

CHURCH PROJECT UPDATE, MARCH 10, 2009:

Saddleback Church's Executive Pastor, Glen Kreun (the number two pastor at Saddleback), has responded to our letter to Pastor Rick Warren with an e-mail message which ended with a statement which said "Mr. Cunningham, it is my desire that I could meet with you...." On the strength of this apparent opening, we have suspended the circulation of the press release announcing the commencement of our abortion photo display at Saddleback Church this Sunday. We will also delay the start of the project, pending the outcome of further discussions with Saddleback.

Pastor Kruen's secretary told us this morning that she will ask Pastor Kruen for his earliest possible meeting date and call us back with it next week. We will not issue any press release at this time but it will be posted on our website and I will agree to be interviewed if approached by reporters who become aware of the project by other means.

On Tuesday, March 10, 2009, we received a phone confirmation that we would be meeting with Pastor Kreun at Saddleback Church on Saturday, March 14, at 10:30AM.

We are thanking God for a breakthrough which most observers believed to be so unlikely as to verge on the impossible. Other activists (anti-abortion and otherwise) have tried to schedule meetings with Pastor Warren and failed.

Here are the facts as I understand them:

Our first response from Saddleback to the letter we sent Pastor Warren, with copies to his senior staff, came the day after the letters were delivered. Pastor Kevin Robertson called us in his capacity as director of Saddleback security. He was annoyed that we had enclosed abortion photos with the letters. He said the staff was upset by these images and wanted to know how we had obtained the names of senior staff members. We referred him to his own website. Then he expressed concern that his six-year-old daughter might see our abortion photos and be as upset as she was when she saw similar photos outside an abortion clinic in his neighborhood.

Then Pastor Kreun sent us an e-mail message which said the following, in pertinent part:

"... I had a full debriefing from Kevin Robertson ...." The first problem with this statement is that it is a tacit admission that Pastor Kreun had not read the letter and the only thing he knew about it was what little he had learned from Pastor Robertson. The problem with this "debriefing" is that Pastor Robertson assured me that he had read our letter but then asked me "Now, why are you doing this?" This limited understanding of the contents of the letter calls into question the value of Pastor Robertson debriefing.

Pastor Kruen next said "I called Rick and shared with him your desire to have your video and other materials be used at Saddleback." This statement also suggests a tacit admission that Pastor Warren has not read the letter and knows nothing more about it than he learned third-hand from Pastor Kruen's incomplete understanding. What we actually want from Saddleback goes far beyond their willingness to use our resources.

Pastor Kruen then said “Rick, who has been on your website, was quick to agree that graphic pictures are a deterrent to abortions and should be used in our Saddleback program.” Getting Pastor Warren on our website represents significant progress because the home page automatically runs a very shocking video of abortions in progress. It is also a plus that he acknowledges the need to use photos. What is disappointing about Pastor Warren’s reaction is that he apparently doesn’t think he should be the one to use them. His proposed solution to the abortion problem did not seem proportionate to the magnitude of this crisis.

Pastor Kruen next said “Here are two ways we would like to use your material:”

Preaching: Abortion “is mentioned on occasion” (but only as among “a number of sins”) and when it is “Rick ... will pause and then talk about and give your website info both on the screens and verbally.”

The problems here are that Pastor Warren does not seem to appreciate the need to preach an entire sermon focused on abortion. He will merely “mention it on occasion.” Also, lumping abortion into an amorphous litany of other lesser sins suggests moral equivalence. Both of these mistakes have the effect of trivializing abortion. The last problem is that instead of Pastor Warren showing the congregation what abortion is, he will merely tell them where they can go to find out what it is for themselves. We know from experience that the people who most need to see abortion are those who are least likely to seek it out.

The next area in which Pastor Kreun says Saddleback might use our resources is:

Counseling: “We find that in our counseling program we are able to hear about and reach out to those contemplating an abortion. Would you provide us with materials you have that you feel would best help us in our ministry?” Of course we will but again, this proposal betrays a misunderstanding of the abortion problem. There is no doubt that most women who abort discuss their decision with someone. But that “someone” is seldom their pastor. Only a very small percentage of the women who attend Saddleback and consider abortion ever seek counseling, before or after their abortions. I am reminded of the Focus on the Family radio interview James Dobson once conducted with several Christian college presidents. He asked them when they had last seen a pregnant coed on their campuses and to a person they said “never.” From this fact these administrators apparently deduced that their coeds weren’t getting pregnant and that they weren’t getting pregnant because these were Christian girls who weren’t having sex. It never seems to have occurred to them that sex was more common than they had imagined and that the resulting pregnancies were invisible because they were being aborted.

It is my considered opinion that the progress we have made here, while remarkable, must not be exaggerated. I was sickened when “prolife” activists expressed profound gratitude that President Obama had waited until the day after the anniversary of *Roe v. Wade* to reinstate funding for foreign abortion clinics. They saw this as an enormous victory because it showed “sensitivity” on the president’s part. Too many of us have suffered so many defeats, over such a long period of time, that we fantasize victories where there are none.

We must enter into these meetings with open minds but also with open eyes. I am agreeing to meet with subordinates at Saddleback primarily in an effort to convince them to persuade Pastor Warren to meet with us. I greatly admire Pastor Kreun but I want to meet with the ultimate decision-maker because the proposals we are making are so sweeping that they can not be meaningfully approved without the total buy-in of Pastor Warren.

We want Pastor Warren to lead the mobilization of the entire Body of Christ against abortion – all over the world. He can't do that effectively unless he has developed and is implementing a comprehensive plan to fight abortion in his own church. This is what he is doing when he leads by example in the fight against AIDS. Pastor Warren doesn't mention AIDS only occasionally and as merely another disease among many health problems. He focuses huge ministry resources on it. Neither does he send people to some website if they if they want to learn more about AIDS. He does the heavy lifting himself. Nor does he sit around waiting for people who want to be counseled about AIDS. He travels around the world, pro-actively going to people who aren't going to come to him. He tries to prevent this disease as well as treat it. That is what a comprehensive AIDS plan looks like and that is what a comprehensive abortion plan would look like.

Once that model prolife ministry plan is designed and being implemented at Saddleback, we want to make a film featuring Pastor Warren laying out a new vision for mobilizing the church against the most horrific mass murder in all of history.

I believe that Saddleback is a great church. I believe that Pastor Warren is sincere about wanting to find God's will regarding abortion. We might wonder, then, how he could be such a grand visionary on AIDS but such a small thinker on abortion. But the path to Saddleback's leadership on AIDS began with his wife having her heart broken by terrible pictures of ravaged children. She then broke Pastor Warren's heart. By his own admission, he didn't figure it out on his own. We don't want to over-play our hand and use the sidewalk abortion pictures injudiciously but neither can we afford to settle for more of the same kinds of half-measures which have kept the church largely on the sidelines of this battle for thirty-five years. When we accept compromise, we aren't trading away our rights, we are trading away the lives of the babies for whom we speak. We can't win without the church and because most pastors are followers rather than leaders, the church isn't going to get into this fight without the leadership of someone like Pastor Warren.

I will direct the staff to begin preparations for the next mega-churches on our list while we attempt to work with Saddleback. Please continue to pray that we will recognize victory when we see it but not a minute before.