

Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<https://www.ncronline.org>)

April 27, 2011 at 5:14am

Closing a Real Pro-Life School

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Distinctly Catholic

Governors across the nation have been struggling to balance their budgets, often with unhappy consequences for programs that aid the poor and the vulnerable. Some of the battles, such as the attack on collective bargaining rights by conservative Republican governors in Wisconsin and Ohio, have exposed the anti-union bias behind the purportedly budget-saving measures. But, perhaps no single measure is so repulsive as the effort in Michigan to close the Catherine Ferguson Charter School in Detroit. And the utter silence in Catholic conservative circles is shocking.

Catherine Ferguson Charter School is unique in the nation. It exists to help young mothers, and young women who are pregnant, stay in school. In addition to providing an education to the young mothers, it offers day care for their children. I can scarcely think of a program that is more pro-life in every sense of the word! We want women not to turn to abortion when they become pregnant. We want them to "Choose Life!" as our placards say when we hold pro-life rallies. But, here in Detroit, where a community decided to actually do something to help young women keep their children, rather than raise taxes on those best able to afford them, rather than nix any of the tax give-aways that are routinely extended to large corporations to get them to locate in a given jurisdiction, rather than close a school where rich kids go, Catherine Ferguson goes on the chopping block first.

The young women who attend the school were, not surprisingly, deeply upset at the news their school was closing. For them, in their situation, transferring to a traditional school is not quite so easy. So, they organized a peaceful protest, a sit-in. The police responded with strong-arm tactics, man-handling the young women and arresting many of them. The courage of the young women in the face of this assault was remarkable. Most of them said they would do it again if their arrests would help call attention to their cause and keep their school open.

I went to the website of LifeSiteNews which has as its mission serving as a sort of clearinghouse for news related to defense of the unborn. They have an item about how the fact that a judge in California who ruled in favor of gay marriage should have been disqualified because he is himself gay. They note that President Obama did not issue an Easter proclamation: Not sure what that has to do with the pro-life cause. They have several articles about the progress of various anti-abortion measures making their way through various state legislatures. And their big coverage of Catherine Ferguson Charter School? Not a word.

InsideCatholic? No article about these heroic young mothers there.
American Papist? Too busy indulging self-promotion.
American Life League? Too busy calling Nancy Pelosi a ?Judas.?
National Right to Life Committee? Nada.

Some on the left have criticized the pro-life movement for only being concerned with human life when it is in the womb, but not caring very much once the child is born. I have never made that criticism because I think it assumes too much. (That said, there are plenty of budget cuts in the GOP's budget proposals that are properly deemed ?anti-life.? If you cut foreign aid programs that help fund anti-malaria programs, you are not, in that instance, advocating for life.) But, I do level the charge that in today's Republican Party, nothing trumps budget cuts in the pantheon of conservative values. If conservatives really want to foster a ?culture of life,? they should stand with the brave young women who attend Catherine Ferguson Charter School and demand that other programs be cut, other schools be closed. There is nothing, repeat nothing, pro-life about closing this school and if the GOP proves it does not care, then they have shown that they are merely using the pro-life movement to achieve their own political goals. (I should add that the House Republicans also caved on cutting Planned Parenthood when push came to shove.)

And, why, oh why is Catherine Ferguson the only school of its kind in the nation? I know that many dioceses have found it impossible to keep their schools open, but instead of shoveling money into political campaigns aimed at preventing gay marriage, why not direct that money to opening a Catholic school for young mothers in every diocese in the country? Make Catherine Ferguson a model for the entire country. That will do more to create a culture of life than anything I can think of, not only preventing actual abortions but helping to convey the message that young women facing crisis pregnancies who ?Choose Life? are heroes who deserve not only our compassion but our help.

Until that happens, I don't want to hear about how pro-life we are. The pro-life movement should stop patting itself on the back for its legislative achievements and get down to work lobbying for more schools like Catherine Ferguson ? and, assuredly, fighting the effort in Michigan to close this great school down.

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