

The Fight Against Abortion: Green Shoots of Life in Sheffield

The Reality

Can you believe that there have been over one billion abortions worldwide?¹ This year marks the 50th anniversary of the legalisation of abortion here in the UK. More than 8 million abortions² have taken place here since then. The latest figures available demonstrate that more than one in five pregnancies end in abortion³ meaning that on average 523 abortions are carried out every day in England and Wales.⁴ It is truly shocking but how do we even begin to respond to this?

A Response

We must pray. We pray to a God who is omnipotent. He can turn situations very quickly, if he so chooses. Many of us can take encouragement from events in the recent past. The 'Iron Curtain' fell almost overnight, after many people prayed for decades. Suddenly, there were many opportunities for the gospel. Similarly let us pray that there would be a wholesale change in attitudes to the value of human life.

We must teach people the truth on these matters. Many in society do not know their right hand from their left⁵ and some in the wider church are not as strong as they could be on this issue. Yet God's word is clear: The Bible states that life begins at conception⁶, every human is made in God's image⁷, and the deliberate taking of an innocent human life breaks the sixth commandment: 'You shall not murder'. We must stand firm on these truths even when society (and some in the church) accuse us of lacking compassion for not allowing abortion in some 'hard cases'.⁸ This is not merely an ideological issue – abortion not only results in the death of a child, but also many women who have an abortion deeply regret their actions. In 2008 a study found that women who have an abortion are 30% more likely to develop a mental illness.⁹ So we must teach with compassion, but also without compromise.

We can also seek to intervene. Is there anything we can do to make a woman reconsider having an abortion? Perhaps many of these women will react with fear on discovering that they are pregnant. Perhaps the baby was conceived in a situation that a woman would not have chosen. These women are now vulnerable – what will they do with the life within them? What options are available to them? It is ironic that those who are overtly 'pro-choice' do not offer pregnant women many choices at all – mostly they want a woman to choose abortion. Sadly, also, a woman's own doctor may recommend an abortion.

¹ *Abortion Worldwide Report*, The Global Life Campaign. (Abortion was first legalised in the former Soviet Union in 1920).

² Between 1968 (when the Abortion Act came into force) and 2015, there were 8,042,157 abortions carried out in England and Wales (*Abortion Statistics, England and Wales: 2015, May 2016, Table 1*) and 471,394 abortions carried out in Scotland up until 2014 (*Abortion Statistics – Year ending 31 December 2014, ISD Scotland, May 2015, Table 6*).

³ In 2015 there were an estimated 876,934 conceptions to women of all ages usually resident in England and Wales.

(<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/conceptionandfertilityrates/bulletins/conceptionstatistics/2015>) In 2015 there were 185,824 abortions carried out on residents of England and Wales (see https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/570040/Updated_Abortion_Statistics_2015.pdf)

This means that 21.1% of conceptions ended in abortion in England and Wales in 2015 – over one in five.

⁴ Of 191,014 abortions in England and Wales: 97.5% were carried out under statutory ground C alone; 0.6% were carried out under statutory ground D or grounds C and D together. See *Abortion Statistics, England and Wales: 2015*, Department of Health, May 2016, Table 13. Of the abortions performed in England and Wales in 2015, **only 0.05 per cent were because of risk to the mother's life**: abortions carried out under Ground A (alone or with B,C,D) or F or G, *Abortion Statistics, England and Wales: 2015*, Department of Health, May 2016, Table 13. **The percentage performed on the grounds of foetal handicap was 1.8%**: abortions carried out under Ground E (alone or with A,B,C or D). *Abortion Statistics, England and Wales: 2015*, Department of Health, May 2016, Table 13. There were eleven cases in England and Wales in 2015 of cleft lip or palate being cited as the principal medical condition for an abortion.

⁵ Jonah 4:11.

⁶ Matthew 1:20, Psalm 51:5.

⁷ Genesis 1:26-7, 9:6.

⁸ I commend to you The Christian Institute's short 'Choose Life' video series which gives an alternative side to some of these 'hard cases'. It is available online, free of charge, at <http://www.christian.org.uk/campaign/chooselife/>

⁹ "Abortions linked to mental illness" (The Daily Telegraph, 30 November 2008)

Many women will not be offered an alternative or any material to make an informed decision. For instance, last December it was reported that a lady considering abortion felt she was simply on a conveyor belt to end the life of the child after arriving at a Marie Stopes clinic.¹⁰

However, another choice is available for these women. A number of 'pregnancy awareness centres' have been opened across the UK. These offer woman confidential counselling and the opportunity to have a free ultrasound scan. Women going to one of these clinics may change their mind about having an abortion. They can hear about the other options (perhaps of adoption or how to manage the situation) and they can see, through the ultrasound scan, that there is a real baby within them and not a mass of impersonal cells. An ultrasound programme operating in the United States of America estimates that 370,000 lives have been saved since 2004.¹¹

The Story So Far

Over the last three years, Kevin and Maria Bidwell, along with others, have been working to establish a Pregnancy Advice Centre. The ethos is to provide wise and directive advice for pregnant women. Our aims are three-fold: to save the lives of babies; to minimise regret among women; and to present a Christian worldview for life. We now have premises and people are being trained so that ultrasound scans can also be offered. We are refurbishing the unit that we have and are setting up a website. We will potentially open initially to offer advice and then in the coming months offer ultrasound scans. Remarkably, the Lord has been answering prayer on many fronts. We have an ultrasound machine, with a couch; it is exciting to see the Lord's hand upon this, even though we often feel 'out of our comfort zone'. This work is vital and yet it requires perseverance, patience, faith and trust in the Living God. Will you join us in prayer?

Pregnancy Advice, Sheffield: How you can be involved

The website currently being constructed has an address (www.sheffieldpac.co.uk) but this will be a front for pregnant women coming to the centre. We are conscious that we need to actively build awareness among Christians and to raise funds to run the centre each month. If you would like to be added to the email database then contact us at kevinbidwell@gmail.com and we will send brief bite-sized updates. Of course the need for prayer almost goes without saying, but also if you are in Sheffield you might like to visit us. The centre is five minutes from Junction 34 off the M1. Do contact us in advance (appointments would be needed for this to make sure we are available).

This year, sadly, marks the 50th year since abortion legislation was passed in the UK. On Friday 3 November we will host an evening to increase pro-life awareness. It will be held at Hill Top Chapel, Attercliffe Common, Sheffield S9 2AD (just three minutes walk from the centre). Kevin Bidwell, the minister of Sheffield Evangelical Presbyterian Church will speak on the biblical theology of pro-life and Chris Richards will speak on 'Putting the ethics into practice: experiences from the centre in Newcastle'. The Newcastle centre (<http://www.tyneside-pregnancy.org.uk>) are planning to extend their service also to Sunderland in the near future.

Kevin J Bidwell

Kevin J Bidwell is minister of Sheffield Presbyterian Church (Evangelical Presbyterian Church of England and Wales).

(This article was originally published in the Affinity Social Issues Bulletin for July 2017. The whole edition can be found at www.affinity.org.uk)

¹⁰ 'I expected sympathy but Mary Stopes Clinic was like a conveyor belt' (The Daily Mail, 22 December 2016).

¹¹ Focus on the Family *Option Ultrasound* program (see <http://www.focusonthefamily.com/pro-life/promos/pregnancy-center-resources/option-ultrasound-program>).