

CULTURE OF LIFE

Doing Catholic Healthcare Right

BY JOSEPH PRONECHEN

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Dan and Jill Harrington were looking for a pro-life doctor to deliver their 10th child when someone in their home parish handed them literature promoting a medical practice they'd never heard of. Just like that, their search ended.

In fact, they soon learned, not only does San Diego-based Culture of Life Family Services provide neonatal and birthing services but also pediatric and primary care for families — all of it deeply respectful of life in every stage of its development and decline.

It's clear the center's medical director, Dr. George Delgado — a board-certified family physician as well as a dedicated husband and father of four — cares about much more than his patients' physical health.

"That's a big benefit," says Jill Harrington. "He's good for the teens because he can encourage them morally."

The good doctor sees his work as a natural extension of his faith.

"By being authentically Catholic, we're being explicitly pro-life in everything we do," explains Delgado. "In all the life and ethical issues, we are there to witness the beauty of the Church's teachings."

The beauty begins with crucifixes displayed in each room; from there it radiates through every aspect of the practice. Among its unexpected services: psychological counseling, spiritual direction, training in natural family planning and infertility care and counseling.

Asked to describe a recent situation illustrating Culture of Life's unique approach, Delgado recalls how a male patient disclosed during a routine physical that he was regularly viewing pornography. The distinguished physician and courageous man of faith did not hesitate to explain how morally damaging this habit is, and how perniciously it harms marriages.

"Several months later he called to say he was still having trouble and needed help," says Delgado, who referred the man to a qualified priest for greater spiritual guidance. "In this case I feel the Holy Spirit used me to help this man and save his marriage."

Medical Ministry

Delgado is also ever at the ready to discuss from Catholic teaching the ethics of certain children's vaccines. Some, of course, are derived from aborted babies. Many parents are unaware of this, Delgado points out.

Delgado, who earned his medical degree at the University of California and teaches there now, was trained in the NaPro (Natural Procreative) family-planning technique at Pope Paul VI Institute in Omaha.

Likewise, Culture of Life's registered nurse, Patricia Poindexter, a longtime NFP practitioner and educator in the Creighton Model Fertility Care System, also earned certification from Pope Paul VI Institute.

The love of the truth about God and man extends throughout the staff.

"Originally this ministry was founded to provide full-service medical care to women who were considering abortion," explains board member and director of development Margi Pearson.

Hold on. Did she just call a medical practice a ministry? Yes. You read right.

Culture of Life's spiritual director, Deacon Kenneth Finn, says Delgado takes healthcare "one step further, with a deep reverence and passion for Jesus Christ. He's a deep healer of people."

Deacon Finn was spiritual director for novices of Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity. He and his wife, Marie,

also run St. Dismas Guild, a Catholic Bible study ministry to prisons.

"In a way," says the deacon, "we're part of the New Evangelization."

"What Culture of Life Family Services is doing is so desperately needed," says San Diego Auxiliary Bishop Salvatore Cordileone. "They're doing exactly what we need to do: showing real care for women, giving them holistic care — medical, spiritual and emotional support, and practical means to make a happy choice, a choice for life."

Beautiful Choices

Indeed, the culture of life flourishes at Culture of Life Family Services at such times as when women in crisis pregnancies see a sonogram of their babies.

"We tell them the truth about the human life growing within them," Delgado says. "This image of the baby is a very powerful tool, a concrete way to help them."

He describes a woman who accepted literature from a non-threatening sidewalk counselor, then decided to come to Culture of Life for an ultrasound.

"She had twins," says Delgado. "Instead of being totally frightened by this image of two babies, her resolve to protect life doubled."

Board member Pearson says that, when women realize that Culture of Life truly wants what's best for them and their babies — and puts this attitude in action by offering follow-up pediatric care and non-medical help as needed — hearts and minds change.

"I see the moms have a subtle shift in their thinking away from abortion," says Pearson. "It's amazing because it's so subtle. The grace flows in a little crack. This is the opportunity to bring Christ's presence to these women maybe living in a dark culture."

Bishop Cordileone puts it this way: "Culture of Life Family Services is really a 'pro-choice' agency: They give women every choice but the one choice that is destructive to the child and the woman. Doing that, they're answering the call to build the culture of life in our society. That's how they also answer John Paul's call to the New Evangelization."

Delgado notes that he delivers babies next door at San Diego's Catholic Mercy Hospital.

"When I go for a delivery, I try to stop in the chapel to pray for the mother and baby," he says, "and commend them to the Blessed Mother. Then, after the delivery, I stop in to offer prayers of thanksgiving to both Our Lord and Our Lady."

The practice's second office, soon to open in Escondido, already includes its own large chapel. (Since Delgado is the only physician, he's looking for another pro-life doctor or a nurse practitioner.)

Because this medical practice is pro-life and non-profit, those who can't pay aren't turned away. Others will drive quite a distance because this is an authentic Catholic practice. "There are some people," says Delgado, "who are really yearning for this kind of healthcare."

*Staff writer Joseph Pronechen
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