

# Laureen's Letters: What a Relief!

*by Laureen Bodnar*

**R**emember when you were a baby learning how to rollover or crawl? Remember when you first drank from a sippy cup instead of a bottle? Remember when you spoke your first word? Remember when you took your first baby steps?

Of course you don't ...you were a baby! However, parents often remember those times as if they were yesterday. Conquering those little milestones produced big results as time went on. The baby steps we take along the path of life either prepare us for great things or lead us to places where we become lost. If we take those steps with caution and patience we are much more able to discern which way the path should lead. If we rush or hurry those steps we will fall on our faces.

What should have been baby steps for me in the past were more like compulsive giant leaps through rose bushes only to find a few thorns in my backside. Serving in the pro-life ministry requires patience, discernment, and caution, none of which I'm proficient at yet. It requires patience and tolerance to relate to those who don't value human life the way I do. It requires discernment to understand what God reveals in scripture about the value of human life. It requires caution to steer clear of my soap box while dealing with issues I'm passionate about and to treat the people I encounter with the love of Jesus. Sometimes the Lord's work requires us to take great leaps of faith, but sometimes it just requires baby steps. Are we as Christians willing to explore and take those steps? Even just little ones?

Northminster P.C. recently took one baby step that required nothing but discerning God's word prayerfully, a session vote, and a letter directed to the Board of Pensions through the Pittsburgh Presbytery. What was this baby step? It was a request for Northminster to be granted "Relief of Conscience." You may not be aware that the Presbyterian Church (USA) Board of Pensions mandatory Medical Benefits Plan for ordained pastors and their families, pays for abortion procedures at any time during the pregnancy for any reason. This coverage includes partial-birth abortion and the RU-486 abortion pill for reasons like unwanted pregnancies, gender selection, and selective reduction. The portion of our tithes and offerings included in the Pastor's terms of call is used to pay dues to the PC (USA) Board of Pensions for pension, death and disability, and medical claims for those ordained in ministry.

In 1998, the BOP instituted a "Relief of Conscience" program for those congregations who oppose having their tithes and offerings used to pay for abortion claims. The program prevents dues paid by participating "ROC" churches to the medical portion of the plan from being used for abortions. Instead, a dollar amount equal to the cost of abortion claims from the previous year is deposited in an Adoption Fund. When enough Adoption funds are available, grants are given to pastors' families to assist with the uninsured medical costs relating to adoption.



Northminster's Session voted unanimously on May 29, 2007 in favor of requesting "Relief of Conscience." The request was approved by the Presbytery, June 7, 2007.

Abortions will continue to be covered, regardless of the reason, by the PC (USA) Board of Pensions until hearts change. Our "Relief of Conscience" effort seems futile in the grander scheme of things. So, why do we even bother making this request? Baby steps! Northminster is one small church in one huge Presbytery making a statement that we value the human life God created from conception until death. What if ten churches requested and were granted "Relief of Conscience"? What if twenty or thirty or one hundred churches joined forces and made the same statement as Northminster?

Relief of Conscience is a program that most Presbyteries across the country will not promote. However, more churches are hearing about it and more and more ROC requests are being made; hopefully, baby's lives are being spared.

I've asked myself, "How could this decision for Relief of Conscience possibly influence our denomination or make any difference?" Proverbs 14:12 says "There is a way that seems right to man, but its end is the way of death." Abortion is not right and man's way leads to death of innocent lives. Our Session could not ignore that fact. The statement needs to be made whether or not anyone hears it. What a relief! A baby step? Maybe...but in my heart, it's another giant leap!

**This article is part of Laureen's *Stand 4 Life Series* written for church newsletters. Laureen is PPL's Associate Director and an elder at Northminster Presbyterian Church. She is active in music ministry and chairs the missions committee. Laureen is a volunteer counselor at a local Pregnancy Care Center. She is married, and the mother of two sons.**

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