal sports, hunting, fishing, and hiking were things we boys did on the weekends and during the summers.

Then, in 1959 near Garden City, a horrendous crime occurred that, in time, captured the attention of much of America. The Clutter family -- Herb and Bonnie, Nancy (16) and Kenyon (15) -- was murdered in Holcomb, Kansas, a few miles west of Garden City. It happened late on a Saturday night in mid-November. The Clutters were members of my family's church, First Methodist Church of Garden City. When the gruesome murders were first discovered early that Sunday morning, our church's pastor was called to the scene of the crime. Later that morning, at the beginning of our church's Service of Worship, I recall that the pastor stood in the pulpit, announced to the congregation the evil that had been visited upon the Clutters, and canceled the rest of the worship service. Such an announcement and such a cancellation were not forgotten by a nine-year-old boy.

One of my best boyhood friends in town was Paul Dewey. Paul's father, Mr. Alvin Dewey, worked for the Kansas Bureau of Investigation and was assigned to the case.

Since the murders received immediate attention in the New York Times, numerous journalists and writers came to Garden City to cover the crimes and the developing investigation. Among them was the famous writer, Truman Capote, who was accompanied by research assistant Harper Lee, who would author the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* (J.B. Lippincott & Co.). In due course, Richard Hickock and Perry Smith were arrested, held in the Garden City jail, tried, found guilty, sentenced to death by hanging, imprisoned on death row, and executed.

There is no shortage of cultural commentary on this crime. From thousands of pages of notes, Truman Capote wrote *In Cold Blood* (Random House, 1965). Then came the movie, "In Cold Blood" (1967), which starred Robert Blake, John Forsythe, and Scott Wilson. More recently, "Capote" (2005), another movie, appeared. And most recently, Charles Shields' *Mockingbird: A Portrait of Harper Lee* (Henry Holt and Co., 2006), which contains much information on the

crimes against the Clutters and on the writing of *In Cold Blood*, was published.

Along with most of my high-school friends, I saw the movie when it was first released. But for years, suspecting that the author would take a condescending perspective toward our hometown and its citizens, I resisted reading Capote's work of historical fiction. Finally, in the late 1980s, I read the book and found it to be respectful of western Kansas and western Kansans. A hardback copy of the book was given to me, by a brother at St. Peter's United Methodist Church in Morehead City, NC, not many years ago. Then, thanks to the mother of a sister at St. Peter's Church, we were loaned a copy of *Mockingbird*, which amply covers Lee's time in Kansas. Last summer, with renewed interest in the Clutter story, we purchased and watched both of the movies "In Cold Blood" and "Capote."

Why mention all of this in *Lifewatch*? Because the Clutter murders have received, are receiving, and will receive much attention. Why? Because the murder of the four Clutters was a disgusting, violent violation of the God-given dignity of the human person. Because of this violation, "in cold blood," news was written and read, spoken and heard. In addition, books were authored and pondered, and movies were produced and watched. It is a horrible incident, in American history, that should not be forgotten.

Living in the United States in the early part of the twenty-first century, we might well forget the very real power of the moral claim of the dignity of the human person. David Brog, in his excellent and interesting book *In Defense of Faith: The Judeo-Christian Idea and the Struggle for Humanity* (Encounter Books, 2010), reminds us: "The radical idea at the root of the Judeo-Christian tradition is that all human beings are created in the image of God. Both Judaism and Christianity therefore stress the sanctity and equality of all humans. Even more importantly, these faiths demand not merely that we recognize the value of our neighbors, but also that we love them and act on this love by serving them. From the Judeo-Christian perspective, the neighborhood grows to encompass the entire world, and the ingroup swells and swallows all outgroups. Hated strangers become beloved brothers." (p. xiii)

Why is the cold-blooded murder of the Clutter family so morally revolting? Because armed, violent men attacked unarmed, defenseless family members. The God-given human dignity of each Clutter was violently assaulted.

Let us remember that abortion involves the same moral dynamics. The strong (the abortion provider) assault the weak (the unborn child), even though the weak are blessed with God-given human life. Sad to say, in our time and place, the unborn child is the most frequently threatened, and lethally assaulted, person of all.



# Uniting for Life

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Photo Courtesy of LifeNews.com

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## The National Pro-Life Religious Council

The National Pro-Life Religious Council (NPRC) is a Christian coalition which acknowledges Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and works to encourage every Christian denomination to affirm and witness to the biblical standard of the value, dignity and sanctity of human life, and to foster ministry to those vulnerable to the violence of abortion or euthanasia.

### Anglicans for Life

### Conservative Congregational Christian Conference (CCCC)

### Ernest Ohlhoff, Director of Religious Outreach, National Right to Life Committee

### International Communion of the Charismatic Episcopal Church (CEC for Life)

### Lutherans for Life (LFL)

### The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS)

### National Clergy Council

### National Institute of Family and Life Advocates (NIFLA)

### Presbyterians Pro-Life (PPL)

### Priests for Life (PFL)

### Taskforce of United Methodists on Abortion and Sexuality (TUMAS)/Lifewatch

### United Friends for Life (UFL)

## Priests for Life Launches Pro-Life Day of Silent Solidarity

Fr. Frank Pavone, National Director, Priests for Life  
President, National Pro-life Religious Council

Twelve-year-old Haley Altman was sent to the principal's office. Before third period, Courtney Woodward was out of red duct tape. Josiah Wadsack only broke his silence for an after-school Bible study.

The three youths were among thousands of students across the nation and around the globe who took part the Pro-Life Day of Silent Solidarity. On a set Tuesday in mid-October each year, students at nearly 1250 colleges, high schools, middle schools and home schools sign up to remain silent in solidarity with thousands of unborn children permanently silenced by abortion every single day.

The Pro-Life Day of Silent Solidarity is a project of Stand True Ministries, the Youth Outreach of Priests for Life.

Bryan Kemper, founder of Stand True and the Youth Outreach Director of Priests for Life, said he was inspired to start Silent Day in 2004, when a student from McNeese State University in Louisiana asked him, "What can I do to work with other students around the country, in solidarity, to help end abortion?"

Kemper realized how powerful it would be "if we got students to not only act in solidarity with others, but also with the children who are dying every day. As soon as I said it, I knew God had set something in motion inside of me."

The Pro-Life Day of Silent Solidarity was born.

Many students wear red arm bands, and place red duct tape emblazoned with the word "Life" across their mouths, both as a way to help them remain silent and to increase awareness of their goals.

Youth groups, students, businesses and ministries that are interested in taking part should go to [www.silentday.org](http://www.silentday.org) to register and to find valuable resources, including informational fliers that can be handed out to explain the project to curious classmates, and a letter for school administrators prepared by the Alliance Defense Fund.

"We have heard of hundreds of girls who have canceled abortions because of this day every year," said Father Frank Pavone, National Director of Priests for Life. "Are you willing to give up your voice for a day for those who will never have a voice?"

## Mourning the Loss of Pro-Life Advocates

On October 8th Student for Life of America (SFLA) staff members were returning from a pro-life conference along with two students when they were injured in a tragic automobile accident that ultimately claimed three lives. Kortney Blythe Gordon and her pre-born baby, Sophy were killed in the crash, and Jon Scharfenberger died ten days later due to complications suffered in the accident.



Kortney worked as Field Director for SFLA, and Sophy was her and her husband Benjamin's first child. Jon was SFLA's Pregnant on Campus Coordinator and Campus Support Coordinator. During the previous summer he worked as an intern for SFLA and for National Right to Life. The passing of Kortney, Sophy, and Jon is a great loss to the pro-life community and prayers are needed for their families.

## Abortion Awareness: Is Your Church Too Silent?

By Marie Bowen, Presbyterians Pro-Life Executive Director

Most pro-life congregation members wish for their pastor to speak out boldly against the evil of abortion. They want their churches to take action and to engage in life-affirming ministry. Let me gently suggest that maybe it is you and not your pastor who needs to take action. I'm not letting pastors off the hook entirely. Pastors absolutely need to be teaching comprehensively on the value of human life as indicated throughout Scripture. God is crazy about us! Our Creator made us in his



own image, and claims us for his own. He has purchased us with the costly sacrifice of his Son, Jesus Christ, on the cross. That message should pervade a pastor's sermons year round. Silence on abortion is not an acceptable option, but it is not only pastors who are too silent!

### Your pastor is called to shepherd the whole congregation.

Pastors are very aware that the people in their pews on Sunday hold divergent views on social issues. He may think that speaking too directly to social issues like abortion may alienate members of the congregation and close doors to future ministry. Few topics are more emotionally charged than those surrounding pregnancy. In a single congregation there may be members who have had abortions, paid for abortions, urged daughters or wives to abort a child, and also those who have struggled with infertility. Those who desperately want to conceive a child may be angry at the thought that some women have "thrown away" a baby in the womb. Others may be adamant that a woman has the right to choose whether or not she will carry her baby to term. It may seem to your pastor that silence is preferable to the emotional free-for-all that might result if he speaks publicly against abortion unleashing disagreement.

### Silence about abortion may not mean you agree.

On the other hand, it is essential to understand that silence about abortion in your congregation does NOT indicate that your congregation is united on this issue. Most church members have an assumption of agreement on essentials of the faith. If your church has not discussed abortion publicly, you probably believe that those in your community of faith hold the same beliefs that you hold about the sacred value of human life. It can be very disturbing to learn that you disagree with those who sit next to you in worship on Sunday. However, if a congregation hopes to minister to the deep hurts and broken places in the lives of its members, breaking the silence on abortion is essential. You could be the one to begin the conversation.

### Breaking silence while facilitating ministry

Here are some ways to open dialogue and ministry without creating division or making your pastor the focal point of controversy.

1) Offer a Sunday School class or Bible study. Make Scripture the focus and authority on the topic of abortion and human life. Pregnant with Promise is a Bible study centered on God's character as revealed through the pregnancy stories of the Bible. For those who have experienced abortion and need to find healing and forgiveness, PPL recommends Forgiven and Set Free & Healing a Father's Heart, Bible studies by Linda Cochran & Kathy Jones.

2) Engaging your congregation by joining hands with your local pregnancy care center or adoption agency is a pro-active way to affirm life in the womb. Something as simple as collecting diapers for a pregnancy center, having a speaker from an adoption agency give a presentation, or providing wrap-around services for an unwed mother, can help church members begin to think about life in the womb without the divisiveness of political dialogue.

3) When there is pregnancy loss—current or past—within a congregation, providing an opportunity for a memorial service for the unborn can provide a beginning point for healing and, where necessary, forgiveness and restoration.

### Praying to end abortion

Once your congregation has opened dialogue on abortion, has studied what Scripture teaches on the sacredness of human life, and has essential agreement, then you are ready to become active as a congregation in working to end abortion in your church, your community and the nation.

## Associate Membership Application

Yes, I would like to become an Associate Member of the National Pro-Life Religious Council, Inc.

Enclosed is my fee of \$25.00 for membership as:  
\_\_\_\_\_ an individual \_\_\_\_\_ a church \_\_\_\_\_ a group

I would like to make a tax deductible donation of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ to help NPRC with its important work.

Mail to: NPRC c/o Development Office,  
PO Box 61838, Staten Island, NY 10306-9811

Contact Person \_\_\_\_\_  
Church or Group \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
Denomination \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone (h) \_\_\_\_\_ (w) \_\_\_\_\_  
E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

## Attacks on Religious Freedom by Obama Administration Center on Abortion



Congressman  
Chris Smith

The Obama administration has taken a variety of actions that directly limit religious freedom in the United States. Congressman Chris Smith of New Jersey stated in a EWTN interview with Raymond Arroyo that President Obama's Executive Order supposedly ensuring that federal funds would not be used for abortion and that individuals who opposed

abortion would be protected under a conscience clause, "was less than a fig leaf, it actually prescribes, allows, permits, mandates abortion in all of the health care that goes into effect in 2014."

Congressman Smith continued, "So President Obama, the abortion president, is at it once again, saying one thing over here while doing aggressively something with the other hand promoting abortion and promoting an anti-conscious provision that is unprecedented in American history."

## Enacting the Pain-Capable Unborn Children Protection Act in Our Nation's Capital

On the basis of evidence that unborn children can experience pain at least by 20 weeks after fertilization, during 2010 and 2011 five states passed laws that protect unborn children from abortion after this time.

However, in our nation's capital, the District of Columbia, abortion is currently allowed at any point in pregnancy, and for any reason. Because the Constitution puts the District under the direct legislative authority of Congress and the President, Congressman Trent Franks (R-Az.), with the strong support of the National Right to Life Committee (NRLC), has introduced the District of Columbia Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act (H.R. 3803).

If this bill were enacted, abortion of unborn babies who are capable of feeling pain, past 20 weeks, would be illegal in the District, as it already is in Alabama, Kansas, Idaho, Nebraska, and Oklahoma. As yet, there has been no serious legal challenge to any of these laws.

"Today, in our nation's capital, a district that the Constitution puts directly under the authority of Congress and the President, an unborn child can be killed at any point prior to birth, for any reason," said NRLC Federal Legislative Director Douglas Johnson. "If abortion of these pain-capable unborn children remains unrestricted in the nation's capital, during the sixth, seventh, eighth, and ninth months, it will be because certain members of Congress, or the President, obstruct this bill. If they do that, then they alone, under the Constitution, are fully accountable for that policy."

These bills are based on a wealth of evidence that shows how unborn babies can feel pain. By 20 weeks after fertilization, nerves have connected the baby's pain receptors, which are found throughout the body, to the baby's brain. Unborn babies react to touch as early as 8 weeks. And at 20 weeks, ultrasounds show unborn babies reacting physically to outside stimuli such as sound,

light, and touch. Also at 20 weeks, unborn babies will recoil from stimuli that adults would consider as painful. Neonatal surgeons have seen unborn babies flinch or jerk away from sharp objects, and therefore anesthesia is routinely administered to the unborn baby during fetal surgery.

"Modern medical science provides substantial compelling evidence that unborn children recoil from painful stimuli, that their stress hormones increase when they are subjected to any painful stimuli, and that they require anesthesia for fetal surgery," said Mary Spaulding Balch, J.D., director of state legislation for NRLC. "Therefore, the states have a compelling interest in protecting unborn children who are capable of feeling pain from abortion."

The bills are very important to the pro-life movement, as they put the public's focus back on the unborn baby and on how truly terrible and painful the abortion procedure is. While there can be great psychological and sometimes physical harm done to a woman during an abortion, at the center of the procedure there is a helpless baby who is being brutally killed despite his or her silent screams of pain.

"For more information on the unborn's pain and to learn what medical doctors have testified before Congress on the matter, please visit [www.nrlc.org/abortion/Fetal\\_Pain](http://www.nrlc.org/abortion/Fetal_Pain). To get more involved in helping to pass this legislation, please visit the NRLC Legislative Action Center at [www.capwiz.com/nrlc/home](http://www.capwiz.com/nrlc/home).

