

RELIGION & VALUES

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Groups' billboards express beliefs on abortion

Birthright of Owensboro has been doing more billboard advertising in the last year but the crisis pregnancy shelter isn't the only group with pro-life or anti-abortion billboards around here.

Catholics For Children finances several of the big signs in Owensboro. Its Projects For Life tries to keep five billboards in the sight of local motorists.

That's a small number compared to Louisville, where a similar group sponsors as many as 125 billboards



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at certain times of the year, said Joan Frey, a member of Catholics For Children and a former longtime volunteer at Birthright.

Just five billboards cost her group \$1,500 a month. "Right now that's what we can afford."

The local group, which started three years ago, was inspired by the Louisville project but decided to go for year-round exposure, Frey said.

"It's a way to offer an alternative to abortion in a nonjudgmental, powerful way," she said.

The Louisville project began in 1994 and has spread to 42 cities across the country, Frey said. When she saw one of the signs, "it just impressed me so much."

Her group's first local billboard was at Crabtree Avenue near West Ninth Street. Locations for some of the billboards change every couple of months.

The two closest to Towne Square Mall are made of vinyl, which holds up well. "We've had those for three years," Frey said.

The images vary. One features a baby. One includes a picture of Mary. Two have the sacred heart image familiar to many Catholics.

One has used the same image of Jesus as the Apostles of Divine Mercy, a local prayer group, which used to sponsor a billboard here. Projects For Life uses that picture "because we like that image," but the two organizations are separate, Frey said.

Overall, "They're just positive images and offer love, help and hope," she said. "Plus, they're a display of faith."

The signs also advertise the toll-free number of Opportunities for Life, a crisis pregnancy hotline supported by the Catholic bishops of Kentucky. Hotline operators refer callers to area agencies that can help meet their needs, Frey said.

Catholics For Children members believe their big signs have a big impact. They've heard reports of women who changed their plans to undergo abortions as a result of seeing the billboards, she said.

Sixty percent of the money for the project comes from collections taken up at local churches. The rest is provided by individuals.

All of the donations go for billboards, Frey said. "We don't have a staff or anything."

To contribute, write P.O. Box 385, Owensboro, 42302, or call Frey at 926-4974.

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