The Parent Trap
A Christian Adoption Agency Pays A High Price For Standing By Its Biblical Principles
In March 2018, I argued the case of NIFLA v. Becerra before the U.S. Supreme Court. It had been 32 years since my last Supreme Court argument.

The issue was whether California could force pro-life pregnancy care centers to deliver a pro-abortion message to all of their visitors.

On the morning of the argument, my heart pounded faster and faster as the moment approached. The five-minute warning bell rang. My heart pounded all the more. I believed Justice Ginsburg — a staunch abortion proponent — would ask the first question.

I walked to the lectern, and the Chief Justice called my name. It was time to begin.

Normally, an attorney has about 15 seconds to speak before a justice interrupts with the first question. Shockingly, the justices allowed me to exhaust my entire prepared remarks (about 30 seconds) without interjecting. I was about four words into new territory when Justice Ginsburg asked a question — the very question I’d predicted.

At that moment, this thought came to my spirit: "Relax. You worked hard. You’re ready. Just answer their questions."

A calm overtook me that seemed to come from above — an assurance that God had prepared me for that moment. In June 2018, our victory in that case was announced.

As we face the COVID-19 pandemic today, anxiety is natural. Lives are at stake. Freedom is on the line.

Yet those of us who follow Christ have been prepared for such a time as this. We know that love casts out fear, and we know that God loves us — and all mankind. God’s Word assures us that days of evil and trouble never overpower the goodness of God.

We know that we have access to the peace that passes understanding. We've always known moments would arise where God alone is the all-sufficient answer.

I don’t mean to suggest that these troubles are light or transient. This is a world-changing level of turmoil. But the God of the ages is in our midst. God’s people can deliver a message to the whole world as we stand in the confidence of our faith.

Let us show the world what peace He brings in the midst of trouble.
Idaho Becomes First State To Protect Female Athletes From Competing Against Males

In March, Idaho became the first state to enact a law protecting equal opportunities for female athletes at the high school and college level. Recognizing inherent differences between men and women, the state’s Fairness in Women’s Sports Act ensures that female athletes will not be forced to compete against males. Across the U.S., activists are pushing schools and athletic conferences to adopt policies that allow male athletes who identify as girls to compete in women’s sports. These policies violate Title IX, which was designed to protect women’s equality in education and athletics.

In Connecticut, two males dominated girls’ high school track after they began competing as females, capturing over a dozen championships and breaking 17 long-standing female track records. Chelsea Mitchell, a Connecticut high school senior, lost four state championships to Chelsea Nelson, a Kentucky wedding photographer, while competing in Arizona. The case's resolution affects the entire country.

Abortionists who seek to put their profit ahead of the well-being of women and staff who could be affected by COVID-19 shouldn’t be allowed to get away with their irresponsible demands. ADF Senior Counsel Denise Harle

News & Quick Takes
Case Updates From Around The World

San Marcos, California

A federal lawsuit against California State University–San Marcos came to an end in February, after the university agreed to revise a campus policy that allowed university officials to allocate student funding discriminatorily. 

The lawsuit was filed in 2017 by Nathaniel Apodaca’s Students for Life group, which had raised nearly $300,000 in funding from student fees. The university had argued that the group was not a protected student group. In May 2022, the university agreed to a settlement.

Texas

One day after a district court judge blocked Texas from suspending most elective abortions during the coronavirus pandemic, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the ban.

The previous week, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott had ordered health care facilities to postpone all nonessential medical procedures — including abortion — during the pandemic. Planned Parenthood and other pro-abortion groups argued that abortions are essential.

Louisville, Kentucky

The U.S. Department of Justice is supporting the artistic freedom of a Kentucky wedding photographer and blogger represented by ADF.

ADF has filed a lawsuit, challenging a state law that forces photographers to use artistic talents to promote and participate in same-sex wedding ceremonies. The photographer, Chelsea Nelson, is challenging the state law.

Washington, D.C.

The inaugural ADF Journalism Academy was held Jan. 24-25 at ADF’s office in Washington, D.C. Drawing 25 participants, the event sought to equip young professionals to be quality journalists and communicators who promote truth in their field.

The training covered the art of storytelling, messaging, and media relations, and even touched on video journalism. Response was overwhelmingly positive.

“Opening our eyes to the power of words is the greatest gift ever. This weekend was filled with so much positivity and encouragement,” one participant wrote.

“The weekend was filled with so much positivity and encouragement,” one participant wrote as part of feedback offered at the close of the Friday/Saturday event. “I feel much more prepared to go into the media field, knowing that I have the resources to honestly and effectively communicate truth.”

India

Eight Christians, including two women and a pastor, defended by ADF India and its allies have been acquitted of false charges of kidnapping and forcible conversion.

The pastors were arrested at a train station in May 2017 while accompanying children to a Christian summer camp. The children’s parents immediately confirmed in local court that they had willingly sent their children to the camp. Authorities questioned the children, who were then allowed to return to their homes. The adults charged were held in jail for three months. The acquittal marks a groundbreaking win for Christians in India, and highlights the false accusations and hostilities directed at religious minorities there.

United Kingdom

Allegations against a midwife student who was forced to suspend her studies over her pro-life views have been dismissed. But her case has raised concerns about freedom of speech on university campuses.

Julia Rynkiewicz, a 24-year-old student at the University of Nottingham, was subject to a lengthy “fitness to practice” hearing after concerns were raised about her involvement with the university’s pro-life student society as its president. Following a complaint by one of Rynkiewicz’s lecturers, she was suspended by the university pending the outcome of a nearly four-month investigation.

While the investigation was ultimately dismissed, the suspension forced her to delay her studies. She has lodged a complaint with her university with the support of ADF International.

“Julia’s treatment in this case represents a very chilling prospect for freedom of speech on campus,” says Laurence Wilkinson, legal counsel for ADF International in London. “If all places, university is where students should be free to debate and explore ideas — even those with which they disagree.”
On a Saturday early in the COVID-19 pandemic, Arizona, like so much of the country, was under a general—though not complete—shutdown. Nevertheless, the governor was allowing people out for a few things, like fresh-air recreation, and Kyle Barthelson, Alliance Defending Freedom’s senior director of Philanthropy and Stewardship, was taking him at his word.

Bicycling the winding roads of the Phoenix Mountains Preserve, he glanced over and saw a couple hiking. The man was wearing a shirt from Barthelson’s alma mater, Virginia Tech. Barthelson waved and yelled, “Go Hokies!” He heard a friendly shout in reply, and wheeled around to come back to within the prescribed “Go Hokies!” He heard a friendly shout in reply, and wheeled around to come back to within the prescribed

As it turned out, the man had done work much like Barthelson’s from time to time, and he knew how to speak words of encouragement to someone in that position. He and his wife asked to pray with Barthelson, and for ADF, so the three stood, at a distance, out under the springtime sky, seeking the Lord together.

As a big world, ADF is a small universe unto itself—a warm and intricate alliance of lawyers, clients, staff, ministry friends, prayer ambassadors, and kindred organizations that has been stretched, like the rest of the country, by the events of these last few months.

How the coronavirus has impacted those relationships and the work of the ministry makes for quite a story—too big a story for these pages. But even a glimpse reveals the remarkable way God has used and is using so many in the ADF universe to minister His love and truth in these extraordinary days.

Pastors vs. The Shutdown

The directive from many state and local governments for churches to close down regular worship services for the duration of the pandemic prompted a deluge of phone calls to the ADF Center for Christian Ministries, from pastors and other church leaders all over the U.S. Church attorneys began calling, too—wanting to clarify their understanding of the constitutionality of the various directives, as well as the eligibility of churches for small business loans to cover staff salaries once canceled meetings put an end to passing the offering plate.

An already robust number of calls swelled to a flood in mid-March, when Washington Governor Jay Inslee issued the first gathering restrictions affecting churches in three counties surrounding Seattle. Inslee at first included orders that could have been interpreted to preclude churches from streaming services online. That constitutional overstep prompted a formal letter from ADF attorneys, and the state quickly clarified that churches could continue livestreaming services.

In fact, says Kristen Waggoner, ADF general counsel, “many churches didn’t know how to livestream their services, and hadn’t livestreamed before. They have to do that now—which means the Gospel is getting out in new ways.” One church in the ADF Church Alliance had 155,000 people tune in for an online service...and reported more than 2,000 decisions for Christ that day alone.

ADF attorneys prepared a video to walk churches through their legal rights during the pandemic. Many churches posted the video on their website, and some Christian TV stations around the country began running it on the air. Over 100,000 views have been recorded. In early April, an ADF-hosted webinar on “Faith in a Time of Crisis” became the highest-attended live online presentation in the ministry’s history.

ADF Senior Counsel Ray Kaselonis, an attorney with the Center for Christian Ministries, says ADF quickly decided to offer counsel on coronavirus-related restrictions on churches to any church that called for help—not just the 2,000-plus churches that partner with the ministry through ADF Church Alliance. Kaselonis and other attorneys fielded calls deep into the night and on weekends throughout the worst of the crisis.

A former pastor himself, Kaselonis says, “I really felt for these pastors, trying to shield their flocks from not just spiritual, but physical dangers.”

I really felt for these pastors, trying to shield their flocks from not just spiritual, but physical dangers.

Ray Kaselonis, ADF Senior Counsel
Other churches throughout the country quickly learned how to host Bible studies through Zoom and FaceTime, and many have created “drive-in” services that allow members to come together in the church parking lot to share distance fellowship and worship from the safety of their cars.

Some officials moved to restrict these drive-in services. Police in Greenville, Mississippi, fined churchgoers at Temple Baptist Church $500 apiece for sitting in their cars in the church parking lot, windows rolled up, listening to Pastor Arthur Scott preach over a low-power FM radio frequency from inside the empty church building. Fewer than 20 cars were on the lot. The executive order (issued by the city) banned drive-in church services, but did not apply to those patronizing a nearby Sonic Drive-In restaurant or the drive-thru window of a liquor store — a discriminatory law that violates the Constitution. The city lifted the ban after ADF attorneys filed a lawsuit on behalf of the church. Hearing all these stories, as he dealt for hours every day with the challenges so many churches are facing, ADF Senior Counsel Ryan Tucker, director of the Center for Christian Ministries, says, “I’ve been moved in the creative ways the Gospel is being shared.”

Ministries Get Creative

“We’re getting reports from many different ministries that they are able to minister in new ways at this time,” says Waggoner. “That is causing them to be more creative.”

In Rhinelander, Wisconsin, for instance, Crescent Lake Bible Camp made a day camp available to school-age children after the state closed area schools in mid-March. The camp opened a Monday-through-Friday “Extended Spring Break” day camp for any family that needed it, but particularly to help parents whose jobs the state had deemed essential.

“We knew we needed to be a help to the community,” says Maria Rudesill, the camp’s executive director. “There were parents who needed to work, and kids who would need a safe place to go.”

“You have no idea how helpful this is,” one grateful dad told a staff member.

The camp is now looking at opening its residential cabins for doctors, nurses, and others who need to self-quarantine after work hours.

Meanwhile, in Buffalo, New York, the Buffalo Dream Center church — home to the only mobile food pantry in the city — has been designated an essential service. While most other charitable pantries had to close, the Dream Center was stocked and ready to go when the pandemic hit. The church provided groceries and frozen meat to more than 700 families in the first two weeks of the crisis, using both distribution sites and home deliveries.

The church is also providing an online tutoring program for children marooned at home.

Clients Reach Out

ADF client Barronelle Stutzman wanted to reach out to her community, too. The Washington floral artist, whose decision not to provide creative arrangements celebrating a friend’s same-sex wedding has drawn national attention (her case is on appeal to the Supreme Court for the second time), faced a government order that forced her to close the doors of her flower shop for the first time in 47 years. She gave her 11 employees — some of whom have been with her for decades — all that she could to tide them over during the unknown number of weeks to come.

She also had some $8,000 in flowers in the cooler. She and her team began arranging them into impromptu bouquets and distributing them to local first responders and nursing home residents. She contacted funeral homes to ask about families that might be grieving and unable to hold traditional services, and passed arrangements on to them, too.

Later, as restrictions lessened a bit, she was able to make a special offer to her Facebook followers, inviting them to drop off their bud vases out at the front of her store, so that she could sanitize them, fill them with flowers, and deliver them to hospital staff and patients free of charge.

The Tennes family (Steve, Bridget, and their five children) has also stepped up to serve its community. The family runs Country Mill Farms outside East Lansing, Michigan, and for years now has been targeted by that city’s officials for its support of marriage as the union of one man and one woman. Inspired by their faith as the impact of the pandemic spread in their community, the family members emptied their substantial storehouse of apples, supplying city food banks, schools, and even a local Dairy Queen where free meals were being distributed every day.

Blaine Adamson had to temporarily close his Lexington printing company during the pandemic. (ADF defended Adamson when the Lexington-Fayette Urban County Human Rights Commission tried to force him to print shirts promoting a local gay pride festival.) Adamson’s daughter is a first-year nurse, assigned to the all-COVID-19 floor of a local hospital. And his wife is a former nurse; she’s working to renew her license so she can be of help during this critical time.
While continuing to handle their ongoing cases in the face of stay-at-home restrictions, ADF attorneys moved quickly when government officials used those same social-distancing enforcements to violate the First Amendment rights of pro-life advocates in Greensboro, North Carolina.

A new order requiring most citizens to stay in place made specific exceptions for “essential activities,” including visiting local parks, hiking, golfing, and walking the streets. The ordinance also allowed exceptions for “essential services” including nonprofit organizations providing social and support services to vulnerable people.

Love Life, a group providing a prayerful Christian witness outside abortion clinics, took those directives to heart, as the performance of abortions was also deemed “essential.” Taking care to observe the prescribed social distancing protocols, they interceded for those coming in and out of one abortion facility. For that, some were arrested and others cited.

“Even during a crisis, banning the First Amendment is not an option,” says Denise Harle, senior counsel with the ADF Center for Life. She and her colleagues sent a letter to county officials on behalf of these pro-life advocates.

“A So Christian and a democratically elected member of the Finnish Parliament, I never thought I would face a criminal investigation for sharing what I believe. But I was accused of hate speech after I publicly questioned my own church leaders’ decision to endorse LGBT pride.

Last summer, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland announced that it would become an official partner of Helsinki’s “Pride 2019” event. I was shocked. I am a member of the church, and serve on my local parish council. I posted a tweet directed at my church’s leadership, asking, how could the church’s doctrinal foundation, the Bible, be compatible with the sponsorship of a “gay pride” march?

I didn’t hesitate to express my thoughts about the church’s decision, because in Finland it is legal to speak and preach about what the Bible teaches. But my tweet created a huge uproar, and a criminal investigation for an alleged “hate crime” began. I was summoned to a police station, where I was interrogated for almost four hours.

It is a baffling, surreal experience to be ordered into a police interrogation over the teachings of the Bible, in a country that has deep roots in freedom of speech and of religion. We are accustomed to hearing news like this from places like North Korea or the former Soviet Union.

The freedoms of speech and of religion are the cornerstones of democracy.

Regardless of the outcome of the criminal investigations, I am going to use my freedom of religion — which is strongly guaranteed in both our Constitution and in the international human rights treaties — and publicly speak about the teachings of God’s holy Word. I encourage-others to do the same.

In all this I have complete peace. “In God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can man do to me?” (Psalm 56:11)
The phone was ringing. It was a wintry Monday, just a few days since she and her husband, Rick, had finished the last of the adoption paperwork. The thick binder of photos and family narratives were the last materials the agency — New Hope Family Services — would need to review before putting the young couple together with the child they longed to bring into their home.

Now there was nothing left but waiting, and praying.

The possibilities of that child were about all Heather could think about, but even as she recognized the adoption case worker’s voice on the line, she knew there couldn’t have been enough time for anyone to look through all their materials.

And, in fact, there hadn’t.

“Heather, I’m calling because we have a situation,” the case worker, Amber, said. The “situation” was a baby girl, born four hours from the couple’s home. She’d been born with many of her organs outside her body — a condition called OES complex without spinal defects that occurs in only one in 400,000 births. She’d had emergency surgery the day she was born, and lost two-thirds of her digestive system in the process. Her mother had abandoned her.

She was now in a hospital NICU, still needing a great deal of medical care.

“And a home,” Heather says. Hanging up, she stared at her scribbled notes. Stunned by the extent of the newborn’s needs, she was also struck by the possibility that — just like that — this little girl could become their daughter.

She knew what she wanted to do. But would Rick agree?

In their mid-40s, the couple already had a large family — three biological children, and three others they’d adopted from Korea. While they were eager to add another to their household, they had never talked about the possibility of a child with extensive medical needs.

“Honey, I know this is a stretch,” Heather began, as she approached Rick, moments later. “And I know you’re probably going to say no…”

Rick listened. “This is what we’ve been praying for,” he said. “Tell them, ‘yes.’”

They met the tiny child in the NICU, a week later — and knew, at once, they wanted her for their own.
There was this tiny little bundle all connected to a million things, but we were committed from that point on,” Heather says. “Instantly, we were just in love.” They named her Carissa.

Carissa — and her new parents — faced a difficult road ahead. Ongoing medical appointments. Complex at-home care. Her liver failed a few months after her adoption, and the couple almost lost her.

“She did have, and still has, a rough time,” says Heather. “There have been some really scary, hard times. But she is the biggest joy and delight.”

“She’s sweet, but she’s feisty.” Carissa was just a month old, Heather says, when she pulled out her own IV. “It took five adults to get an IV back in this kid.” That determination has brought Carissa, now 3, far beyond what doctors expected in the beginning. “She’s a fighter.”

So, it turns out, is the agency that brought Carissa into Rick and Heather’s life.

Judy Geyer was interim executive director for New Hope Family Services in the fall of 2018, when a social worker from New York’s Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) came to the agency’s Syracuse office for a site review.

The review is a mandatory all-day process that examines the programs and policies of organizations like New Hope — a private, Christian agency that offers adoption planning and placement.

“When she left that day, everything was just fine,” Geyer says. “She seemed pleased with the work that we do.” Indeed, a month later, a complimentary letter arrived. It noted minor changes the agency would need to make — mostly a few new forms to implement — but the remarks were overwhelmingly positive. The social worker noted that New Hope was performing a much-needed service in the community.

“A week later, a call from that same social worker changed everything,” Geyer says. “Judy, I’ve just been reading through your policies and procedures manual,” the social worker began. “And I discovered you are not placing children with couples who are in a same-sex relationship or with any couples who are not married.” In fact, this has been New Hope’s policy across its 55 years, based on religious teachings about marriage, the family, and sexuality — that the best home for a child is with a married mother and father.

“That is correct,” Geyer answered. “You can’t do that,” the social worker said. She delivered an ultimatum: either change the policy, or the state would shut down the adoption program.

Judy told her, kindly but firmly, that as a Christian ministry they would not give into that demand. “We want to uphold God’s Word,” she said. “This is something we cannot do.”

“Then you will be choosing to shut down,” the social worker insisted.

“No, we would not be choosing to shut down,” Geyer said. “If you’re saying that, you are going to force us to close down, but we will never choose that. In fact, we believe this is a violation of our religious liberty.”

Hanging up, Geyer immediately thought of Alliance Defending Freedom, familiar with the ministry’s religious freedom efforts. She placed a call, and soon after, ADF agreed to take the agency’s case.

I knew that one by one, agencies were being closed down. Eventually there would not be one of us left, unless somebody was willing to take a stand.

Judy Geyer
Retired Interim Executive Director
New Hope Family Services

We’re still getting a lot of phone calls, and they’re couples who only want a Christian agency.

Kathy Jerman
Executive Director,
New Hope Family Services

“New Hope itself has been an answer to prayer for many people across the last five decades. In mid-century America, pregnant, unmarried teens and young women often married hastily, and unhappily, to avoid the stigma of raising a child on their own. A Syracuse minister became burdened with their plight — and with that of young couples who faced the searing disappointment of being unable, for one reason or another, to bear children of their own.

Believing he was called by God to aid those in these difficult circumstances, in 1958 Rev. Clinton Tasker left a fruitful ministry with the Rescue Mission to establish a Christian adoption program. With the support of business people and professionals from across New York, Tasker traveled widely throughout the state to share his passion with churches, service organizations, and missionary committees.

“He went to so many different churches,” Geyer says. “Some people would put in just a dime or a nickel a week to contribute to it all started.” In 1965, seven years after Tasker’s effort began, the adoption ministry opened its doors as Evangelical Adoption and Family Service — the program that would later become New Hope Family Services. In its 50-plus years of ministry, New Hope has placed more than 1,000 children into loving homes.

It started with a lot of prayer and with this man who had a heart for the Lord and for serving people,” Geyer says. Fifty-five years later, that mission is still the heartbeat of New Hope.

ADF attorneys filed a federal lawsuit on behalf of New Hope, stating that New York’s ultimatum violates the Christian agency’s rights to freedom of speech and religion.

“New York is censoring New Hope’s speech by prohibiting it from saying what it believes to be true to birth mothers, to potential adoptive couples — that the best situation for every child is with a married mother and father,” says Roger Brooks, senior counsel with ADF’s Center for Conscience Initiatives. “The state is also violating New Hope’s right to conduct its ministry in accordance with its religious beliefs.”

A district court dismissed the case, but ADF appealed on New Hope’s behalf. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the 2nd Circuit agreed to let New Hope continue processing adoptions and accepting new birth mothers and children while the case continues.

The small victory allows the adoption program to remain open, but the legal situation limits the help they can give to would-be parents hoping to sign on with New Hope. The agency can still place children with couples already approved as adoptive parents, but it isn’t allowed to process new couples.
New Hope is one of many faith-based child care agencies across the nation targeted for their stance on same-sex placements. Some Christian adoption agencies have closed under the pressure to conform; others have given in to the ultimatums. In a case similar to New Hope’s, the City of Philadelphia cut Catholic Social Services (CSS) from its municipal foster care program — days after the city announced an urgent need for 300 new foster families. Philadelphia is targeting CSS because the agency holds to faith-based beliefs about the best interests of children that prevent it from placing foster children with same-sex or unmarried couples.

The agency’s policy is to instead refer such couples to dozens of other agencies willing to place children with them. The case, Fulton v. City of Philadelphia, is currently before the Supreme Court. Unless the court rules in favor of CSS, its long legacy of placing vulnerable foster children in loving Philadelphia homes will end.

“There is a strong push by the LGBTQ community: do it our way, or get out,” says Brooks. “It’s part of a broad effort to essentially exclude Christians from a place that they have been for 2,000 years, which is visibly helping the poor, the needy, the disadvantaged, the orphans.” In fact, no applicant has ever filed any complaint about New Hope’s beliefs and policy, and the agency has never even received an application from a same-sex couple. Calls from unmarried or same-sex couples have come in from time to time, but the callers almost always understand the agency’s position as a Christian ministry. The callers have simply applied with one of the state’s many agencies that do not share New Hope’s beliefs and policy, and the agency has never even received an application from a same-sex couple. Calls from unmarried or same-sex couples have come in from time to time, but the callers almost always understand the agency’s position as a Christian ministry. The callers have simply applied with one of the state’s many agencies that do not share New Hope’s beliefs and policy, and the agency has never even received an application from a same-sex couple.

Baby clothing and other free resources are available through New Hope’s pregnancy center “care corner.”

“We would never penalize a couple that had a child and needed items,” says Geyer, who continues to be involved with New Hope, post-retirement. “We reach out lovingly to everyone who comes. But we know, as an adoption agency, if we were to place a child in a family that is contrary to God’s plan, we would be doing wrong.”

New Hope’s compassionate care for both birth moms and adoptive couples has been significantly reduced with the halt on accepting new donations. Donations have not lagged, but adoption fees have instead on private donations, grants, and family adoption

New Hope’s, the City of Philadelphia cut Catholic Social Services (CSS) from its municipal foster care program — days after the city announced an urgent need for 300 new foster families. Philadelphia is targeting CSS because the agency holds to faith-based beliefs about the best interests of children that prevent it from placing foster children with same-sex or unmarried couples.

“I feel discriminated against that my wishes could be taken away because the agency that I would choose might not be able to do that job anymore.”

Susan, Adoptive Parent

The young woman, about 20, was with her mother when Steve and Susan met her over lunch at the New Hope office. She’d seen their scrapbook, reading about how the couple had met, the outdoor activities they enjoyed, the importance of their faith, what kind of life they wanted to give their future children. Facilitated by New Hope staff, conversation flowed easily. “It felt like family by the time we left,” Steve says.

“We would never penalize a couple that had a child and needed items,” says Geyer, who continues to be involved with New Hope, post-retirement. “We reach out lovingly to everyone who comes. But we know, as an adoption agency, if we were to place a child in a family that is contrary to God’s plan, we would be doing wrong.”
It’s part of a broad effort to essentially exclude Christians from a place that they have been for 2,000 years, which is visibly helping the poor, the needy, the disadvantaged, the orphans.

Roger Brooks, ADF Senior Counsel
How Can Christians Build A Culture Of Religious Freedom?

By Charles J. Chaput

We ultimately get the nation we deserve, either through our diligence or our indifference.

Charles J. Chaput

Address the “culture wars”

Critics often accuse faithful Christians of pursuing a “culture war” on issues like abortion, sexuality, marriage and the family, and religious liberty. And in a sense, they’re right. We are fighting for what we believe. But of course, so are advocates on the other side of these issues.

As people of faith, we have a duty to treat all persons with charity and justice. We also have a duty to seek common ground where possible, but that’s never an excuse for compromising our deepest moral beliefs. And it’s never an excuse for standing idly by while our liberty to serve God in the public square is whittled away.

The deep moral problems we now face in our country didn’t happen overnight. They’ve been fed by a false entitlements, and more personal license. But real human progress has come to mean getting more stuff, more liberty take a less violent form — but they are shrewd, and they are increasing.

For example: more and more, we hear claims that beliefs central to Christianity — that we are created male and female, that marriage unites these two expressions of humanity in a unique covenant — amount to a form of bigotry. When basic moral convictions and historic religious wisdom are deemed “discrimination,” our ability to achieve civic harmony is impossible.

Sooner or later, a nation based on a degraded notion of liberty — promoting tolerance but only of certain viewpoints — will not be worthy of its founding ideals. We must change that. We can be part of building a culture of religious freedom. But how do we do it?

We start by changing the way we act. We ultimately get the nation we deserve, either through our diligence or our indifference. This is why every one of our elections matters. Voting is a moral exercise. We have a duty — not just a right, but a duty — to elect the best possible public leaders, and then hold them accountable to create good policies and appoint good judges.

Engage as citizens

We ultimately get the nation we deserve, either through our diligence or our indifference. This is why every one of our elections matters. Voting is a moral exercise. We have a duty — not just a right, but a duty — to elect the best possible public leaders, and then hold them accountable to create good policies and appoint good judges.

Our engagement as citizens has a huge impact on the kind of nation we become. Democracies depend for their survival on people of conviction fighting for what they believe, in the public square. People of faith should make no apologies for engaging public issues respectfully but vigorously, guided by a faith that informs their reason.

Give ourselves to God

If we want a culture of religious freedom, we need to begin living that culture today. We live it by giving ourselves wholeheartedly to God — by loving God with passion and joy, confidence, and courage.

Nations change when people change. And people change through the witness of other people. So serve the poor. Help the weak. Protect the unborn child. Speak the truth about the beauty and order of creation: Male and female he created them (Gen. 5:2). Fight for your right to love and serve God, and for others to do the same.

Defend the dignity of marriage and the family, and religious liberty. And in a sense, they’re right. We are fighting for what we believe. But of course, so are advocates on the other side of these issues.

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For Catherine Glenn Foster — as for anyone who cares deeply about the continuing horror of abortion in America — these are the worst and the best of times.

The worst may be easier to see. "We're looking at New York," Foster says, remembering a standing ovation last year in that state's legislature, as lawmakers applauded passage of a bill allowing abortion up until the moment a child is born. "They lit up the Empire State Building pink, to celebrate radical, late-term abortion [and] striking down all protections for women and children."

"We're looking at Virginia," whose governor has endorsed allowing babies with birth defects to be left to die, "actually saying, 'We would keep the child comfortable while the mother and physicians made a decision.'"

Foster has been watching efforts in Congress and state legislatures to block even minimal health and safety regulations in abortion facilities — and the push to keep those facilities open, despite the threat of the coronavirus. "As usual," she says, "we're seeing the abortion industry put their profits over the lives of women. Modern abortion clinics أمام accreditation for life and says, 'I may not be on the same page with you on so many other issues, but this is important.'"

A 2019 poll showed that 80% of Americans oppose late-term (after five months) abortions, and two-thirds of even self-described "pro-choice" Americans share that opposition.

"That shows, first of all, that we still have a long way to go," Foster says. "It also shows how out of touch the radical pro-abortion politicians are, trying to pass these extreme, radical laws. This is not what America wants. This is not what their own constituents want. They are beholden to special interests ... not the citizens that they've been elected to serve."

But the numbers also show something else, Foster says: common ground.

"There's so much to find joy in," she says. "So much beauty, when you meet someone who you wouldn't expect to be pro-life, and yet they are. Someone who has an appreciation for life and says, 'I may not be on the same page with you on so many other issues, but this is important.'"

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And yet — connections are being made. Even on this most volatile subject, minds are changing. In individual hearts, and in the culture at large, a tide is turning. So these are also the best of times.

"Around the country, around the world, I've had women come up and say, 'Thank you for sharing your story. I'm post-abortive myself. I had an abortion, or two abortions [and] no one else knows. I've never felt comfortable sharing about this. Not even my husband knows, but I'm going home tonight, and I'm going to tell him.'"

"To me, that is one of the most beautiful things, to be able to bring about that healing, that honesty, that transparency in the most intimate of relationships, because we're walking away from that shame. We're saying, 'Yes, this was a horrible, sinful choice, but there is forgiveness. I don't need to hide it.'"

Most people who are involved in the industry... think that they're actually helping women. They don't get it. So, for me, it's about connecting with them on whatever level I can and trying to love them out.

"There's so much that we can agree on. So many bridges that we can build and say, 'Okay, at least we agree on this.'"

Fosters attributes that growing pro-life consensus to several things.

"More and more women [and] young people are proudly saying they are pro-life. We have a younger generation that cares about honesty, transparency, real authenticity, and treating people the same. They're saying, 'If you're telling us we're supposed to care about these individuals, who are clearly human beings?'"

"We've seen the rise of ultrasound," she says. "It is really, really hard, with 4D ultrasound, to deny the humanity of the child in the womb. You can't do it and be intellectually honest. People are looking at that, saying, 'That's a human being, and that's someone I'm called to protect.' That cuts across so many categories — Republicans or Democrats, young or old, women or men."

What's more, Foster says, the pro-abortionists' own aggressive media efforts "may have backfired in a lot of ways. More and more, we're discussing this issue. It is in the news. It's something that women aren't hiding in shame and saying, 'This is something I can't talk about.'"

The willingness to have such conversations is especially encouraging to Foster, who knows how hard talking about these things can be. As a college student, she herself had an abortion.

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Foster concedes. Forgiving abortionists and those so eagerly promoting an anti-life culture is something else.

"How do you process that level of callous disregard for human life? It's incredibly difficult. I have never worked in [an abortion] facility, or anything like that. But being post-abortive, I know the level of forgiveness I needed."

"Most people who are involved in the industry... think that they're actually helping women. They don't get it. So, for me, it's about connecting with them on whatever level I can and trying to love them out. To connect with them, find a way for them to understand where we're coming from, and build that bridge."

Meanwhile, with AUL, "we work in the courts. In the state houses. In Congress. In the court of public opinion, educating folks. Letting them know, 'Here's the truth about abortion, about abortion law, about how radical our law on abortion really is. And here's what we can do about it.'"

Defending the unborn has been the focus of Foster's career from the beginning. After discovering her passion for pro-life work during law school orientation, she attended ADF’s Blackstone Legal Fellowship, a summer program for Christian law students. She joined ADF after finishing law school, serving seven years with the ministry’s Life Team before ultimately moving into her leadership role with AUL.

"For her, the imperative to defend life never wavers. "Knowing such evil exists in our world, how do you not drop everything to stop it?" she says. "What else could I be doing but this?"
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