



Written by on September 16, 2009

## Pro-lifers' Prayers Protest Planned Parenthood

The Gulf Coast community of Naples, Florida, is known more for its numerous golf courses and palm-tree lined planned retirement communities than for controversy and dissent, but Planned Parenthood's decision to perform abortions here created quite a stir when the facility began performing the once-banned procedures on September 14.



An AP report noted that abortions have not been available for 13 years in Collier County — of which Naples is the county seat — an area considered to be generally conservative in its political and social makeup. The last doctor in private practice who performed abortions in the county stopped in 1996, in apparent response to demonstrations held by pro-life advocates outside of his practice and home.

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"It became clear that no private provider was going to provide services in the county," Char Wendel, president and chief executive officer of Planned Parenthood of Collier County, said in an interview with the *Fort Myers News-Press*. "We wanted to provide the full range of reproductive and sexual health care services."

"Reproductive and sexual health care services" is a euphemism for abortion and contraception — taken as a combined unit — by providers such as Planned Parenthood.

While pro-life advocates have continuously engaged in prayer vigils outside abortuaries and sidewalk counseling for women seeking abortions since the infamous *Roe v Wade* and *Doe v Bolton* decisions rendered by the Supreme Court on January 22, 1973 denied the right of states to prohibit abortion, the opening of this latest facility produced more than ordinary controversy. And that may very well be attributed to the fact that Collier County is now home to an institution that was not around in 1996 — Ave Maria University.

AMU is the successor to Ave Maria College, founded in Ypsilanti, Michigan, in 1998 by Domino's Pizza founder Thomas Monaghan. Chartered as a university in 2003. AMU was located at a temporary campus in Naples until 2007, when it was relocated to the new town of Ave Maria, some 20 miles East of Naples. Recently, Ave Maria Law School, also founded by Monaghan, relocated from Ann Arbor, Michigan, to occupy the university's former campus in Naples.

Thomas Monaghan, as a faithful Catholic layman, has long been a supporter of pro-life causes such as Operation Rescue, and back in the days when he still owned the pizza chain, his position sometimes caused Domino's to become the target of boycotts called for by pro-abortion groups.



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With a legacy inspired by its founder, Ave Maria University's students have often used their youthful enthusiasm to serve the cause of life. Last January, a group of 60 students from the university traveled to Washington, D.C. to participate in the annual March for Life.

On the morning of September 14, the morning radio news report announced that a group of Ave Maria students had been holding a candlelight vigil outside the clinic since midnight, peacefully praying and softly singing hymns. Additional students and Ave Maria residents met outside the town's signature Oratory after 7:30 am Mass to exchange information, receive their stick-on "Life is Precious" lapel badge, and form carpools for the ride to Collier County's pre-natal equivalent of the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp.

The students and town residents joined pro-lifers from churches all over Collier County praying and singing as pairs of Planned Parenthood staff and volunteers escorted women from the parking area to the facilities, their identities shielded from public view by open umbrellas. Some forming the vigil carried signs that read "God Loves Your Baby," and "We Can Help!" The *Naples News* estimated that "their numbers grew to about 100 protesters by mid-morning, with participants coming and going throughout the day."

Martha Mass, this writer's wife, who serves as treasurer of the Ave Maria Respect Life Committee in the neighboring town, recalled :

There was a deep sadness in the hearts of our people as we watched the girls being escorted in. Each time, we would hope that the woman would change her mind at the last moment, but none did. It brought lumps to our throats and we held back tears as we stood helpless, unable to prevent this tragedy. All we could do was pray and hope that someday, our prayers would bring an end to this national abomination.

Mrs. Mass said that members of Planned Parenthood's staff repeatedly took picture of the pro-life people engaged in peaceful prayer and attempted to stare them down, but the pro-lifers remained unfazed by this feeble attempt at intimidation.

The *News* reported that Char Wendel, Planned Parenthood's local CEO, said she had no regrets about her organization's decision to offer abortions for first-trimester pregnancies and that she was pleased by the large contingent of law enforcement officers who were present.

"I think the law enforcement are doing a great job protecting our patients and staff and First Amendment rights," she said. "All the staff are feeling proud today to bring this service [here]. I think we are committed to providing the service. We have been a long time coming."

Ms. Wendel did not elaborate on exactly where in the First Amendment the right to kill unborn babies in the womb is found. The amendment states: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."

Perhaps Ms. Wendel failed to consider that maybe the law enforcement officers were there also to protect the First Amendment rights of the pro-lifers gathered outside. When Captain Mark Baker of the Collier County Sheriff's Office was interviewed on camera by a local news bureau, he stated that officers were "monitoring the situation of people wanting to engage in their lawful right to exercise the first amendment speech, to protest whatever their issues are. We're just here as a presence to make sure the community's safe ... to make sure the neighborhood's not affected by unnecessary traffic and



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parking. Basically just here in case somebody needs us for questions for comments, for safety reasons." Though there was never any indication that employees or patients of Planned Parenthood were at any time threatened with physical harm by a group of mostly senior citizens and wholesome-looking college students engaged in prayer, the head of the organization that reaps a whirlwind profit from snuffing out human life seemed to relish in affecting a manufactured fear. "Protecting our patients and staff," indeed!

The teams of official-looking staff, wearing bright yellow safety vests emblazoned with "PLANNED PARENTHOOD" in large black letters, lending mock authority to their attire — like wannabe FBI or DEA agents — "guarded" the hapless patients as if escorting them through a mob of stone throwing Islamic terrorists in downtown Teheran.

The entire scenario would be comical if not for the fate of the unborn child carried aboard each woman to his or her doom.

Among those present for the "grand opening" of the abortuary was Eric Scheidler, the son of Joe Scheidler, executive director of the Chicago-based Pro-Life Action League . Scheidler spent years defending himself against a lawsuit brought against him and the league by the National Organization for Women (NOW) under the RICO act, a law originally intended to be used against organized crime. Though he eventually won, in a case (NOW v. Scheidler) that went to the Supreme Court, the legal costs were devastating to the Scheidler family's personal finances. (See [Conservapedia](#) for more details)

"Planned Parenthood is Abortion Inc.," the younger Scheidler told the *Naples News*. "has almost become the Wal-mart of abortion."

"It's a dark day for Naples but at the same time, it is an opportunity to share the mission of the pro-life community," said Scheidler. "We call for people around the country to take action, take those pro-life convictions and put them to action."

*Photo: AP Images*

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