

From the Speakers' Podium to the Altar

The Right to Life Oratory Contest is a terrific opportunity for local youth to learn more about life issues, to hone their pro-life arguments, and to gain public-speaking experience. For two 2015 participants, the contest had a more unexpected—and life-changing—consequence.

Erin Gaerke and Nathan Platfoot's story begins on the March for Life bus trip in January 2015. Nathan, a junior at Botkins High School, found himself amid a sea of Russia High School students, and he met a lot of new people, including a pretty, blond junior with whom he had only a brief interaction. "She remembers it; I don't," he confesses.

In February, their paths crossed again, as competitors in the RTL oratory contest. They both made a good showing: Nathan won second place and Erin came in third. This time, their encounter was more memorable. Through a common friend, Nathan was reintroduced to Erin. "We really hit it off and had a great conversation," she recalls.

They exchanged contact information and eventually Erin asked Nathan to Russia's prom. Nathan reciprocated for the Botkins prom and the relationship was off and running. By the time the 2016 oratory contest rolled around, the two were dating—but still competitors at the podium. Now both seniors, Erin took first place and Nathan was again second. The turnabout has been the cause of some playful banter between the two. "I beat him by a larger margin than he beat me," Erin points out. "I was more consistent," Nathan replies.

It's appropriate that an RTL event was the springboard for their courtship. Nathan, the son of Richard and Joyce Platfoot, and Erin, the daughter of Jason and Judie Gaerke, were both raised in strongly pro-life, devoutly Catholic families. They agree that this common background provided a solid foundation for their relationship.

After high school, Erin and Nathan continued their studies at the Ohio State University, where they will graduate next May. At the beginning of the summer following their third year, they went backpacking in Germany, where Nathan proposed and Erin accepted. They will be married at St. Remy Church in September 2020. *Congratulations, Nathan and Erin!*

Life Chain 2019

More than fifty Shelby County pro-lifers joined thousands of others across the continent in more than 1600 communities in prayerful witness at the annual Life Chain, Sunday, October 6 on the court square. With rain threatening, the program began inside the RTL shop with a prayer led by Father Jarred Kohn of the Petersburg Parishes. Elias Bezy delivered his 2019 oratory contest-winning speech, then the group moved outside—no rain!—and displayed pro-life messages for downtown passersby.

Thanks to all who participated in this important witness.

Thrift Shop Report

August

217 Customers
16 Work-to-earn shifts
67 Units, assistance program

September

178 Customers
10 Work-to-earn shifts

Number of Abortions Drops to Historic Low

Pro-life advocates have a reason to celebrate this week after a report shows abortions dropping to a new all-time low across the United States. The Guttmacher Institute, a pro-abortion research group considered to have the most comprehensive abortion data, reported a 7-percent drop in abortions between 2017 and 2014, NPR reports.

There were 862,320 abortions reported in 2017, down from 926,200 in 2014, according to the report. The abortion rate also fell to 13.5 per 1,000 women of childbearing age, down from 14.6 in 2014 and 16.9 in 2011. Not since the U.S. Supreme Court allowed abortion on demand in 1973 through *Roe v. Wade* have abortion numbers been so low.

Guttmacher attributed the decline to lower pregnancy rates and better access to contraception. However, pro-life efforts to protect unborn babies and mothers also made a strong impact. According to the report, 32 states passed about 400 pro-life laws in that time period, including requirements that women be allowed to see the ultrasound of their unborn baby, informed consent, parental consent and waiting period requirements.

Yet more evidence of pro-lifers' life-saving impact, the states with the highest abortion rates also have the most permissive pro-abortion laws, including the District of Columbia, New Jersey, New York and Maryland, according to the report. Meanwhile, the states with the lowest abortion rates are ones that have been working hard to protect unborn babies from abortion: Wyoming, South Dakota, Kentucky, Idaho and Missouri.

While the total number of abortions are down, the number of medication abortions are up. According to Guttmacher, 39 percent of all abortions in the U.S. were drug-induced abortions in 2017, up from 29 percent in 2014.

Various news outlets also speculated about a possible rise in self-induced abortions, a dangerous trend that abortion activists have been pushing in the past few years. The FDA recently cracked down on several online abortion drug sellers after one was linked to an alleged forced abortion.

By Micaiah Bilger, LifeNews.com, September 18, 2019. Edited for space.

Ohio Abortion Numbers also Lowest on Record

On October 1, the Ohio Department of Health released the 2018 Ohio Abortion Report, revealing a decrease in the number of abortions last year. A total number of 20,425 abortions were performed, representing a decrease of 2% from the previous year and a 31% decline over the last decade. This marks the lowest level since 1976, when record-keeping first began, and follows a national trend as abortions continue a steady decline nationwide to their lowest numbers since *Roe v. Wade* was decided in 1973.

Since 2010, half of Ohio's abortion facilities have been shuttered or closed voluntarily. In the last nine years, Ohio Right to Life has successfully advocated for 22 pro-life initiatives which have been signed into law, including Ohio's Heartbeat Protection Act which was signed earlier this year. Currently, Ohio Right to Life is advocating in favor of the Unborn Child Dignity Act and the Abortion Pill Reversal Information Act which both seek to promote a culture that respects life, respects women, and rejects abortion.

Excerpted from Ohio Right to Life (OhioLife.org) press release, October 1, 2019.

Congratulations to Jim and Jill O'Leary on their 50th wedding anniversary,
In recognition of which a donation was made to Right to Life.



For all of the members, volunteers, board members, and staff of Shelby County Right to Life, may God guide us and strengthen us as we strive to uphold the dignity of every person.

Program Director Farewell

It's hard to believe that it's been twelve years since I started working for Right to Life. In January of 2007, we were still located in a small office across from the post office. We had no lifetime members, no website, no social media presence, and never used e-mail to communicate with members. We didn't sponsor an oratory contest, our speakers' bureau was mostly inactive, and the annual golf outing hadn't yet been conceived. How things have changed!

That's not to say Right to Life wasn't doing great things. We were blessed with a talented office manager, generous volunteers, and a dedicated board. We had an established presence in the community and reached thousands of people through our parade floats, candlelight vigils, Life Chain, and fair booth. Our garage sale raised many of the funds we needed to operate. In short, Right to Life was an outstanding organization, poised to be even better.

That's where we are now, too. RTL will benefit from new energy and new ideas and it's time to pass the torch to the next runner. I look forward to seeing what is in store for RTL in the future.

One of the most edifying aspects of my work for RTL has been witnessing the phenomenal generosity of our members and volunteers. It is only from the inside that one can fully appreciate how much effort, time, and money go into making RTL the success it is. I sincerely and warmly thank all of you who have contributed so much in so many ways.

I have also been amazed at the good that is done every day by our thrift shop staff and volunteers. Their genuine care for those in various forms of need is a testament to their compassion, an asset to our organization, and a blessing to our community.

I'm grateful to have had the opportunity to labor for the cause of life and to all of you for your cooperation and support. I pray for God's blessings on you and on Right to Life. —Kevin Schmiesing

Study: Assisted Suicide Laws Dangerous for People with Disabilities

The National Council on Disability (NCD) has issued the second in a series of reports on Bioethics and Disability. NCD's release on the report focuses on "a federal examination of the country's assisted suicide laws and their effect on people with disabilities, finding the laws' safeguards are ineffective and oversight of abuses and mistakes is absent."

The Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund (DREDF), which worked in partnership with NCD on the series of reports, summarizes this groundbreaking work:

Despite the growing consensus that disability is a normal part of the human experience, the lives of people with disabilities are routinely devalued in medical decision-making. Negative biases and inaccurate assumptions about disabled people persist. In medical situations, these biases can have serious and even deadly consequences.

NCD's release on the assisted suicide report includes the following details: *Continued on page 4*

In memory of Melba Bender, Alfred Gehret, and Mary Yahl,
In whose honor memorial donations were made to Right to Life.
+ May they rest in peace +

Assisted Suicide Laws Dangerous for Disabled *Continued from page 3*

Despite the belief that pain relief is the primary motivation for seeking assisted suicide, NCD found that the most prevalent reasons offered by someone requesting assisted suicide are directly related to unmet service and support needs, which NCD urges policy makers respond to through legislative changes and funding.

Closely examining the experience in Oregon, where the practice has been legal for 20 years, NCD found that the list of conditions eligible for assisted suicide has expanded considerably over time, including many disabilities that, when properly treated, do not result in death, including arthritis, diabetes, and kidney failure.

In the report, NCD details limitations of purported safeguards of assisted suicide laws, finding:

- Insurers have denied expensive, life-sustaining medical treatment, but offered to subsidize lethal drugs, potentially leading patients to hasten their own deaths.
- Misdiagnoses of terminal disease can cause frightened patients to hasten their deaths.
- Though fear and depression often drive requests for assisted suicide, referral for psychological evaluation is extremely rare prior to doctors writing lethal prescriptions
- Financial and emotional pressures can distort patient choice.
- Patients may “doctor shop” limitlessly to find a physician who will obtain a colleague’s concurrence and prescribe a lethal dose.

Posted by Alex Schadenberg, Euthanasia Prevention Coalition blog, October 10, 2019. Originally published by Not Dead Yet, October 9, 2010. Edited for space.