

# Mothers' help in jeopardy

If you're a woman in Baltimore who is pregnant and wants alternatives to abortion, times certainly are not easy.

Catholic Charities and the Salvation Army used to run maternity homes in the area, but those closed years ago. Eventually, Sparrow House relocated from Harford County to Baltimore City, finally settling in an unused convent at St. Benedict Parish.

The move to the city saved quite a bit from its former location, reducing the monthly needs, but the level of donations also reduced at that time, according to one supporter.

Now, however, Sparrow House is in trouble. It needs about \$6,000 a month to operate, and, with the help of a recent \$10,000 donation, it has about \$4,000 in monthly pledges. The parish has agreed to forgive the rent on the facilities until the donations pick up, but that's not a long-term solution. (See page 3.)

There is a great need for a maternity home for pregnant women with few resources. Deacon Richard "Monti" Montalto, who has served on the board of the Gabriel Network, a pro-life ministry, notes that the previous executive director of the network said he sometimes received 300 calls a month for maternity housing in Baltimore City.

"And that's just one network," Deacon Montalto said. Several other phone networks also take calls from women in crisis pregnancies.

Sparrow House serves a unique need. Without it, there is no place for women with limited resources who want to bring their unborn child to birth and need a place to live, aside from a few beds in shelters available for women who are abused.

Providing a place for these women to have their children honors the sanctity of life and meets the church's mission to act as Jesus would. Deacon Montalto said, "This is the first time for most of these women that they meet Christ face to face - in the women who are the volunteers" at Sparrow House.

On another front, the City of Baltimore passed an ordinance late last year to make things more difficult for “limited-service pregnancy centers” – centers that won’t provide referrals for abortion or artificial contraception – to do what they do without the government interfering with their ministry. Since early this year, such centers have had to comply with this inane law by posting a sign stating the services they *don’t* provide. It is being challenged in court and arguments will be heard Aug. 4.

Archbishop Edwin F. O’Brien, St. Brigid Parish and the Greater Baltimore Center for Pregnancy Concerns, which is located at St. Brigid, have sued to overturn the ill-devised city ordinance on the grounds that it attacks the freedom of speech of the plaintiffs and discriminates based on the political nature of the work done by the pregnancy centers.

The argument is that the ordinance compels certain speech by the “limited-service pregnancy centers,” thus violating their freedom of speech, and that it does not require abortion clinics to post such signs about the services they do not provide, thus it is discriminatory.

We said it back when the City Council was debating this ordinance: this was a bad bill to begin with. In addition to being unnecessary, it’s mean-spirited and counter-productive. It is politically- and ideologically-based control of a certain point of view, disguised as “consumer protection”; but it’s not aimed at consumers, and it doesn’t protect anyone.

If the city actually wants to improve the lives of women and children, it ought to be encouraging and supporting nonprofits to provide the kinds of services offered at places such as Sparrow House and the Center for Pregnancy Concerns, so that women in Baltimore are offered genuine love and aid in the form of prenatal care, parenting classes, food and clothing for their children, and emotional support. These are in short supply for poor and vulnerable women in our city and state, and we need to embrace such environments, rather than hinder them.

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