



Memorials to the Unborn -- Op Ed by Jen Boulanger

ALLENTOWN - On Tuesday, April 17, the Morning call printed a disturbing photograph of a project being undertaken by Sunday school students at Boulevard Evangelical Congregational Church. The photograph depicts hundreds of tiny crosses, less than a third of the 3,093 crosses they plan to place for each abortion performed in 1999 in the Lehigh Valley. What in some eyes may appear benign, placing these crosses presumes that women who have abortions do not mourn the loss of their pregnancies. Any woman who loses a pregnancy (fetus, baby, child), through miscarriage or abortion, will need to deal with the loss and the emotions that accompany it. It is up to her to decide what she will need in order to successfully cope with her abortion, which may or may not include grieving.

Women honor their pregnancies. As an abortion counselor, I have had the privilege of getting to know women who have had abortions. They have shared personal stories about their abortion decisions and how they were forced to confront their moral and ethical beliefs. The woman coping with an unplanned pregnancy is faced with a reality she never expected to encounter, which, regardless of the outcome, will impact her life and the lives of those around her in some significant way. These women, couples, and families are entitled to privacy to decide which way of coping or grieving is best for them.

It is normal to have mixed emotions about important life decisions and grieve choices we feel are right for us. Abortion can be a painful and loving sacrifice and is rarely decided upon lightly. It is a compassionate and moral decision. It is a matter of the heart. And only by listening to women and understanding what is in their hearts can you learn about their strength and courage.

Some women choose to mourn the loss of their pregnancies, which can help them to obtain closure to their experiences. A woman may decide to hold a private memorial; write a letter to the unborn child; write poetry; plant flowers or a tree; or pray. Other women feel their abortion experience represents a positive turning point in their lives and that this decision enables them to be better mothers. How offended they must feel to see a picture in the newspaper of a stranger stealing these private emotions away from them! It is no one else's right to mourn on behalf of these women.

By displaying these crosses, the church and the students are attempting to rob women of their

emotional privacy and use it in the name of political symbolism. Of the female children in this Sunday school class, 43 percent will choose to have abortions during their reproductive lifetimes. It is a disappointment that the Morning Call participated in an effort to make a political statement by reducing women and their offspring to symbols, rather than respecting them and honoring their privacy.

The benefits of abortion extend far beyond the exercise of a constitutional right. Women must be trusted to determine what is best for their lives and to act as moral agents in making their reproductive decisions.

The amount of time and passion going into this project could be better channeled into something that will actually help our community, such as raising money to help women who want to continue their pregnancies but feel they cannot due to lack of housing, financial and childcare problems. Self-serving displays serve no community purpose.