



Aid for Women

Empowering Women to Choose Life Since 1978

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March-April 2004

It's Back!

“A Boutique for All Seasons 2004” is scheduled for Thursday, October 7, 2004, at the North Shore Country Club in Glenview. This classy affair is sponsored by the Aid for Women Auxiliary. Mark your calendars now to attend this long-time favorite event!

“Overwhelmingly Beautiful”

By Susan B. Couri, Board Member and Secretary

One Friday late last April, a young couple named Adriana and Tomas came into Aid for Women contemplating an abortion. They were pregnant with their third child and were feeling desperate.

The couple had a 9-month-old son and a 19-month-old daughter and lived in a one-room attic apartment. Tomas was working part-time, and Adriana had just started back to school taking one class in the afternoons when he was home from work. After counseling, it was evident that they needed much support to help them carry this baby to term.

Since I was part of the “Mentor Angel” program, I became their mentor and arranged a baby shower in my parish through the Adopt-A-Mother-And-Baby program sponsored by the Respect Life Office of the Archdiocese of Chicago.

The shower took place in early November, providing clothes and supplies for the new baby as well as the two older children. Finding them an apartment was a bigger challenge. With the help of God and my parish, St. Joseph of Wilmette, who supplemented their rent increase, the family moved into a two bedroom, first floor apartment three weeks before their baby was due. On December 10, 2003, a beautiful, healthy baby girl named Lilliana was born.

Below is a copy (slightly edited) of their thank you to Aid for Women and the Mentor Angel Program:

“You are right, having kids is a true blessing; but it’s very hard to keep up with our everyday chores with three children. There are days that pass by without us shaving or bathing. Either way, we are happy and grateful about what God has provided for us. We are blessed.

“Thank you, truly, thank you. You have been our guardian angel long before we met you. When God finally decided it was time for us to meet, God knew it was going to be forever. In such a cold world there aren’t enough people that would go out of their way to help others in need (not that I’ve seen).

You truly went out of your way to help and console us. Because of Aid for Women, our little gift from God is healthy and breathing. Throughout my lifetime I’ve never experienced such kindness so many people can bring. Now I have, and the feeling of it all is overwhelmingly beautiful.”

As you can see, being a counselor and/or mentor for Aid for Women is also an overwhelmingly beautiful experience. Each person who supports this ministry, in whatever capacity, is an integral part of making it possible.

I hope this story will encourage you to offer your time as a counselor or mentor for Aid for Women. You, too, can feel the rewards first-hand of helping young men and women through a difficult and blessed time.

Celebrating at the baby shower are (from left) Tomas holding daughter Anahi, Susan Couri, Kirsten Solmos of the St. Joseph Respect Life Committee, and Adriana with son, Andrew.



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Walking In Grace

Aid for Women welcomes Diane R. Pietrzak as executive director, effective February 2, 2004 (which, coincidentally, was also her birthday!). Diane is new to pregnancy resource center leadership, but she is no stranger to the cause for life. She was the President of the student pro-life organization at Washington University in St. Louis, and has remained active in pro-life since college, usually attending the March for Life in Washington, D.C. each January.

Diane takes over leadership at Aid for Women from Elaine M. Kindler, who became executive director in March 2000. Elaine oversaw enhancements to client counseling and services, volunteer training and appreciation, and office technology. She succeeded in increasing the number of presentations to churches and groups, which helped raise awareness of Aid for Women's critical efforts throughout the Chicago area. Working with the board of directors, Elaine helped increase the number of donors substantially between 2000 and 2003.

"To be at all effective as an executive director of a pregnancy resource center requires that you walk in God's grace, every day," Elaine said. "I am extremely grateful for the privi-

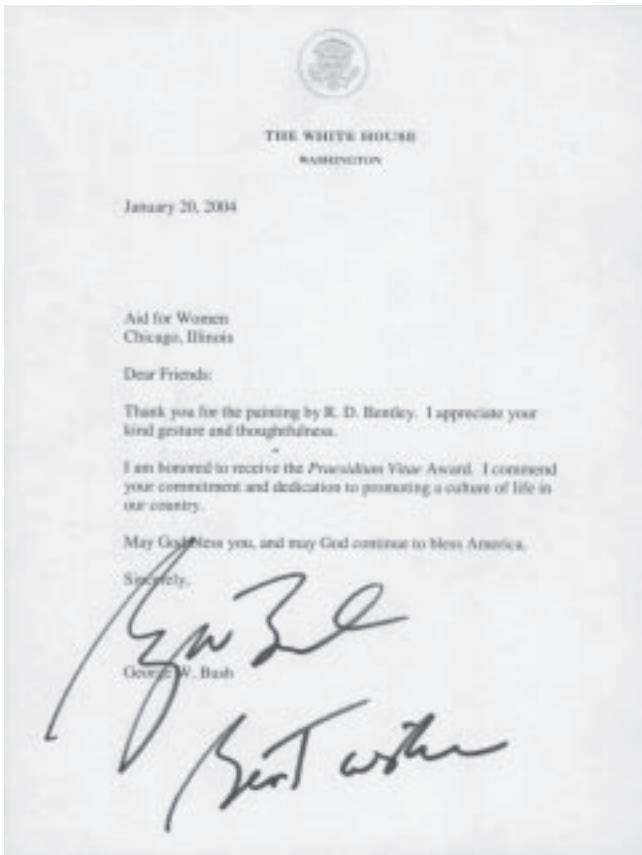
lege to work with and know the incredible women and men who support Aid for Women in many different capacities. I am thankful beyond words for God's faithfulness to Aid for Women and me during the past four years. It truly has been a walk in grace."

Elaine resigned in order to relocate to the New England area where she will continue her service to the cause for life.



Elaine Kindler (left) and Diane Pietrzak in front of Aid for Women's table at the 2004 Speak Out Illinois conference on January 25, 2004.

President Bush Sends Greetings



The President's letter, with his original signature and the comment "Best wishes."

In recognition of his commitment to the sanctity of life, President George W. Bush was the recipient of the *Praesidium Vitae* (Defender of Life) award at Aid for Women's 25th anniversary gala dinner on September 25, 2003.

Since the President was unable to attend the ceremony, Chairman of the Board Pat Daily presented the award to White House Deputy Director of Public Liaison Tim Goeglein, who graciously received it on the President's behalf.

An original portrait by Robert Dewar Bentley, commissioned by Aid for Women and facilitated by Kathleen Van Ella of PORTRAITS/CHICAGO, INC., was presented to the President as well.

President Bush responded with letters expressing his gratitude to both Aid for Women and Bob Bentley. A reprint of the President's letter is to the left.

Please save the date and join us from noon to 3 p.m. on Saturday, June 5, in welcoming guest speaker Vicki Thorn. As the executive director of the National Office of Post-Abortion Reconciliation and Healing, Vicki will present a workshop entitled *Understanding the Truth Will Set Us Free*. Everyone is welcome to this in-service event; you do not have to be an Aid for Women volunteer to attend. A small registration fee of \$5 will include lunch and program materials. Please register at (312) 621-1101 by Wednesday, June 2.

Partial-Birth Abortion Bill Becomes Law

Aid for Women Board Member and 25th Anniversary Dinner Chairwoman Florence Sorensen and her husband, Buz, attended the signing ceremony last fall for the bill banning partial-birth abortions.

The Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act of 2003 was signed into law on November 5, 2003. The historic day was the culmination of Congressional attempts since 1995 to ban partial-birth abortions. Former President Clinton had vetoed the legislation twice.

"The President was so excited to sign it that he tried to quiet the crowd of 400 people, who continued their ovation for a very long time," said Florence. "You could see how determined he was and how proud to be signing this bill into law."

"He promised that every resource of the Executive Department would be used to defend the law and guarantee its enforcement. It was quite a day."

Some excerpts from President Bush's speech are below:

"For years, a terrible form of violence has been directed against children who are inches from birth, while the law looked the other way. Today, at last, the American people and our government have confronted the violence and come to the defense of the innocent child."

...

"Each year, thousands of partial birth abortions are committed. As Doctor C. Everett Koop, the pedia-



Florence and Buz Sorensen (right), at the signing ceremony with C. Preston Noell (left) of the Washington, D.C.-based Tradition, Family and Property initiative which promotes family and pro-life values.

trician and former Surgeon General has pointed out, the majority of partial-birth abortions are not required by medical emergency. As Congress has found, the practice is widely regarded within the medical profession as unnecessary, not only cruel to the child, but harmful to the mother, and a violation of medical ethics."

...

"Every person, however frail or vulnerable, has a place and a purpose in this world. Every person has a special dignity. This right to life cannot be granted or denied by government, because it does not come from government, it comes from the Creator of life."

Unfortunately, enforcement of the new law was immediately blocked due to rulings from three separate federal courts, in New York, San Francisco, and Nebraska. Hearings on the cases began in late March of 2004.



(Photos provided by Florence Sorensen)

President George W. Bush, surrounded by dignitaries, signs the bill. Those present included Attorney General John Ashcroft, Congressman Henry Hyde, and Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert.

A Simple Way to Support Aid for Women – and save money!

Our Internet shopping mall offers a chance for you and your family to support Aid for Women when you do your online shopping. We have partnered with many of the top Internet merchants to develop a secure shopping environment. You pay the same price as you would otherwise, and up to 10% of your purchases will go to Aid for Women. In addition, you can also save money through merchant special offers.

Choose from hundreds of quality merchants in a safe, secure and family-friendly shopping mall. Some participating retailers include Walmart, Best Buy, Barnes & Noble, Office Max, Omaha Steaks, Lands End, LL Bean, Circuit City, Harry and David, Sears, PETsMART, KBToys, The Sharper Image, Staples, Spiegel, The Vitamin Shoppe, and many more.

Please visit our mall at: www.aidforwomen.onecause.com, or click on the shopping link at www.aidforwomen.org. Thank you!



Speak Out Illinois 2004 Audio Tapes Available

Audiotapes of talks and workshops from the 2004 conference, *Understanding "Choice,"* are now available for purchase. Aid for Women was one of the sponsoring organizations of the event. One of the workshops was co-facilitated by now former Aid for Women Executive Director Elaine Kindler. Tapes are \$5 each plus \$1.25 for shipping, or the full set of 8 tapes is \$35 plus \$5 for shipping. Order forms are available at www.SpeakOutIllinois.org.

Volunteers are Always Needed

By Sharnina D. Starling-Buford, Director of Client and Volunteer Services

Answering phones, scheduling appointments, talking with clients about healthy choices, counseling clients face-to-face, referring a client to a shelter, lending a listening ear, sharing a well-needed hug, painting a different vision for a client to see, and sharing God's word when asked – these are just a few things that Aid for Women volunteer pregnancy counselors do from their hearts.

The dedication of each volunteer pregnancy counselor is impressive. Aid for Women is incredibly grateful, for without the commitment from our counselors, we could not rejoice in the many lives we touch. Our counselors take pride in their work and because of that, they are women of prestige and honor.



Volunteers discuss counseling techniques at a previous training session.

If you have the desire, direction and inspiration to give of yourself to women in need, please consider joining Aid for Women's volunteer pregnancy counselor team. No previous counseling experience is necessary, only a willingness to serve and learn. We will provide you with a six-hour, one-day training, followed by 20 hours of observation, support and encouragement.

Our free training is designed so that each person can contribute at her own level of comfort. Level One counselors are trained to answer the phone and provide counseling to callers, addressing pregnancy issues and information about Aid for Women services. Upon completing Level One, you have the opportunity to become a Level Two counselor, providing face-to-face counseling to our clients.

Please join us for a no-obligation orientation from 9 to 10 a.m. at 8 S. Michigan Ave., Suite 1303, on one of the dates listed below. If you have already decided to become available to others by volunteering with us, please stay for the full day of training, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. (Lunch will be provided.)

Level One Training Dates

- May 12, Wednesday, 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.
- October 2, Saturday, 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.

If your parish or women's group is interested in learning more about volunteer opportunities, please call (312) 621-1101 and ask for Sharnina. Volunteers are always needed!

In Perspective

Diane R. Pietrzak, Executive Director

I was privileged to attend a preview screening of Mel Gibson's film, *The Passion of the Christ*, a few days prior to its official release. Needless to say, I was overwhelmed by the powerful portrayal of Jesus' sacrifice of unconditional love.

But I was also struck by the quiet, faithful role of Veronica. She dares to approach Jesus, as He lies broken and beaten on the streets of Jerusalem. She asks Him to permit her to attend to His needs, and He receives her compassion.

Veronica doesn't shrink back and wring her hands about what little she can do. Merely wiping Christ's face may seem trivial considering His intense suffering, but this gesture was humbly offered from her heart. Surely Veronica's concern and compassion comforted Christ in His hour of loneliness and brutal torture, at least as much as her meager offerings of physical relief. And her seemingly insignificant act is still remembered 2000 years later.

I admire both Veronica's humility and her boldness, her courage. "Don't be afraid," she tells her daughter in the film, just as Pope John Paul II has been telling his flock for the past 25 years. No offering is too small, no gift too insignificant, when given in love. God has promised to multiply whatever we offer. But nothing times 1,000 is still nothing; first, we must take that step of faith and *give* of ourselves.

The word "compassion" comes from two Latin words: "com"



meaning "with," and "passion" which means "to suffer." Thus, compassion is *suffering with* another person.

But this is not a passive emotion. Merriam-Webster defines compassion as "sympathetic consciousness of others' distress together with a desire to alleviate it." A deep awareness of another's pain creates a sense of solidarity and offers companionship and assistance.

At Aid for Women, we are called to bring this compassion to women and girls experiencing the anxiety, fear, and confusion of an unplanned pregnancy. As we reach out in love and support, we offer to accompany them during their time of trial, to provide whatever emotional, physical, spiritual and material resources we can to empower them to choose life. This is *compassion in action*.

God can take what little we have to give and use it in a mighty way. As Mother Teresa said, every little act of love is doing "something beautiful for God." May you be assured that the smallest act of kindness, gesture of love, prayer or sacrifice for a sister in need, will be seen, rewarded and used powerfully. Let us not forget Jesus' words in the parable of Matthew 25: "Whatever you did for one of the least of these, you did for me."

I wholeheartedly thank you for the compassion you have shown to the women we serve. We can only imagine what He, who with five loaves and two fish fed a multitude, can surely do with what we have to offer Him today.