

The power of television

Apostolate uses commercials to promote, defend sanctity of human life

by KATIE MOORE

staff writer

CHARLOTTE — According to Jesuit Father John Kavanaugh, professor of Philosophy at St. Louis University, by age 75 the average American will have spent 14 years of his or her life watching television. Of those, four years will have been spent watching commercials alone.

Fortunately, a pro-life media apostolate is taking advantage of those statistics to use the media as a tool for promoting godly virtues and the sanctity of life.

Founded in 1998, Virtue Media is a pro-life media apostolate that creates and airs national television and radio commercials. The mission of Virtue Media is three-fold: first, to help save unborn babies from abortion; second, to offer hope and healing to post-abortive parents; and third, to educate the public about the sanctity of life.

By harnessing the potential of media to educate and inform the general public, Virtue Media has tapped into an expansive resource that allows for the spreading of positive messages in the media market.

The ads were first introduced in the Charlotte market in 2006 after Msgr. Richard Bellow, pastor of St. Mark Church in Huntersville, asked Tom Peterson, founder and president of Virtue Media, to speak at the parish.

With financial support from St. Mark Church, Virtue Media then partnered with the North Carolina Right to Life, Inc. to launch a pro-life ad campaign called “Heart to Heart.”

Real results

Using pro-life television ads from Virtue Media, the campaign, which was an ecumenical effort between Catholic and non-Catholic churches in the community, was aimed at reducing the number of abortions in the Charlotte area.

The ads first ran on major networks and cable stations from December 26, 2006 to March 25, 2007 and again during June, July, August and October of 2007.

According to North Carolina Right to Life, Inc., in 2007 there were nearly 1,900 fewer abortions in the Charlotte-area than in 2006.

In August 2008, Bishop Peter J. Jugis sent a letter to pastors encouraging their support of the campaign.

“Television is the most effective and influential vehicle we have to touch minds and hearts in society,” said Bishop Jugis in the letter.

“They are positive messages which encourage people to choose life over abortion, and offer hope and healing to parents after abortion,” he said about the ads.

Within the past year several parishes in the Diocese of Charlotte have supported the campaign through either a parish tithe or voluntary contributions from parishioners.

Virtue Media offers church presentation materials, including DVDs of the ads, to parishes that are interested in generating support.

How they work

At the end of each ad a number is provided for Option Line, a call center in Columbus, Ohio, which is run by CareNet pregnancy centers and staffed 24 hours a day by Christian groups.

At Option Line, callers are directed to local pregnancy help centers where they can receive counseling. In Charlotte, callers are directed to the Pregnancy Resource Center.

When Virtue Media television ads air nationally, approximately 22,000 women contact the pregnancy call line a month, according to Peterson.

He attributes such high numbers to the utilization of television as the most effective way to reach people.

“We’re showing up where these women are,” said Peterson. “When you put a powerful creative message out there, when and where they are watching, they will respond.”

A powerful message

One of those powerful messages comes directly from Norma McCorvey, better known as Jane Roe, the plaintiff in the Supreme Court case *Roe v. Wade*, which legalized abortion in 1973.

In the ad, McCorvey, a convert to Catholicism, refers to the court case as “the biggest mistake of my life.”

Now she is dedicating her life to spreading the truth about preserving the sanctity of human life.

“We have powerful national figures who are blessing us and our church with the truth,” said Peterson, referring to Virtue Media ads featuring McCorvey and Dr. Alveda King, niece of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

“It’s powerful coming right from them,” he said.

What’s next?

Peterson has started a second Catholic media apostolate called Catholics Come Home, which he hopes will further the mission of Virtue Media.

Although these ads are focused primarily on bringing wayward Catholics back to the church, Peterson believes that by bringing more Catholics home, the pro-life movement within the church will be strengthened.

“The ultimate solution to stopping abortion is to have more hearts centered on Christ and more people active in their Catholic parishes,” he said.

“Research has shown that if people are centered on Christ and active in their churches they will support pro-life issues,” he said. “Once somebody is grounded in faith they can be formed in virtue.”

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To find out more about Virtue Media, visit www.virtuemedi.org.