

REMOVING ABORTION FROM THE ABSTRACT

It's time for men to take a stand,
says Knight and president of 40 Days for Life

By Andrew Fowler 10/19/2020



New York Auxiliary Bishop Peter J. Byrne, archdiocesan vicar for pro-life activities, and Father Fidelis Moscinski, a member of the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal, join fellow pro-life advocates in reciting the rosary across the street from a Planned Parenthood center in New York City, Feb. 24, 2020. The prayer service was preceded by a pro-life Mass at the Basilica of St. Patrick's Old Cathedral marking the kickoff of the Lenten 40 Days for Life campaign. (*CNS photo/Gregory A. Shemitz*)

Shawn Carney, a member of the Knights of Columbus, has dedicated his life to “removing abortion from the abstract.” As president of [40 Days For Life](#), his appeal to promote pro-life causes by sharing the joy of the Gospel has reached an international audience, with more than 588 cities worldwide participating in this year’s effort. It even helped convert former Planned Parenthood administrator Abby Johnson.

But large initiatives often have humble beginnings.

Carney was always pro-life. He attended a small Catholic high school in Tyler, Texas. While he attended Texas A&M, Carney became a member of the Knights of Columbus. When a Planned Parenthood facility opened down the road from the College Station campus Carney and his girlfriend, Marilisa — she is now his wife — became “sidewalk counselors,” counseling and praying for those who entered the building.

By 2004, they, along with David Bereit, decided that a greater effort was needed, so they organized the first 40 Days for Life campaign, which consisted of around-the-clock prayers over a period of 40 days.

When inviting those in the local community to join, he got help from a familiar group.

“When we announced it, it was really cool. The grand Knight [of the local council] said that the Knights of Columbus were taking the night shift,” Carney said.

That night shift ran 11 p.m. to 7 a.m. After that initial prayer campaign, abortion rates in the area dropped by 28 percent. By 2013, Carney's prayers were answered with the facility's closure in July of that year. The building is currently the 40 Days for Life's headquarters.

"That was a great opportunity as a witness to what can happen in any community," Carney said. "If an abortion facility can close there, it can close anywhere."

By fall 2007, Carney and Bereit decided to launch a national 40 Days for Life campaign. From there, interest "took off." Eighty-nine cities held their own campaigns in the first year. Efforts spread into more than 60 countries in the following years. Carney stated that since it started more than 18,000 babies have been saved, 107 facilities closed and 206 abortion facility workers — including pro-life activist Abby Johnson — had a change of heart.

Carney and his wife's assistance with Johnson's conversion were portrayed in the movie *Unplanned*.

Carney believes that 40 Days for Life has been so successful with people like Johnson and others because it offers a simple "invitation to do something about the abortions that happen where you live."

It's a local focus, but Carney's pro-life efforts reflect those of Knights of Columbus from around the world. The Order as a whole has also turned to the national stage, supporting every National March for Life in the United States since it was first held in 1974. Current March for Life President Jeanne Mancini has [said](#) that without the Knights of Columbus "there would be no March for Life."

The Order is also committed to other pro-life causes, including its Ultrasound Initiative and Culture of Life Fund which have helped place more than 1,000 ultrasounds in pro-life pregnancy centers globally. Supreme Knight Carl Anderson has [stated](#) that the program is the "greatest humanitarian effort the organization has ever undertaken."

Carney shared that Knights have always been by his side during 40 Days for Life events.

"When you go to 40 Days for Life events, you're going to meet a Knight. That's just the way it is," he said.

Recent political and media attention on the abortion issue has raised the stakes of Carney's efforts, and his work has been met with increased violence from Antifa and other groups. Yet, even with the current tension, 40 Days for Life events have seen record turnout in 588 cities around the world.

It's hopeful. But, as Supreme Knight Carl Anderson [recently noted](#), abortion remains the leading cause of death in America.

"We are culpable," Carney said. "We Catholics live in a nation that has dehumanized an entire group of people so that we can discard them. That is a calling that goes to the very basic level of the Gospel."

This is not the time to "run to the side-lines," Carney stated. But it's a time for men, including Knights, to take a stand for the pro-life cause through prayer and providing "loving alternatives."

"This is definitely something where we need more men," he said. "The Knights have given a great example that we need to go out and go out as men who are meek and humble of heart and love when it's difficult."

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