



Kay Harvill (left) and her daughter, Pam Mayer, pray outside the Planned Parenthood clinic in Waco during the start of their 40 Days for Life campaign.
Staff photo — Rod Aydelotte

Local abortion opponents join international prayer vigil

By MIKE COPELAND mcopeland@wacotrib.com
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Some stood quietly, reading Scripture or their eyes closed in prayer. Others chatted about the cause, their reason for gathering outside the Planned Parenthood clinic in Waco early Wednesday morning.

Ronnie Holmes, senior pastor at Church of the Open Door, joined a local group taking part in “40 Days for Life,” a prayer vigil in 375 cities and 25 countries with the goal of ending abortion.

Holmes watched as a woman emerged from a car driven into the parking lot. “Do you know this is abortion day?” Holmes asked from the sidewalk.

“Yes, I’m here to get one,” the woman replied, pumping a fist into the air.

“I urge you to reconsider,” Holmes said. “A baby’s heartbeat can be heard three weeks after conception.”

“I wouldn’t care if it was 5 years old. I’m going to kill it,” she said, prompting a murmur to arise from those who witnessed the interaction.

Holmes, looking alarmed and repeating the woman’s words, said, “It is very unusual for a woman to go in for an abortion with that attitude. Most have mixed emotions, and some simply don’t know where to turn. We let them know there are options that do not include a baby dying.”

John Pisciotta, director of Pro-Life Waco, said at least 100 local volunteers have signed up to stand outside the Planned Parenthood clinic from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. daily, except Sundays, through Nov. 5. The goal is to have at least two people praying and offering “sidewalk counseling” to anyone visiting the clinic seeking an abortion or family planning advice.

“Despite ongoing intimidation and harassment of Planned Parenthood staff and patients outside of our health center, our doors are open to anyone who needs expert healthcare,” according to a statement from Planned Parenthood of Greater Texas in response to the 40 Days for Life demonstrations.

Treatment is provided to thousands of patients each year, “regardless of their insurance or documentation status, income level, or who they love,” according to the statement.

“Since 1939, Planned Parenthood has provided essential healthcare and education services in Waco,” including breast exams, cervical cancer screenings, testing and treatment for STDs, birth control including IUDs and safe, legal abortion, the statement reads.

Anti-abortion protesters gather for a 40 Days for Life demonstration outside Planned Parenthood in Waco.

Signs posted or being held near the demonstrators’ gathering site, but off the Planned Parenthood property, carried messages including, “Abortion is forever, get the facts first,” and, “Women regret abortion. Don’t do it.”

Two dozen white roses were placed on a walkway near the clinic, one for each abortion performed during a three-day period every other week, Pisciotta said. Pro-Life Waco arrived at that figure by counting vehicles entering the property and talking with visitors, he said.

“To put that in perspective, that’s 50 abortions a month, 600 a year,” Pisciotta said.

In April, Planned Parenthood of Greater Texas resumed abortion services in Waco,

three years after it was unable to meet provisions under Texas House Bill 2 relating to “ambulatory surgical care” and hospital admitting privileges. The U.S. Supreme Court overturned those standards, and the Waco clinic received a new license last fall.

The abortion clinic, which opened in 1994, had served about 800 women a year until its closing. Its closing had left a gap in abortion services between Austin and Dallas-Fort Worth, according to Planned Parenthood.

“There were clinics in Killeen and College Station that still have not reopened, so the local market is getting pretty expansive,” Pisciotta said. “We’re pushing back very hard because, from our perspective, this is something that has dreadful potential.”

Kara Kirby attended the vigil Wednesday with her four children, ages 5 to 16, who joined her in reciting the rosary and praying.

Kirby said her thoughts were with a friend in Chicago who had an abortion performed. She said she wants women who find themselves in dire circumstances to know more about resources available to them as they weigh alternatives.

Deborah McGregor, CEO of Care Net Waco, said the agency offers women’s health and prenatal services free of charge, including sonograms, pregnancy testing and exams for sexually transmitted diseases, and welcomes working with women considering abortion.

Information provided by Pro-Life Waco says the “40 Days for Life” campaign also is being held in Dallas, Fort Worth, Austin, Houston, San Antonio, McAllen and El Paso.

The effort in Waco started with a kickoff ceremony Tuesday evening

