Life After Death

One woman brings her own tragic history to the fight to change her state’s aggressive abortion laws
CONTENTS

COVER STORY
9 Life After Death
One Woman Brings Her Own Tragic History To The Fight To Change Her State’s Aggressive Abortion Laws

COLUMNS
2 Minutes With Michael
Prayer And The Taming Of ‘Mad Dog’

3 News & Quick Takes
Case Updates From Around The World

5 Special Feature
Allied Attorneys Step Up To Join ADF’s Legal Efforts

8 Ambassador Profile
Danny And Virginia Acuna

17 My View
Why I Tell Marriage Stories — And Why New York Doesn’t Like It

19 Q&A
Florida Governor Ron DeSantis

21 Opinion
Waking Up To The Extraordinary Power Of Prayer
Prayer matters. We know this, of course. But we see our nation in turmoil and our God-given freedoms facing increasing threats, and it’s easy to lose heart. Some may even wonder if prayer will make a difference. But I’ve seen God at work through law and politics. Here’s a favorite story:

In the early 1980s, I was the leader of a pro-family lobby and legal group in Washington state. During that time, the state decided to introduce a lottery — ostensibly to raise money for schools. Believing it to be an unjust tax on the poor, I led the opposition to the lottery.

One day, a friend called to tell me that a radio talk show host was bashing me on the air. I tuned in just in time to hear the host, who called himself “Mad Dog,” say that I was only interested in raising money for my organization.

That made me angry, and I punched the show’s number into my phone. I tore into Mad Dog, making strong points about the lottery’s harms. “You’re pretty good over the phone,” he said. “Are you man enough to come into the studio and do this face-to-face?”

“Yeah!” I said. The station set a live, on-air debate for the following week. On the morning of the show, I gathered my staff for prayer. We prayed a hedge of thorns around Mad Dog. One of my associates prayed, “God, as a special sign of Your power, give Mike a chance to share the Gospel over the air.”

Mad Dog was surprisingly genial as the show began. “So, Mike, tell us why you oppose the lottery,” my host invited. I told him my reasons. He didn’t react other than to say, “Interesting. Let’s take some calls.” The phones lit up.

“I am so sick and tired of hearing about you born-again Christians in politics,” one of the first callers said. “I don’t want to ask anything about politics. I want to know — what does it mean to be born again?” I told her — the entire Gospel story.

Another listener called to spout his irritation. “Mad Dog, what’s come over you?” he yelled into the phone. “You’ve let this guy turn this show into a religious harangue.”

“You leave him alone,” Mad Dog said. “He was asked the question. He had the right to answer it.”

The show continued, mostly uneventful from that point on. At the end, Mad Dog said, “I don’t know what happened today, but I agree with this guy. Not everything, mind you. But a lot. If you agree with him, send him some money.”

God tamed a Mad Dog. God answers prayers in every venue of life.

The needs of our nation are great. But so is the power of prayer. Alliance Defending Freedom has begun a massive prayer effort, inviting 5-10 million Christians to pray for freedom’s future. I hope you’ll join us.

Read about ADF’s Generational Wins Prayer Initiative on p. 21.
**Chattanooga, Tennessee**
Two organizations of medical doctors and an OB-GYN are challenging a Biden administration mandate that will force doctors to perform gender transition procedures, even on children.

ADF attorneys filed suit in federal court against the Department of Health and Human Services for its reinterpretation of the Affordable Care Act, which prohibits sex discrimination. The new HHS directive requires gender transition interventions, services, surgeries, and drugs on demand, no matter a doctor’s medical judgment, religious beliefs, or conscientious objection ... all in the name of protecting gender identity.

“The law and the medical profession have long recognized and respected the biological differences between boys and girls and the unique needs they each present in health care,” says ADF Senior Counsel Ryan Bangert.

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**Loudoun County, Virginia**
ADF attorneys are representing three Virginia teachers in a lawsuit challenging a new Loudoun County School District policy that forces them to address students by their preferred pronouns rather than the ones consistent with their biological sex.

Tanner Cross, a physical education teacher at Leesburg Elementary, was suspended in May after voicing objections to the proposed gender pronoun policy at a school board meeting. ADF attorneys filed a lawsuit on his behalf, and he was reinstated to his position after the district court and Virginia Supreme Court both ruled that the school district’s actions were likely unconstitutional.

The lawsuit moves forward as Cross and two other teachers ask the court to suspend enforcement of the policy, which the school board enacted after Cross’s reinstatement. Joining the lawsuit are Kim Wright, an English teacher at Smart’s Mill Middle School, and Monica Gill, a history teacher at Loudoun County High School.

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**Anchorage, Alaska**
ADF attorneys filed suit in federal court to again stop Anchorage officials from forcing a faith-based women’s-only shelter to open its doors to males.

In 2018, Downtown Hope Center filed a federal lawsuit against the city after the shelter referred an inebriated and injured man to a hospital to get the care he needed. The man, who identifies as a woman, later filed a complaint with the Anchorage Equal Rights Commission. The city then chose to pursue the complaint against the center, prompting ADF attorneys to file suit on the center’s behalf.

The city eventually dropped the complaint after a loss in federal court, but the Anchorage Assembly has amended the city ordinance in an attempt to find a new way to target Downtown Hope Center and force it to let males sleep next to abused and homeless women.

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Forcing doctors to prescribe transition hormones for 13-year-olds or perform life-altering surgeries on adolescents is unlawful, unethical, and dangerous.

Ryan Bangert, ADF Senior Counsel

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In his new book, *Facing the Fire: The Faith That Brought “America’s Fire Chief” Through the Flames of Persecution*, former ADF client Kelvin Cochran shares how his distinguished firefighting career ended when Atlanta officials charged him with alleged discrimination. Read the whole story in *Facing the Fire* — available from major booksellers.
Germany

Prohibitions on silent prayer gatherings near a pre-abortion advisory center may remain – so indicates a German court’s recent ruling. The court dismissed the challenge of a prayer initiative’s leader to lift a ban on her group’s prayer vigils.

Twice a year, about 20 people from the “40 Days for Life” group had gathered near the Pro Familia advisory center in Pforzheim, Germany, to pray for the women considering abortion, and for the lives of their unborn children. The vigils were conducted silently and peacefully. But in 2019, the local municipality suddenly denied permission for the prayer group to hold its vigils in sight of the abortion advisory center.

Pavica Vojnović, leader of the prayer group, challenged the ban on the grounds of their right to freedom of religion, assembly, and speech. She plans to appeal the court’s decision.

What kind of society restricts prayer for vulnerable women and children?

Felix Böllmann
Senior Counsel
ADF International

Pakistan

Christian girls in Pakistan fear for their safety, and Maira Shabaz knows the dangerous reality more than most. The 14-year-old escaped her captor – but not before he brutalized, blackmailed, married, and forcibly “converted” her from her Christian faith. She has been in hiding for several months with her family. Working with a local lawyer, ADF International is seeking to annul her marriage certificate.

Maira’s case highlights a wider problem of forced “conversion” through marriage that affects an estimated 1,000 girls from religious minorities in Pakistan every year. The practice is usually carried out through kidnapping, sexual violence, and blackmail.

Local authorities are frequently complicit in such cases. Courts have often failed to uphold the Child Marriage Restraint Act, which sets the legal age of marriage for girls at 16 years.

Washington, D.C.

Currently before the Supreme Court, the case Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization is widely believed to be the most significant legal action on the sanctity of life in a generation. Oral arguments will take place on Dec. 1.

At the center of Dobbs is Mississippi’s Gestational Age Act, passed in 2018 with the support of ADF’s legislative team. It protects life by limiting abortions after 15 weeks of pregnancy, permitting them only in medical emergencies or for severe fetal abnormality.

Mississippi’s law highlights a conflict between the high court’s ruling in Roe v. Wade that abortion cannot be restricted before a baby is viable (able to survive outside the womb) and the court’s repeated affirmation in subsequent cases that states have a legitimate interest in protecting “vulnerable and innocent life” from the moment of conception. That discrepancy – and the court’s decision to grant review of Dobbs – has raised hopes in some quarters that this case could lead to Roe being overturned or profoundly weakened.

More than 60 million unborn children have lost their lives since the Supreme Court created a constitutional right to abortion in Roe v. Wade in 1973.

Visit adflegal.org/fj-Dobbs to learn more about this case.
An engineer before he was an attorney, Sean Gates found himself at a crossroads a few years into his career.

First came the realization that he would need a Ph.D. — and six more years of school — to pursue what he really wanted to do in the field of engineering. But conversations with a lawyer friend began to shift his interests to another profession altogether.

“I would talk to him about what he was learning and the discussions [he and other lawyers] were having,” Gates says. He was struck with a realization: “In engineering you ask, ‘What can we do?’ In law you ask, ‘What should we do?’ That question was more interesting to me.”

Gates went to law school and eventually became a partner at a large Los Angeles law firm. Evidence of his talent as a trial lawyer accumulated: he was named “Attorney of the Year” by California Lawyer, listed in Best Lawyers for antitrust law, and ranked among the Southern California Super Lawyers.

But his desire to succeed in “Big Law” ebbed as the nation’s culture began to change — and with it, his profession.

Gates had a particular interest in doing pro bono work, eager to lend his legal services to causes he believed in — especially ones that reflected his Christian faith. His firm encouraged pro bono activities, and a partner could choose any pro bono matter as long as it didn’t present a client or business conflict.

But that began to change.

“Wide swaths of matters became, quote, ‘too controversial’ for the firm to take on,” he says.

Similar changes were happening in large firms across the nation. Gates began researching high-profile Supreme Court cases that addressed “hot-button social issues” and discovered that fewer and fewer firms were showing support for conservative causes.

It’s no secret that religious freedom is under assault in the United States, and ADF has been on the forefront of all these battles. I just wanted to help.

Sean Gates, Allied Attorney
Gates knew it was time to leave Big Law. He started his own law firm and signed on as an Allied Attorney with Alliance Defending Freedom.

“I just wanted to do pro bono work that was consistent with my beliefs,” he says. “It’s no secret that religious freedom is under assault in the United States, and ADF has been on the forefront of all these battles. I just wanted to help.”

The ADF Allied Attorney program has given him ample opportunities to do just that.

Passionate about religious freedom and conscience rights in particular, Gates began writing friend-of-the-court briefs to support “a slew” of ADF conscience clients, including Hands On Originals (promotional printer Blaine Adamson), 303 Creative (graphic designer Lorie Smith), and Harris Funeral Homes.

In March, he defended Jack Phillips as lead trial counsel in Scardina v. Masterpiece, the third legal case for the Colorado cake artist. Working alongside the ADF attorney trial team, Gates argued that Phillips should not be punished for declining to design a cake celebrating a gender transition.

“The highlight of that experience was Jack himself,” Gates says. “It’s been nine years of litigation now. He’s been through a lot, but he completely understands that God is sovereign, and God is going to work everything out for good for those who love Him. It was just fantastic to get to know him.”

At the same time, Gates had a front-row seat to witness the hostility that’s often on full display during cases involving transgender ideology. “It’s a tough environment,” he says, “but ADF has the courage to take on important issues that are incredibly unpopular in our culture today.

“I really am grateful for the fact that ADF is doing that. As these issues encroach into our day-to-day lives, we’re seeing more and more how important ADF’s work is.”

The Indispensable Role of Allied Attorneys

About a dozen times every day, someone makes a call or submits an electronic form to ADF, asking for legal assistance. A homeowner has been cited for displaying Christian signs in front of his home. A public-school bus driver faces discipline after passing out Bibles to students on his bus. A mother is ordered to affirm her young daughter’s gender-confused behavior.

All of these inquiries come down to the same essential question: **Can you help?**

The vast majority of these requests are handled by Allied Attorneys — a network of 3,500-plus outside lawyers whose professional support bolsters the work of ADF’s in-house legal team. Working in all corners of the country, these attorneys perform a wide range of legal functions, including litigating cases, filing friend-of-the-court briefs, and drafting publications. The work can be as simple as sending a letter to reinforce a decision that’s already been won in the courts.

“That’s a distinguishing feature between ADF and other organizations that are doing some of the same legal work,” says Ali Kilmartin, senior counsel and director of Allied Attorney Relations. “ADF has a network of attorneys who stand ready to enforce the victories we have already won in the courts. That is life-changing for the thousands of people who call into ADF every year for legal help and just need to get a bully off their back.”

Ali Kilmartin, Senior Counsel and Director of Allied Attorney Relations
The Allied Attorney Network laid the foundation for ADF’s legal efforts when the ministry opened its doors in 1994. ADF had no legal team of its own in those early days, instead funding and training outside attorneys to engage in efforts to defend religious liberty.

“It’s the first program we started when we launched,” says Brett Harvey, vice president of Allied Legal Affairs. “ADF wanted to help mobilize our allies and the attorneys that would work with us to get involved in the fight.” ADF eventually hired its own lawyers to direct litigation and advocacy efforts, but the need for help from its Attorney Network remains strong — and is increasing.

“We are continually growing the number of people who will engage with us in religious liberty,” Harvey says. “ADF is never going to be large enough — and no organization could be large enough — to be everywhere all the time.”

“Our Attorney Network is indispensable to the work that we do,” Kilmartin says.

Pro-life sidewalk counselor Eleanor McCullen, for instance, faced a “buffer zone” that kept her far from the women she was trying to reach at a Boston Planned Parenthood abortion facility. Connecticut Allied Attorney Michael DePrimo came to her aid. After bringing her case to the attention of ADF, he litigated on her behalf to the U.S. Supreme Court — and won.

“If you look at our Supreme Court victories, Allied Attorneys have played a role in nearly every one of them,” Harvey says. “And Allied Attorneys played a driving role in two-thirds of them.”

If you look at our Supreme Court victories, Allied Attorneys have played a role in nearly every one of them.

Brett Harvey, Vice President
Allied Legal Affairs

The desire to play that crucial role is what characterizes the Allied Attorneys.

“ADF attracts action-oriented people — people who don’t want to sit around and talk about what’s wrong,” says Kilmartin. “They want to do something about it.”

The Allied Attorneys, she’s found, are ready to engage in cases and causes that fit their particular areas of interest and expertise.

“Our Allied Attorneys are so powerful,” says Kilmartin. “We contact them about important matters we need to collaborate on, and they step up to the plate. It’s like being in the National Guard. They want to be part of the army. They’re not doing it every day, but as soon as we need them — they’re ready.”

One lawyer made his readiness known at the close of a recent ADF Legal Academy, an event offered to recruit and train Allied Attorneys. While completing a post-event survey with glowing remarks about the week, he closed with one determined request:

“Put me in, Coach.”

“That’s our job,” Kilmartin says. “OK — let’s deploy you!”

LEARN more about ADF’s Attorney Network at ADFlegal.org/fj-attorneys
When Danny and Virginia Acuna first heard about ADF’s Ambassador Program, they knew at once they wanted to get involved. Virginia had grown up hearing her parents’ stories about fleeing Cuba in the 1960s, leaving their house behind. Danny was aware of the political turmoil that had characterized his birthplace, Argentina, for many years. Those experiences impressed both with the importance of standing up for fundamental rights in society — especially religious liberty.

“To me, everything begins and ends with the freedom of religion,” Danny says. So when Ryan Johnson, ADF’s vice president of Ambassador and Alliance Relations, presented the work of ADF and its Ambassador program in a house meeting last year, the couple said, “Let’s sign up.”

ADF stood out to them among other Christian and conservative legal organizations because it works with the nation’s courts and laws to secure the rights of everyday Americans.

“That really resonated with me,” Danny says. “That’s what the Apostle Paul did, right? He appealed to Caesar because he was a Roman citizen. To me, that’s what ADF does.”

People light up when they hear the things that ADF is doing.

Danny Acuna

The couple’s desire to defend the liberties they cherish made the program an ideal fit for them. ADF Ambassadors make up an active network of volunteers who help defend faith and freedom by connecting people within their sphere of influence — friends, family, church, and community — to the mission of ADF.

The Acunas spread the word about ADF in Sugar Land, Texas, where they are involved in the homeschool community as well as their local church. They also serve as captains of the Ambassador program’s southern region, leading a team of over 112 volunteers throughout Arkansas, Texas, and Louisiana.

In this role, Danny and Virginia provide their region of Ambassadors with monthly updates on ADF cases and teach new volunteers how to engage members of their own community in ADF’s mission. But most of their work has built on their existing relationships with like-minded people within their community, where the topic of ADF often comes up naturally.

“People have a lot of concerns, and they’re very uneasy about what’s happening on many fronts,” Virginia says. “It makes it a little easier to talk about what ADF is doing.”

“It’s no different than when you share the Gospel,” Danny adds. “It comes out in conversations. As we think of people to share it with, it’s not a hard sell. It doesn’t feel like it’s work.”

The couple has been encouraged by the eager responses of friends. “People light up when they hear the things that ADF is doing,” Danny says. “I just had a conversation with someone who said, ‘I can think of four other couples we could talk to that will benefit from hearing about ADF.’”

The organization offers hope to Christians, he notes. “You see defeat all around, but then you hear about ADF and the cases. You hear that there is a group of people running an organization that is fighting back.

“That, I think, is why it resonates with people so well.”

Ambassador Profile

Danny and Virginia Acuna

By Emily LaFata

LEARN more about the Ambassador program at ADFlegal.org/ambassadors

People light up when they hear the things that ADF is doing. — Danny Acuna

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Sobbing, Kathy Sparks jammed the loaded revolver against her head and pulled the trigger. A "click." Nothing else.

Another sob. "I can’t even kill myself," she thought.

With or without the bullet, her life seemed to be at an end. Her beloved father had died, drinking himself into an early grave. Her marriage was grinding to a bitter close. Still in her early 20s, she was buried in debt, with a 2-month-old baby girl to care for. Her friends were all graduating, moving on into bright new futures, even as her own college dreams fell away, crushed by endless financial problems and responsibilities.

So Kathy put her baby to bed, pulled out her policeman husband’s off-duty revolver, and sat down to put the finish to her hapless, empty life.

“I was at the end of myself,” she remembers. But now, even the gun had failed her.

And then came one last thought: her mother-in-law.

Kathy considered her a religious fanatic, the walls of her house covered with pictures of Jesus. The two had no relationship to speak of. But the woman lived close by, and she was one last straw, amid the surging flood of despair. Kathy called her and choked out what was happening.

“Put the gun away,” her mother-in-law said. “Get the baby and come over here.”

Kathy did as she was told. Halfway into the three-block drive, a huge semi ran her car off the road and into a light pole. Kathy backed out into the street and kept going.

A few minutes later, she was sitting on her mother-in-law’s porch, listening to the woman’s kind voice.

“Kathy,” she said, “here you are trying to take your own life. Why not give the Lord an opportunity to live His life through you?”

“And I thought, ‘Why not?’” Kathy remembers. So the night that had begun with plans to end it all ended, instead, with a new beginning. An extraordinary transformation that would have far, far-reaching effects.

Forty-five years later, Kathy still marvels at the grace that found her that terrible, wonderful night … even as she finds herself, and her life’s work, once more under the gun.

[Pro-life work] is not just about the one life that is saved, but the many, many lives that one is going to touch.

Kathy Sparks
The more [abortions] they could do …

it was big, big money for them. Money was a huge driving factor.

Kathy Sparks

A lot of things changed in Kathy’s life that night. One thing, curiously, did not.

The first miracle was the revolver that didn’t go off. The second, she says, “was that the depression that led me to kill myself was instantly **gone**. I was so free! The heaviness of sin just completely lifted off my heart. And I was happy.”

Too happy to get divorced the next morning, she decided, as she and her husband, Mike, had planned. When he found she’d changed her mind, he went off ranting to his mother, who told him what had happened on her porch the night before — then handed him a Bible.

“You need to read this,” she said. “Every answer to your problems is in this book.”

Mike read it, believed it, gave his life to Christ, and kept reading. Studying. Learning the book inside out. The marriage — now between two believers — began to heal. And through all of this, Kathy kept cheerfully going back every day to her job …

… at the abortion clinic.

It was a curious job for a young woman who just a few years earlier, in high school, had debated ardently for the pro-life position. College changed that. She fell among feminists, at a time when Women’s Lib was dominating the culture, *Roe v. Wade* was transforming the laws, and the hue and cry on campus was for women’s right to control their own bodies.

“I just immersed myself in the pro-abortion culture,” Kathy says. “Embraced it. I bought the lie.”

Ironically, she was studying to be a nurse, with hopes of working with pregnant women and newborns. A stint volunteering on the obstetrics ward as a high school candy striper had left her with a sense of wonder. “It was the most exciting thing I’d ever seen,” she remembers. “I’d never seen the birthing process. I’d never even seen a dog have puppies. To see how it all happened was very, very exciting.”

None of which dissuaded Kathy from taking a well-paying job at a local abortion clinic, once the bills began accumulating in college. She and Mike, living deep in the red, now had a newborn to feed and care for. She dropped out of school and went to work.

She loved the professionalism of the abortionists. She was glad to be involved in medical work, sincerely believing she was helping young women in need. “The office was beautiful, very clean. The people were nice. I felt like I was really doing something important. I didn’t see that abortion was killing babies.”

“We did abortions six days a week,” Kathy says, “a minimum of 40 a day — 60 on a Saturday. Back then, all they had was surgical abortions.” No medical abortions, no morning-after pill. Kathy was one of three medical assistants working with three doctors and their small nursing and clerical staff. “We did a lot of abortions.” She estimates that she helped kill some 700 babies.

“You had five-to-eight minutes to get your patient into your room, and on the table,” she says. “You’d take their vital signs, their blood pressure, their temperature, and chart it. You’d open up the tray, put Betadine (an
antiseptic) on the cotton, and get ready for the doctor to come in. When your abortion was done — which took another five-to-eight minutes — you’d have to get her off the table and into recovery, go back in, pull your paper down over the table, get your next patient in.

“If you weren’t ready when the doctor came in, you were slowing him down. You’d get written up, and it would go into your employment file. It was very important that you kept it going. The more they could do … it was big, big money for them. Money was a huge driving factor.”

Kathy listened as clinic counselors convinced uncertain young women to go through with killing their babies. “We didn’t want one of three things to happen,” Kathy says — the first being that a woman might get her abortion (and pay her money) somewhere else. “Second, we didn’t want her to change her mind.” Third, “we didn’t want her parents finding out and changing her mind for her.”

The obvious greed and manipulation did weigh on Kathy a little, she remembers: “You’re trying to help these women, but they don’t look like they want to be there.”

Another troubling aspect for her was the toilet bowl, mounted to a wall in the cleanup room. While bodies of babies killed only a few weeks into pregnancy were bottled in formaldehyde and sent to a pathology lab, those killed closer to term were simply flushed down the toilet. (Abortions past the first trimester were illegal at the time, and flushing the body eliminated the evidence.)

“I remember thinking that wasn’t right,” Kathy says, “and, ‘Why aren’t they getting in trouble for this?’”

Even at 16 weeks, that baby is fully formed, so you see the arms, the fingers, that little eye, everything.” Still, when one of the doctors would pick up body pieces to show her (“These are the lungs”), her medical interest pushed past the moral concerns.

“To me, it was like looking at an autopsy,” she says. “Not for a second, until the moment I got out, did I realize, ‘That’s a baby — and I just assisted this doctor in killing him.’ I didn’t see it.”

The opening of her eyes came three months to the day after her decision to give her life to Christ. Her husband, Mike, still reading through the Bible, had come to a well-known passage in Revelation (3:15-16). “Kathy,” he told her, “we’re lukewarm. We either have to get into this walk or out of it, but we can’t continue
to be lukewarm. God would just as soon spit us out of His mouth." The two made a heartfelt, prayerful commitment that night to cleanse their lives of anything that might be displeasing to God.

“The next day, I went into the abortion clinic ... and it was a day-and-night difference,” Kathy says. “Freezing cold. A horrible smell throughout the building — and no one else could smell it.”

One of her first patients that morning was much further along than usual — at least 23 weeks. She required three times the usual sedatives, and the abortion took much longer, as the doctor aborted the child piece by piece. Kathy still remembers the "perfectly formed" baby boy’s face.

“Suddenly, not only did I know that was a baby, but I knew I was killing babies, and it didn’t matter if they were six weeks, eight weeks, 10 weeks — it didn’t matter. They were all babies.

“I took his little body into the cleanup room and I just began weeping ... sobbing over everything I was doing.”

Someone called for the clinic director, who grabbed Kathy by the arms and began berating her. “My God, Kathy — pull yourself together! You’re a professional.” But Kathy couldn’t stop crying. She told the woman she wouldn’t be part of another abortion. The woman took the dead baby, flushed it down the toilet, and directed Kathy to rinse trays for the rest of the day.

Kathy spent most of that night praying for God's direction. The next morning, the clinic director came in to see her again, clearly troubled. She’d had a bad, unusually vivid dream, she said, in which Kathy told her she was going to quit the clinic “because of her religion.”

“I knew that God had given her that dream,” Kathy says. “So I said, ‘I have become a Christian, and this is my last day here.’” With that, she turned and walked out, never looking back.

Why wouldn't you think your mom was a superhero, when she went and saved babies every day?

Hannah Skirball

“T
ime — and their new relationship in Christ — brought remarkable healing and change to Kathy and Mike. They chose to stay married, and had four more children together. The Sunday after she quit the clinic, they joined a local church and became very active there, growing in their faith and their love for God and each other.

In years to come, Kathy would even learn of others she had worked with in the clinic who left and came to know Christ — including the woman who had rebuked her after that last abortion.

“When I left the clinic, God instructed me to lift up people, by name, for salvation,” Kathy says. “Every day I prayed. Sometimes, the pro-life movement tends to look at these people as wicked, evil, mean. They’re really not. They’re people who believe that they’re helping women. They’re very deceived. But except for the grace of God, we’re all lost until we come to know Him.

“Pray for them,” she urges her fellow believers. “Pray that God will reveal the truth to them.”

For all her involvement in her church, though, Kathy was haunted by guilt about those four months working at the clinic. “I had a lot of shame,” she says. “I repented of all of it, but I just couldn’t talk about it.” Five years passed before she finally told a Christian friend what she’d done.

“Kathy, you have to forgive yourself,” the friend told her. “Jesus didn’t die for most of our sins. He died for every one of them. If you hold this against yourself, it’s like you’re saying that the work on the cross wasn’t enough.” It was the turning point that opened Kathy’s life to a whole new direction.

I said, ‘I have become a Christian, and this is my last day here.’

Kathy Sparks
Mike awoke one morning to tell her of a dream he’d had — “a dream that we were going to be involved in pregnancy center ministry.” Kathy didn’t even know such ministries existed. But soon after, she found herself on the radio, talking about her abortion experiences. Out of that appearance came some new acquaintances … and a shared vision that soon grew into Mosaic Pregnancy & Health Centers.

The ministry, headquartered in Granite City, Illinois (just across the Mississippi River from St. Louis), offers no-cost pregnancy testing and ultrasounds, testing and treatment for sexually transmitted diseases, post-abortion counseling, adoption referrals, classes on parenting, information on sexual relationships for teens, and a wide array of practical resources for new families, from diapers to clothes to bottles to toys.

Together, Kathy and her team have served more than 20,000 clients over the last 34 years.

“Our clients are all very different from each other, in terms of who they are and what’s gone on in their lives,” Kathy says. “They’re hurting, mostly overwhelmed, coming from pain — some out of great pain — and then God gives them the gift of a baby. To see God put together all those pieces to form this beautiful picture in their life … we just thought, ‘Mosaic.’

“When we began the ministry,” she says, “we had two desires. One, that babies wouldn’t be aborted. Two, that we could share the Gospel, and people would come to Christ. When you have the opportunity to lead someone into eternity, to have that personal relationship with Jesus, it’s unbelievably exciting. Then, when they choose life for their unborn babies … I love it. Love it!”

Mike’s dream became the couple’s lifelong work together: Kathy serving as president and CEO; Mike writing the newsletters, helping at planning meetings, serving on the board.
Unfortunately, though, not everyone shares the affection.

Mosiac has the misfortune — and the increasing challenge — of being an outstanding pregnancy care center in a state where politicians are pushing a particularly aggressive pro-abortion agenda.

“Illinois has some of the most permissive abortion laws in the entire country,” says Elissa Graves, legal counsel with the Alliance Defending Freedom Center for Life. “Very pro-abortion.” In recent years, she says, “they’ve repealed almost every restriction on abortion since the 70s, including parental consent statutes.”

None of that proved sufficient for groups like the ACLU and Planned Parenthood, who continue to take aggressive exception to a 50-year-old state law that says no Illinois medical professional is obliged to provide or refer for abortion.

“It’s a really broad law, based on conscience,” Graves explains. “Not just religion, but strongly held moral beliefs. Essentially, it says the state can’t force you to provide or refer for abortion.”

To plug that gap in their legal offensive, abortion activists came up with a new law that requires all medical professionals, whatever their personal convictions on the issue, to promote abortion to their pregnant patients. They’re not only required to explain the purported benefits of abortion; if a patient shows interest, they must provide her with a list of abortionists.

“People trust us,” says Hannah. “Mosaic has always been so transparent. The records, any documents that anybody wants to see, we’ve been transparent with that — people who support us have a direct line into saying where their money is going and how it’s being spent. They love what we’re doing here.”

There’s a battle being waged in heaven and on earth for the lives of the unborn.
And we are the people standing on the front line.

Hannah Skirball
“Basically, every time a pregnant woman walks into a doctor’s office, the doctor has to say, ‘Hey, did you know you can get an abortion?’” Graves says. The bill was signed into law five years ago, and Alliance Defending Freedom is representing a handful of pregnancy centers — including Mosaic — that are challenging it.

“We just decided to fight it,” Kathy says. “First, it’s a direct attack on and violation of our freedom of religion. It would mandate that we provide our clients with a list of doctors who do abortions, and we’d have to refer for abortion — and we never will.

“The second thing is worse. It’s a violation of and attack on our freedom of speech. We’d be mandated to provide the benefits from the abortion procedure. And there are no benefits to the abortion procedure. Abortion harms women. In essence, they’re going to mandate that we lie to our clients. And we would never do that.”

ADF attorneys secured an injunction early on that prevents state officials from enforcing the law until the lawsuit challenging its constitutionality is settled. But five years and three judges later, the case continues to inch its way through the judicial process.

“I didn’t know how long it was going to take for this to happen,” Kathy says. “But it didn’t matter. If it’s the last thing I do as president and CEO of this ministry, I will see this out to the end. We have the best legal team in the United States. I love Alliance Defending Freedom! I’ve come to understand the tremendous impact that they’re having in many areas — not just the life issue. And I’m thankful for what they’re doing and how they’re supporting us.”

“I remember, growing up,” Hannah says, “my mom always said that there’s a battle being waged in heaven and on earth for the lives of the unborn. And we are the people standing on the front line. With that, you come under attack. But if we don’t fight the battle, who will?

“M y mom has told me all about her past, and the way she was before Christ,” Hannah says. “All I know is my mom as she is today. My parents were not perfect people, but they really authentically lived out their faith and raised us to love Christ.

“I just remember being little and being so proud of what they did. I didn’t have any idea that it was controversial, or that some people wouldn’t like that. It just made total sense to me. Why wouldn’t you think your mom was a superhero, when she went and saved babies every day?”

But the leader of Mosaic knows who brought the shattered pieces together. “My life really is a Romans 8:28,” Kathy says. “‘God uses all things together for good for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose.’ He’s used that horrible time in my life for my good, and ultimately, even now, to His glory.”

Her team’s work, she says, “is not just about the one life that is saved, but the many, many lives that one is going to touch.” Multiply that impact by all the babies Kathy has had a hand in delivering from the abortionists … and you have an extraordinary legacy for a woman whose darkest moment, by God’s grace, triggered a remarkable transformation. 🔄
It’s tough to give an answer when someone asks what my favorite event has been so far. Across all the weddings, elopements, and engagements, I’ve captured so many beautiful moments since I started my own photography business. I imagine it’s like asking parents who their favorite child is.

But if you pressed me hard enough, a summer elopement in upstate New York just might separate itself from the pack.

A sun-drenched meadow in the Adirondack Mountains served as the “church.” The music came from a babbling brook winding its way through the valley alongside us, and the occasional chipmunk provided witness.

No noise, no chaos, no distractions. Just two people reading their vows and trading doe-eyed glances as they prepared to begin a lifelong journey together.

Their love story reminded me (once again) why I do what I do: create beautiful imagery and meaningful blog posts, celebrate marriage, and marvel at God’s good gifts to us.

I love what I do, because I believe marriage is a picture of the Gospel and demonstrates the redemptive love of Jesus Christ. I believe He died to His own interests and painted a picture of sacrificial love in action.

But that, according to the state of New York, is where my right to believe ends.

You see, New York state laws require me to create photographs and blogs celebrating same-sex weddings if I do so for weddings between one man and one woman.

The penalties of New York’s laws aren’t just steep. They’re life-altering. By that I mean fines of up to $100,000, a revoked business license, and even a year in jail. One of those laws even forbids me to explain my religious beliefs about marriage on my own website or social media accounts.
I ask my clients for honesty and intimacy because it’s there, in that space of vulnerability, where the beauty of their story can truly be captured. But I can’t ask them to open their hearts and bare their souls if I can’t do the same. After all, I didn’t just fall into the passion behind the process. I had to earn it.

The coals had been stoked during my senior year of high school, when I bought my first camera as nothing more than a creative outlet. My hobby quickly turned into much more than that as I began shooting local sports during college, then started freelancing for the local paper. Then I photographed my first wedding ... and those coals turned into a full-blown fire.

But fun and creativity eventually gave way to “adulting.” I put the camera down in 2016 to take a corporate marketing gig at a tech company. But after working there for several years, I felt my creative side was being stifled. So I left the company.

I needed to get back to telling stories with my camera. I needed to get back to that passion I believe God instilled in me. I recalled the big, bright light bulb that had come on when I’d started shooting weddings, and I knew I needed to get back to that.

Could there be a more perfect job for me? Marriage unveils the beauty and depth of the Gospel, and I get to be there to capture it. I get to connect with people on an honest, open, and intimate level, then translate stories into tangible treasures they will remember forever.

It’s heartbreaking to learn that my state could force me to give that up. Artists of all walks should be free to choose what they celebrate, and governments are bound by the Constitution to respect that choice.

That’s why I reached out to Alliance Defending Freedom. With ADF’s help, I was able to file a lawsuit in federal court that challenges New York’s laws.

I serve clients from all backgrounds, but the government is trying to tell me what to do, what to say, and what to create — based on its beliefs, not mine. Free speech protects everyone, which means photographers and other artists should be able to choose the stories they tell.

During that elopement in the Adirondack Mountains, I had a chance to accomplish exactly what I had always hoped to with my photography: savor God’s glory, point to it, and put it on display for all to see.

I pray that by my taking a stand against New York’s law, other artists will be free to do the same. 

Marriage unveils the beauty and depth of the Gospel, and I get to be there to capture it. I get to connect with people on an honest, open, and intimate level, then translate stories into tangible treasures they will remember forever.

SEE Emilee’s photography at emileecarpenter.com.
A Florida native, Governor Ron DeSantis captained the varsity baseball team at Yale University, graduating with honors from there and, later, Harvard Law School. While at Harvard, he earned a commission in the United States Navy, where he was a decorated JAG officer. After active-duty service, he served as a federal prosecutor in the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Middle District of Florida, and then three terms in Congress before being elected governor in 2018.

At 43, he is the youngest governor in the country. His first term has been distinguished by his successful efforts in keeping churches open during the Covid-19 pandemic, leading efforts to ensure public schools teach true history rather than politically correct ideology, strengthening free speech on college campuses, and protecting women’s sports — the latter two directly connected to the work of Alliance Defending Freedom.

In July, Governor DeSantis was a featured speaker at the 2021 Summit on Religious Liberty, ADF’s annual flagship event that convenes leaders in law, public policy, media, business, education, and the church to collaborate on legal and cultural strategies to ensure religious liberty flourishes throughout the United States. This Q & A is a transcript of those remarks.

F&J: You and your state legislators moved quickly to pass a law securing the integrity of women’s sports. Why was that important to you?

DeSantis: It’s discrimination against women athletes to force them to participate against male athletes. That’s just the bottom line. I have two daughters, and it’s somewhat personal to me, but as governor, I think it’s important that our boys and our girls have opportunities to advance themselves in athletics. It was something that [our state] needed to take very seriously.

If you stand, you’re standing on behalf of a huge, huge silent majority of Americans ... who have strength in numbers, understand common sense, and understand what’s right.

This was an issue where you had corporations, you had the NCAA doing all this stuff. When our bill was working through the process, the NCAA put out a statement saying, “We’re not going to hold events in Florida if legislation is passed to protect women’s sports.” They think that is fairness, when it’s completely unfair.

I called our Speaker of the House, and I said, “Hey, did you hear what the NCAA said? If we go through with the women’s sports bill, they’re not going to do events in the state of Florida.” And he said, “You know what that means? We’ve got to pass this bill.” So, we were able to
get it over the finish line and through our Senate. And we've signed it into law.

Of course, the Left and the media did their thing. Nobody listens to them anymore; you shouldn't care what they say. I made it very clear that we were going to stand strong. And lo and behold, the NCAA said, “Well, we will actually hold events in Florida; we're not going to hold it over you.”

**F&J: Where do you find courage to take on these increasingly deafening voices of the Left?**

**DeSantis:** You stand up for what’s right. Stand up against the blowback. This “wokeness” dominates certain institutions — academia, corporate media, Big Tech, corporate America, and big businesses — but it’s got very little cachet outside of those aspects of our society.

They may want to chirp at you. They may even try to do something ... but if you stand, you're standing on behalf of a huge, huge silent majority of Americans who may not have access to these commanding heights of some of our elite institutions, but who have strength in numbers, understand common sense, and understand what’s right.

We can either let the elites steamroll us — or we can go on offense and achieve big victories.

**F&J:** The threat to Americans’ fundamental freedoms is growing more acute. Do you think America has the leaders to take on such an epic challenge?

**DeSantis:** I remember being in Congress; a lot of people didn’t rock the boat. Well, I think the boat needs rocking, and people need to step up and lead.

Academics, corporate media, Big Tech, big business — all of them adopt, in various degrees, a Leftist woke perspective in terms of what they want to see. Most of them are entirely hostile to any type of conservative values or traditional principles. You know that, going in; that’s what the battlefield looks like. And if you stand up for the truth, you're going to face the wrath of these institutions.

The media will almost assuredly try to smear you. Big Tech may censor you, and big business may even try to boycott you, your state, your jurisdiction. But that’s what you have to be willing to put up with. That’s what you have to be willing to dive headstrong into, to accomplish things for the folks you represent.

You’ve got to stand. You’ve got to have the right philosophy; you’ve got to understand what time it is. But you’ve also got to have the backbone, the wherewithal to be willing to stand for the right things when the going gets tough, when the lights get hot, when people are throwing stuff at you and trying to smear you. That is really when the rubber meets the road.

That’s where we learn who are the leaders we can count on, and who are the people that are basically just in office to be in office, but aren’t going to ultimately accomplish anything.

**F&J:** How did you first become acquainted with the work of ADF?

**DeSantis:** I think it was the media smearing your group. I said, "You all must be over the target somehow, so this is probably a group that I'm going to like."

I appreciate what ADF is doing, because I know you face blowback. You take on cases that are not popular with certain segments of our elite institutions, and God bless you for being willing to do it. Stand firm for what’s right. Put on the full armor of God. Take a stand against the Left’s schemes. Take up the shield of faith.

You're going to face flaming arrows; that's guaranteed. But stand strong, hold the line, and don't ever, ever back down.
Our culture is engulfed today with seemingly endless debates over who is “woke” and who isn’t. Those pressing the “woke” agenda seem to crave a kind of mass social awakening that will revolutionize traditional thinking on race, sex and gender, etc.

As prayer initiatives director for Alliance Defending Freedom, I’m committed to a different kind of awakening — a spiritual awakening that will open the eyes of people all over this country to the truth of God and the crucial importance of protecting our God-given freedoms. I’d like to see us rediscover the beliefs that our nation was founded on, the ideas that can unite us as a nation and inspire us as people of faith to stand for our Lord amid all the seismic changes that are unnerving America.

There has never been a spiritual awakening in any country or locality that did not begin in united prayer.

A.T. Pierson, 19th Century Pastor

I can’t imagine there are many people who support ADF who don’t share that desire for what Abraham Lincoln called “a new birth of freedom.” But I wonder how many of us are truly willing to do what it takes to bring an awakening like that to pass.

A.T. Pierson, a distinguished Presbyterian pastor of the late 1800s, once observed that “there has never been a spiritual awakening in any country or locality that did not begin in united prayer.”

That brings up two questions for those looking to see the restoration of faith and freedom in America: One, why is prayer the answer? And two, what does it take for prayers to be “united?”

Prayer is the answer because, clearly, what we’re facing today is a spiritual war against the rapid moral disintegration of our country. To read the stories told in this publication is to recognize that America is turning more and more of its furies and frustrations on people of faith. Our opponents resent God and His people so much that they’re increasingly willing to dismantle our nation’s most basic freedoms to accommodate their persecutions.

If you don’t want to hear people preach the Gospel in the public square, or speak out against abortion … the simplest thing is to take away their freedom to speak.

If you don’t want people gathering in Jesus’ name … the easiest thing is to use Covid-19 restrictions to shut down their freedom of assembly.

If you don’t want people holding fast to biblical truths that challenge Leftist orthodoxy … all you have to do is destroy their freedoms of conscience and religion.

Opinion

Waking Up To The Extraordinary Power Of Prayer

By Marcus Harris
Prayer is the answer because, clearly, what we’re facing today is a spiritual war against the rapid moral disintegration of our country.

Marcus Harris, ADF Prayer Initiatives Director

For a quarter of a century, ADF has been leading the legal effort to resist those who would unravel our nation’s laws and persecute Christians. By God’s wondrous grace, we’ve secured many crucial victories and thus helped to protect the rights of millions of believers — as well as all Americans. And yet the opposition grows ever fiercer, and the persecution more intense.

“If the culture isn’t changing,” observes ADF President and CEO Michael Farris, “we’re going to fight the same battles in the next generation.” That reality is the basis for ADF’s focus on “generational wins” that will secure landmark, culture-shifting changes in support of our faith and freedom.

But legal victories won’t come in a vacuum; they must be grounded and nurtured and strengthened by the prayers of those who share a common vision of a nation transformed. That is where the “united” aspect of intercession has its eternal impact.

ADF’s Generational Wins Prayer Initiative is a call to all believers to pray with unprecedented focus, urgency, and unity for the revival of faith in our country, and for the legal victories that will secure our freedom to speak and live out that nation-shaping faith.

Our goal is to enlist 5–10 million Christians all over this country who will join in concentrated, impassioned prayer for spiritual awakening and the transformation of our society. As individuals, as small groups, as churches ... people praying determinedly together and encouraging others to join with them in earnestly beseeching God’s deliverance, favor, and forgiveness for America.

You can learn more about what we’re hoping to accomplish by visiting ADFlegal.org/prayer. There, you’ll find concrete ways you and your family and friends can be a critical part of this heroic spiritual offensive.

It’s past time for a true spiritual awakening in America — and we’re inviting you to join in the Lord’s great wake-up call.

Marcus Harris is Prayer Initiatives Director for Alliance Defending Freedom.
“Our greatest legacy is not our financial wealth, but the spiritual wealth that we have fought to establish and pass down. We want to leave a contribution for ADF to continue the fight for God-given freedoms for our children and grandchildren.”

— Ben & Suzanne S.