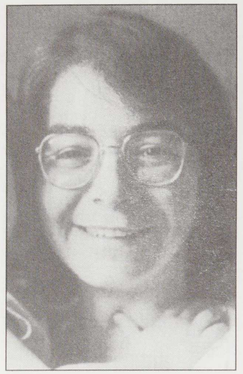

The rescue movement and love of neighbor

by Monica Migliorino Miller

It is unfortunate that many pro-life activists are more than happy to attend the burial of the rescue movement. Some believe that even before Clinton signed the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act, rescues were on the way out as a "tactic" and that somehow the effectiveness of rescues had waned. Some pro-life leaders declared "Rescue is dead" meaning that we should not be too concerned about it, as if to say that the "rescue era" was nice while it lasted, but now we have all gone on to something else.

If we are happy or at least content to attend Rescue's, funeral this attitude reveals an unfortunate lack of understanding of the importance and significance of Rescue. Those who sing its funeral dirge usually fall into two groups. The first declares Rescue to be dead because deep inside they always had a revulsion to it in the first place, but because Rescue (*a la* Operation Rescue) was at the cutting edge of the activist movement, they felt obliged to be a part of it. Deep down this group has little heart for going to court and being imprisoned, which is often part of what Rescue entails. Indeed, this group doesn't see much, if any, value in a pro-lifer being in prison. They think being jailed is basically a waste of time. This group wants Rescue to be dead, because it gets them off the proverbial hook so to speak: since FACE made the price too high, no one is expected to rescue anymore, and thus, for this group, the nagging burden of making the sacrifice that Rescue entails is gone.

The second group sings the funeral dirge because they fully believe that, indeed, FACE did make the price too high, and they simply do not have the means nor the courage to pay the price, in terms of the high fines and the significant jail time involved. This is the larger of the two groups and perhaps the more honest of the two. And I think we should be honest: Rescues are not being done frequently now because we simply do not have the courage to do them. There simply are not enough people who have the means or the courage to ensure that rescues are done on a regular basis.

Yes, I do include not only the lack of courage, but the lack of means. If someone does a rescue now, they must risk the possible jail sentence which could be six months for the first conviction, and that's federal time which means no time off for good behavior or work release. Each person must take this issue before God in prayer. God speaks to us through the primary duties that he has placed before us. I'll speak from my own experience. I was a single woman up to the age of 36, at which time I married Edmund Miller. Two months ago, I gave birth to our third child (by emergency Cesarean section four weeks early). Our other two children are ages four and two. I have been involved in the pro-life movement since 1976—19 years. I did my first rescue in 1978;, a full ten years before OR was even thought of. I have done rescues steadily since 1978—not only participating in them—but organizing them in Chicago and Milwaukee. In the days before OR, the number of people who did rescues was small, but we did them anyway. We didn't wait for, nor did we need large numbers to, make this life protecting act legitimate. Even though I believe in Rescue with my heart and soul, I do not believe, given my present God-given motherhood responsibilities, that I should place myself in a situation where I could be away from my small children for six months or more. To do so would turn rescue into a cult. Yet, I still desire to do them. I don't want FACE to get me off the hook—the tension is there, and the burden of wanting to defend the unborn in this most unequivocal way is still there. Yet I realize that people with significant responsibilities to others would be stalled by FACE to place themselves before an abortuary door. Nevertheless, my husband Edmund is being sued under FACE by a local Milwaukee mill and the federal government, as a result of the first FACE rescue that occurred here in June, 1994. So, despite our family responsibilities God has placed us in the thick of things.

However, we are brought back to the lack of courage question. While there are many who perhaps should not rescue, there are still many who, due to their personal life circumstances, *can* rescue and should be encouraged to do so. But our lack of courage, our lack of willingness to make the sacrifice, is a spiritual problem that in the deepest humility needs to be acknowledged. If the Rescue movement is dead, this is the primary source of its demise. This lack of courage needs to be named and confronted, and by the grace of God, overcome. Each person reading these words, including myself, must search his conscience and face his fears and ask God for an emboldening of heart; not to fear FACE because of the possible sacrifice that rescuing the unborn from abortion under this bill might entail.

Perhaps, however, we have turned FACE into the devil that it's not. Several rescues have occurred since FACE was signed into law and many rescuers have not been charged with FACE at all. This includes the rescuers in the recent OR California rescue! This is something that should be considered. Perhaps the price is not as high as we think. As a matter of fact, even before FACE came along, several states had trespass laws with penalties nearly as stiff as FACE, and those laws never seemed to deter pro-lifers from rescuing.

Rescues are not simply a "tactic." The word carries the connotation of some kind of military or political maneuver. The word "tactic" does not communicate the true essence of Rescue. This is like saying that giving a loaf of bread to a starving person is a "tactic" to ease that person's hunger. No one would refer to such an act in this way. Indeed, such acts are not simply "tactics"; they are acts of charity towards fellow men in need. And this is what Rescue is all about. It is an act of love towards our neighbor. Since the lack of charity towards those scheduled for abortion is so extreme, rescues of the unborn do require sacrifice. We should not be shocked or frightened by the cost. Perhaps only when we once again look upon Rescue as an act of love towards those in need, an act of love that we would want others to do for us if we were in similar circumstances, perhaps only then will the Rescue movement be revived. If my life was threatened I would want someone to protest it, I would want someone to try and persuade those who are about do the killing to cease and desist from it; but even more than these acts of love I would want someone to place themselves between me and the attacker which is a more tangible and real act of defense.

The sin of the priest and the Levite was to act as if the man half-dead on the road did not exist, They saw him "but continued on" (Luke 10:31). It was the Samaritan who came to the man's aid. His was the appropriate response to someone in need. When pro-lifers block the door to the building where the unborn are about to be killed, this is an appropriate response to the children's need in that moment.

If Rescues are dead, it is because our fear of sacrifice is alive. In the meantime, it is true that pro-lifers cannot allow FACE and the rescue slump to be an excuse to do nothing, We must still witness to the sanctity of human life outside our nation's killing centers despite the laws, the injunctions, the pro-abort opposition and the judicial tyranny. But when it comes to FACE we, (and that includes myself,) must be honest and face our own selfishness and fears and ask God in His abundant mercy to give us grace to over come our fears, and show us a way to continue blocking the portals of death, the passageways of slaughter. Indeed, maybe it is time to gird our loins and place ourselves in front of the killing center doors once again.

No rescue is ever a failure—even if every child defended still goes to his death. Rescues are not simply about how many babies are saved. No babies may be saved at any particular rescue though very often they are and certainly that is the goal. But beyond tactics, beyond politics, beyond military maneuvers, in each and every rescue every unborn child, abandoned by his parents, is truly loved by us. Because it is an appropriate act of love towards our neighbor in need, the effectiveness of rescuing the unborn cannot wane. ■

Monica Miller is director of Citizens for Life in Milwaukee, Wisconsin and a former regional director for American Coalition for Life Activists.

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