

Former abortion clinic director turned pro-lifer has simple goal: make abortion 'unthinkable'

Abby Johnson has an [unlikely resume](#) for a pro-life speaker and crusader.

A former director of a local Planned Parenthood abortion clinic in Bryan, Texas, she estimates she helped facilitate more than 20,000 abortions over eight years.

Nearly a decade later, Johnson – a Catholic mother of seven who has had two abortions herself – has become an international speaker and advocate for the pro-life movement who dispels myths, rallies the pro-life troops and shares her own story.

“My end goal is not to simply make abortion illegal. My end goal is to make abortion unthinkable, so that we become a society that can actively play a part in finding the solutions so that women never have to feel like they even have to darken the door of an abortion clinic,” Johnson said.

She was the guest speaker at a Sept. 21 event in support of the [Alberta Life Issues Society \(ALIES\)](#), which runs [The Back Porch](#), an Edmonton pregnancy resource centre.

She urged supporters not only to “save babies” but to continue to demonstrate in front of abortion clinics despite opposition, to fight for legal and legislative changes, and to support organizations that help women throughout their pregnancy and beyond.



Abby Johnson, a former Planned Parenthood clinic director, was once named Employee of the Year. Andrew Ehrkamp, Grandin Media

In 2016, a total of 97,764 abortions were reported in Canada, according to the [Canadian Institute for Health Information](#). Alberta reported 12,948 abortions that year. Ontario had the highest number, at 38,383, and Quebec had 23,393, according to the CIHI report.

Johnson said she's confident that Judge Brett Kavanaugh, who is Catholic and is expected to be confirmed to the United States Supreme Court within days, may tilt the court balance and overturn the Roe vs. Wade court decision that made abortion legal.

She hopes her own story will play a small part in changing attitudes. Johnson was recruited to Planned Parenthood as a young woman and rose through the ranks to become a clinic director and being awarded employee of the year.

"I really believed our goal at the clinic was to keep abortion safe, legal and rare."

Instead, in 2009 Johnson was asked to double the number of abortions performed,

which caused her a crisis of confidence. At that point, she drove to the pro-life movement office, walked in, and wept.

“It’s just spiritual blindness,” explained Johnson, whose parents and husband have remained pro-life. “I think God had been working on my heart the entire year of 2009. I think there were just enough cracks for me to, when I saw the ultrasound-guided abortion, for me to be able to say, ‘Whoa, this is wrong.’”

Planned Parenthood sued Johnson to impose a gag order, but the lawsuit was ultimately dismissed. That has allowed her to speak about what she calls the myths told to women about abortion, fertility and their own bodies – as well as her own conversion.

“It was what I didn’t know, that’s what led me in the door of the abortion industry, and I submit to you it is what the majority of women do not know in our society that leads them inside the doors of abortion clinics.”

“No one is beyond the power of conversion, because no one is beyond the power of Christ,” she said. “That has to be our goal in the pro-life movement. It can’t be just about saving a baby. Just because you save one doesn’t mean you’ll save the next, not unless there is a conversion, a heart change within that woman.”

Women, Johnson said, have been misled to believe that without access to safe and legal abortion, they will be forced to back alleys, that pro-life advocates would then challenge other civil rights, and that abortion clinic clients are young girls. Most women having abortion are mothers already.

“They’re having abortions because we as a collective society have told women that if you are not in the perfect situation to have a child, then the best thing, the most merciful thing you can do for your child is to kill it,” Johnson said.



Samantha Williams

“Being pro-life is being pro-woman,” added Samantha Williams, executive

director of Alberta Life Issues Educational Society. “I think a lot of people who aren’t very informed about abortion, they think that being pro-choice is being pro-woman, and that’s not the case.”

Birth control is not a solution, said Johnson, an advocate for natural family planning whose own unplanned pregnancies occurred while she used contraceptives.

“The answer to our problem is not simply birth control. The answer to our problem is self-control. Self-control is not lucrative. Self-control does not make money. But birth control does. When we as pro-lifers begin to push contraception to the masses, we become part of the problem.”

What’s needed, she said, is the kind of change in values promoted by such organizations as The Back Porch and Johnson’s own ministry. Johnson founded [And Then There Were None](#), a ministry designed to assist abortion clinic workers in transitioning out of the industry. To date, this ministry has helped over 430 workers leave the industry.

“Being pro-life means getting messy, because the lives of these people who are impacted by abortion, the lives of women who consider abortion, sometimes their lives are messy. We can’t just look at them and say ‘Don’t have an abortion and have a good day.’ Being pro-life isn’t just about saving a baby. It’s about growing a family.”



Emma Marple

Emma Marple, an Edmonton mother of two who attended Johnson’s speech, agrees.

“If there’s been difficulty for me in the pro-life movement, it’s that we’ve missed a lot of other people involved in this whole thing. This is about fathers. This is about human rights. This is about everyone.”

Her husband Jeff goes further, saying it’s a question of societal values.

“The sad part is, I think, we’re losing the battle on a lot of grounds that

happen before you get to the abortion clinic. Until we start to win some battles sooner than once they get to the abortion door, it's really is just about saving lives."

ALIES reports that it counselled an estimated 600 clients last year. Twenty of them went so far as to indicate that they had decided against having an abortion, despite ongoing opposition.

This year, the Alberta government banned demonstrations within 50 metres of an abortion clinic and allowed for other restrictions on doctors' homes and offices. Nevertheless, Johnson said protesters must grow a thick skin and know that – from her own experience – their actions are effective.

"When there are people standing in front of an abortion clinic praying, the rate of no-show appointments goes as high as 75 per cent. Does public witness make a difference? Absolutely. You're showing society that you're willing to take a stand."

She adds: "We also need to know how to defend our convictions without our religion as well. You have to keep being a public witness even if you can't be right in front of the abortion facility. We have to show people around us that abortion is wrong and healing is available."

Johnson also bemoans what she calls complacency, especially within the Christian community.

"We are so silent and timid about this issue ... because we're so scared to offend people. Guys, the people on the other side of this issue, the people on the other side of this debate, are not in the least bit concerned about offending you. Why in the world are we sitting here so worried about offending people with God's truth? So what if they flip you off. Just wave and smile."

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