



A refuge for unborn-newborn babies and little children who will die and those who love them

NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2019

EDITORIAL

Dear Friends of Alexandra's House,

Welcome to our Spring issue 2019. In this issue, we will hear from a graduate student who was struck by the way in which the house, away from the noise and passions of politics, quietly and faithfully builds up a culture of love, wherein the smallest and most vulnerable are welcomed and given pride of place.

We will also hear about the project to redesign the Wall of Life undertaken recently by Teresa and Paul Willnauer. Everyone who has been to Alexandra's House knows there is a wall, but some of our readers who haven't visited may not know of it. A wall where the photographs of those first precious newborn moments are also the last; where love and pain fill the faces of mothers and fathers cradling their very small, very sick babies.

A special wall. An unignorable wall. A memorial wall. In its way, a biblical wall.

I always think back to the Western Wall in Jerusalem. It is the holiest place that Jews are allowed to pray. It's a place where they pour out their hearts to God, a place of sorrow and emotion – called, in Arabic, el-Mabka, 'Place of Weeping', because it is the only reminder of an even holier place behind it, now lost, the Temple, the Sanctuary, the Holy of Holies. Loss is real and one does not forget. To see the wall is to remember and to remember is to hold dear, and allow oneself the chance to grieve. And our wall has a similar purpose. We can mourn there, silently or in tears, and see and remember what it is to love in this valley of tears. The wall of loss is truly a Wall of Life.

—Hilary Stroh



If ever you are with someone who has lost a little baby to death, it is unlikely they will have pictures of their baby displayed on the walls of their house or readily available for viewing. Rather, they might be drawn from an otherwise hidden away box. This became a common experience for me when visiting families.

Alexandra's House should be different, as it is the babies' home for sure, so these special photos should be proudly displayed. We avoided the more common areas but chose the stairway walls between the upper and lower levels of the house, so people could visit only if they chose. Little did we know all these years later that this Wall of Life would become a catalyst for meaningful conversation, for reflection, for stories to be told and shared, and for hosting countless visitors, including an unlikely visit from the controversial Richard Dawkins. It is no doubt, the most popular space here and, not infrequently, people show up to visit only because they were told just to come to see.

Since 2002 the Wall amassed quite a collection of photos so finally we had to acknowledge that it was in serious need of refreshment. We received a grant in 2017 from Soroptimist International of Kansas City to have the walls repaired and repainted and then planned for immediate installation of the new gallery. Several professionals came to assess the space and yet none returned with a design proposal or to complete the project. The babies' absence was uncomfortable and most unfitting that they should be hidden away in boxes here. We desperately searched Pinterest and all sorts of online sites to find out how we could redesign the walls to hold so many pictures but also be a fitting testimony to these sweet and meaningful lives. We finally developed our own idea of how it could be done and just prayed to God that He would send someone, because thus far, no one had responded to our plea. Then just before Alexandra's birthday, along came Teresa.....

Teresa Willnauer, a photographer, and her husband, Paul, undertook a labour of love in redesigning the Wall of Life, working day and into the night, and here they tell us about how they came to be involved, and what it has meant to them, and their young granddaughter. We hope you will get a chance to see the wall in person soon.

Over the years I have often heard my mother-in-law, Helen Panebianco, talk with great love about her service at Alexandra's House. When she came to me in November and asked me if I would be willing to create a picture display of the babies and families they had served, I couldn't refuse. I knew how important this mission was and I wanted to be able to use my talents to help. When Helen described what they were looking for I thought the project would take me one afternoon. I must admit that after meeting with Patti, discovering there were more than one-hundred-and-seventy 4x6 photos to display, and seeing the space I had to work with, I was overwhelmed. This was a project of much greater magnitude than I had expected.

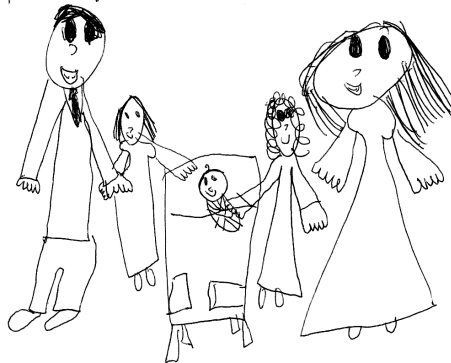
Because of my time constraints I was tempted to back out, but as a retired photographer I love to be creative so I knew I could and needed to contribute. Over the course of a few weeks my very supportive husband and I put in many hours on this project. *[Patti adds they even worked into the night]* God's work isn't always easy and such was the case this time. All along we encountered challenges but once I began I could not abandon those babies! As I worked I spent many hours looking at the photos of the babies and I often wondered about them and their families. I was grateful to know that life is eternal, that families are forever, and that these families would be reunited again in the next life. I was blessed to be God's hands to do this work. He inspired me and gave me the ability to create this lovely tribute to these precious babies and their families.



An 8-year old's Impression

On the day before the scheduled installation of the new wall of life Teresa invited her daughter-in-law, Dessie, and her eight-year-old granddaughter, Rylee, to help her with the final preparations. They worked all day organizing and attaching the photographs of the babies to the ribbons that would hang from ceiling to floor in the stairway at Alexandra's House. Rylee was deeply touched by the photographs and asked many questions about the sweet babies that had died. During a time when there wasn't something she could do to help she was drawing pictures to give to Alexandra's House. Her drawings reflect what she was quietly observing about family life when babies die.

Love is when two hearts are as
one.
In a family the heart of kids and parents
learn to be a forever family.



Too often, the label 'pro life' can be a narrowly political one, and conjure up a picture of the seemingly endless battleground between those who support Roe and those who don't. Before we can seek to change laws, we need to change the culture, and that means changing ourselves and our response to others. Alexandra's House is a witness to an unconditional culture of love, where the most vulnerable are truly accepted and loved as they are.

Kyle Herrington was struck by this on a recent visit. Kyle is a grad student at Boston College working toward his second Masters in Theology; he hopes to pursue his studies to doctoral level. This article is copied with his permission from the online publication Ethika Politica.

If Mary's charity-filled presence is the model of fostering a Culture of Life, then I can think of few greater examples of this charism than Alexandra's House....

I first visited the house as the leader of my high school's pro-life group. I had found the charity online and immediately wanted to do something to help. One day, I, another member of the group, and my mother traveled to the house to help with yard work. Afterwards, Patti invited us into the house to talk. Immediately upon entering the door, the house felt charged with love. Even though it was a place for people who were going through terrible challenges, my friend exclaimed that the house felt like the happiest place on earth.

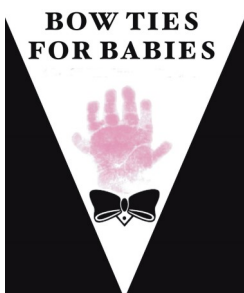
Patti offered to show us around the house which acts as a meeting place and as temporary place to stay while families visit the hospital. Hanging on the walls of the stairwell that lead to the living quarters

and house chapel were dozens of photos of babies that the house had helped by cherishing, loving, and respecting them. To the world and the human eye, these photos showed contradictions: tiny lives cut too short. Yet for Patti and for God, these photos showed a sign of God's love that could not be contradicted by human ignorance or short-sightedness. These were little babes, full of Christ-revealed dignity.

Patti does not actively campaign in the pro-life movement; she does not believe God has called her to that witness. The website for Alexandra's House states that the organization has been "Building of Culture of Love since 1997". Showing love to families and their little ones has been Alexandra's House's vocation. As a movement trying to build a Culture of Life, we obviously must discuss political action and ecclesial messaging. However, Alexandra's House points to the real Culture of Life being intertwined with a Culture of Love. Christ is both "the way, the truth, and the life" (Jn 14:6) and "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8). Modeled by Mary's loving nurturing of Love Incarnate and reflected in our time in Patti's love for the little babies and their families, Love is the cornerstone of a culture built to foster Life.

To serve a Culture of Life is to follow Christ. Without discipleship, whatever our good intentions, clever political maneuvers, or ecclesial documents say or do, our message will be nothing more than "resounding gongs or clashing cymbals" (1 Cor 13:3). Yet, with God's grace, Spirit, and example, we can set out to build a Culture of Life in a society that so wishes to contradict and destroy it because "nothing will be impossible for God" (Lk 1:37).

Bow Ties for Babies 2019



The Friends of Alexandra's House sponsors the organization's only annual fundraiser which supplies a full fourth of its operating expenses. Our team is most grateful for all your support. This year's Bowties for Babies is scheduled for Friday Oct 4, 2019 at The Venue in Leawood, KS.

Tricia Clement leads the planning committee: tclement@polaris-planning.com. All are invited to attend. Feel free to contact Tricia for tickets or with questions.



Alexandra's House

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