Opinion

NCR Voices



Jeannie French, a former board member of Democrats for Life and a longtime pro-life advocate, has opened a combination resale shop/pregnancy help center in downtown Pittsburgh. (Courtesy of Jeannie French)



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Jeannie French has worked in real estate for years, so she's well aware of the adage about the three most important factors in a property: "location, location, location." That's why when she decided to open a combination resale shop/pregnancy help center, she knew it had to be in downtown Pittsburgh, where women in need would stop by.

Little Lamb Resale is located near a bus stop on a busy street full of restaurants, a day care center, a high school — and just six doors down from a Planned Parenthood office. But French, who has long been involved in the pro-life movement, isn't there to talk women out of having an abortion. Instead, she wants to help those for whom a pregnancy is a challenge or even a crisis.

"This is about choice," French told me on a call from Pittsburgh. "You can go to Planned Parenthood — I'm not going to stop you. But if you want to consider parenthood and get safely from here to there, come in here."



At Little Lamb Resale in Pittsburgh, pregnant women who visit the shop will receive a free maternity outfit, low-cost or free baby clothes, and referrals to places that can help with other needs, such as housing, jobs, food, diapers and day care. (Courtesy of Jeannie French)

Pregnant women who visit the shop will receive a free maternity outfit, low-cost or free baby clothes, and referrals to places, such as Catholic Charities or Women's Choice Network, that can help with other needs, such as housing, jobs, food, diapers and day care.

Visitors also will get a friendly chat from French, herself a single mother — and now proud grandmother. (Full disclosure: French and I have been friends since we both worked for the church in Chicago decades ago.)

French has long put her pro-life ideals into practice. When she was pregnant with twins and learned that her daughter, Mary, had a serious form of spina bifida, she was determined to continue the pregnancy. Mary died shortly after birth, but French testified before the U.S. Senate that her daughter's life was meaningful even after death, since her heart valves were a match for two infants in critical condition.

French later founded the National Women's Coalition for Life, an umbrella organization for projects that provide support to mothers and infants. Little Lamb Resale is a project of the coalition.

"Women just need support, they need somebody," French said. "We just have to say we're there with you."

Advertisement

French, who is semi-retired and has volunteered with St. Paul of the Cross Parish's St. Vincent de Paul Society as well as a local free health clinic, has over the years invited three women to live in her home until they could get back on their feet.

But, as a Democrat, she recognizes that "helping people needs to be a little more formalized." Thus, Little Lamb Resale was born.

The 350-square-foot resale shop, which opened at the end of June, has a boutique feel, with a small collection of select maternity wear and baby outfits. Purchases are wrapped in tissue paper and put in logoed gift bags by the staff — all volunteers.



The 350-square-foot Little Lamb Resale shop, which opened at the end of June, has a boutique feel, with a small collection of select maternity wear and baby outfits. (Courtesy of Jeannie French)

All of the items are secondhand — most thrifted by French, who brags that she gets quality items for 33 cents at the "happy hour" sale at her local thrift store. Proceeds from the shop's sales underwrite the operation, but it is primarily funded by an insurance settlement French received after being hit by a car while cycling.

"If it weren't for my helmet, I'd be dead," French recalls about the accident five years ago that resulted in a broken neck, back, collarbone, three ribs and wrist, from which she has since healed.

"God healed me, so I figured that's really his money," she said. "So I decided I'm going to do something with his money."

She sees the shop as the "perfect combination" for her, since she is both a longtime thrift shopper and pro-life advocate.

"I'm one of those liberal pro-lifers, which can be hard to be," said French, who has served on the board of Democrats for Life. "But I don't want to spend my time in politics. What I want is to be physically there and make sure that women have a real choice."

Crisis pregnancy centers have been in the news recently, after Illinois passed a law making it illegal for such centers to use "misinformation, deceptive practices, or misrepresentation" to interfere with access to abortion services or emergency contraception. Earlier this month a federal judge issued a preliminary injunction blocking the law, citing First Amendment issues.

French notes that her resale shop does not offer pregnancy tests, ultrasounds or "anything medical."

Instead, she is just trying to connect women with needed resources. "It's a nice model for how to be pro-life and not controversial."

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