

Billboard project gives more visibility to pro-life ministry



Record Photo by Roy J. Horner

One of the pro-life billboards created by Catholics for Children (CFC) is located on Poplar Level Road near the Watterson Expressway. CFC has invested thousands of dollars the past six years to have the billboards placed along area highways, streets and roads.

*Dividends, Like These,
Pile up EVERY YEAR
From your billboards
INVESTMENT*

John

By ROY J. HORNER
Record Local News Editor

What can happen when the power of advertising is put to work for an objective above and beyond the pursuit of financial gain?

As the members of one lay Catholic group in the Louisville archdiocese have found out, in the world of investments their returns are zero. But in the realm of faith their rewards are piling up.

For the past six years the not-for-profit Catholics for Children (CFC) has been investing thousands of dollars in highly visible pro-life billboards located at strategic spots along interstates, streets and roads.

Organized through St. Martin Church, 639 S. Shelby St., CFC's "Billboards for Life Project" has area-wide support among parishes. Operating expenses are at the bare minimum, said CFC member John DeFriend, who helped launch the initiative in 1994.

Approximately "99.5 percent of the budget goes to the billboards and the rest to postage" for fund-raising and information letters and thank-you notes, he said.

"I just got a report from the billboard company and they said that 99 percent of the people in the Louisville metropolitan area this time saw the billboards repeatedly," DeFriend added. "Now that's everybody except for shut-ins. Anybody who is taking a bus or driving a car sees the billboards repeatedly."

CFC purchases the billboard space in chunks for one or two campaigns each year. Each billboard carries a social justice message aimed at saving unborn children from abortion, a Gospel message about God's gift of life and a practical message about a pregnancy resource center to call if assistance is needed to carry a baby to term.

The artwork varies but the trademark blue and yellow colors remain the same. Pictured are Scripture scenes from the lives of Jesus and Mary. Each billboard carries the phone number (683-2151) of the Pregnancy Resource Center, a volunteer outreach on Sixth Street operated by a group of Catholic women

from several different parishes.

This past October CFC funded 113 billboards in Kentucky and Southern Indiana. Thirteen were large ones along I-65, I-64 and other major arteries. Another 100 were smaller and placed along city streets and county roads.

"The strength of the billboards is their visibility," said Judy Scholl, another CFC member. "They have loving messages that touch the heart. The expressway signs have made a huge difference. Those are highly visible and so many people see them."

Judging from the Pregnancy Resource Center's telephone logs, the billboards for life are attention grabbers and inspiring some people to think twice about an abortion, said Dolores Murphy, a center volunteer.

Notes taken by the center's telephone counselors reveal a pattern of good from the billboards, she said.

One woman who called — identifying herself as a Catholic — said she and her daughter were open to the possibility of an abortion until they saw the billboard.

In another case taken from the phone logs, a pregnant woman from Arizona who had flown into Louisville for a visit also had abortion in the back of her mind. After seeing one of the pro-life billboards near the airport, she changed her mind and called the center to say thanks.

"We've had a number of calls from people who saw the billboards and just wanted to make a donation or help with the ministry," Murphy said.

DeFriend said the billboards for life project welcomes contributions all year long.

"This is something people can sink their teeth into," he said. "Sometimes when people make a contribution to a good cause, they see or hear little about it later. But with donations to the billboard project, contributors can get in their car and see what they've donated to."

(For information about billboards for life, call John DeFriend at 812-923-9923, which is a local call from Louisville.) 812-923-7398