

Center for Pregnancy Concerns celebrates three decades of service

Before the Center for Pregnancy Concerns opened in Baltimore 30 years ago, there was no place women could go in the city for help carrying unplanned pregnancies to term.

In the three decades since, more than 30,000 women have come to the pro-life center for free pregnancy tests, sonograms, parenting classes and material support with diapers, infant clothing and other supplies.

"I think that's an awesome number," said Carol Clews, executive director of CPC. "It makes my heart sing to think of how many babies we have been instrumental in saving."

CPC will hold a 30th anniversary celebration Oct. 7 at Marriott's Hunt Valley Inn in Hunt Valley. Silent and live auctions benefitting the center will be held, and Deacon Richard "Monti" Montalto of St. Thomas Aquinas in Hampden will be presented the "Pro-life Advocate Award."

Clews said the ecumenical outreach, which started with just six people from different Christian denominations, would not be possible without a dedicated pool of about 35 volunteers. The center operates out of a main office on St. Paul Street, with two satellite locations at St. Brigid in Canton and St. Rita in Dundalk - sites offered rent-free by the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

The center operates a telephone hotline, which last year fielded nearly 8,000 calls. It also offers abstinence education, Bible studies, post-abortion stress counseling, health fairs, a men's mentoring program and a large referral program for adoption and employment services.

Jeanne Graniero, a volunteer CPC counselor, said lives are changed at the center. She remembered talking with a 14-year-old girl who decided to have her baby even though the girl's mother pressured her to have an abortion. Graniero prayed with the girl and her mother, and the CPC provided support throughout the pregnancy

and for three years after the baby was born.

"We give them love and we give them God and we give them the material things they need," Graniero said.

Clews acknowledged that it hasn't been easy working in the city. Planned Parenthood has campaigned to discredit the center and Baltimore City passed a law last year requiring it and other pro-life pregnancy resource centers to post signs indicating that they do not provide abortions or birth control. The law does not require Planned Parenthood to post signs indicating what services it does not provide. The archdiocese is challenging the legislation in federal court.

"It is discouraging at times," Clews said, "but it just makes me more determined. I know how important the services we provide are. We really are doing God's work."

Deacon Montalto, a member of CPC's board of directors, said there is a need for more volunteers.

"They do all of the corporal works of mercy at these centers," Deacon Montalto said. "For people not involved in the social ministries, supporting a crisis pregnancy center would be a great way of getting involved."

The anniversary event will include a silent auction opening at 6 p.m., with dinner served at 7 p.m. Reserved tickets are \$50 per person or \$55 at the door. Call 410-243-6699 for more information.