

## Speaking to My Generation about Abortion

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**Note:** Natasha Frasch is a homeschooling mother and free-lance writer from Cincinnati, Ohio. She maintains a blog, “Venerating Life” at [veneratinglife.wordpress.com](http://veneratinglife.wordpress.com). She has recently published a beautiful children's board book called *Love Comes Down* (published by Ancient Faith Ministries), based on a song she wrote.

Four years ago, my husband and I got married, and for our honeymoon we went to Charleston. On the first day, trying to duck out of the rain, we ended up taking a tour of a grand old Victorian home called Calhoun Mansion. After its initial glory days, the house fell into disrepair. The interior was painted over a battleship gray, later even being used for naval operations during World War II. Eventually it was condemned, but in 1976, someone set about restoring the home. While removing the gray paint, they were shocked to discover beautiful murals beneath of Shakespearean scenes and the four seasons. On the ceiling, they found intricate stenciling done by Louis Tiffany of Tiffany lamps. Priceless finds.

I'm sharing this memory, because in some ways, entering into debates about abortion can be like stepping into the Calhoun mansion circa 1975, before renovations began. The walls are gray and the place that was meant to be a home has become militarized. Instead of sacred space, the womb has become an ideological battlefield, and a woman's body a site for power politics. The thick gray paint is designed to depersonalize, to erase history, beauty, and mystery. When we step into that space, it's easy to engage in a way that draws lines in the sand, that looks for truth bombs; it's easy to be self-righteous or defensive.

I'd like to propose three actions to begin to restore this environment to a home, a place for relationships, not just ideas. The first is to pull up a chair; the second, open the doors; the third, reveal the images beneath the gray.

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First, pull up a chair. This means creating a space of listening and acceptance for people who disagree. It's about asking genuine, not leading or pointed, questions about their perspective. There is a time to make a point, but first, it's important just to listen.

For me, this meant e-mailing friends who were publicly posting pro-choice views on Facebook and asking them how they came to their perspective, asking them for resources—books, websites, statistics—and not just aiming to refute them. Sometimes people would share a very personal story near the end of our communication that I wish I would have known at the beginning. You truly never know the painful stories people are carrying.

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Pulling up a chair is for the benefit of others, but also for ourselves. It means sitting with the suffering on all sides of this debate. Sitting with it, allowing the grief to affect us, whether it's the hardships of women in impoverished nations, or pregnant women living out of their cars, having more children, in our own cities.

My current pregnancy has been an intense experience for me personally—to feel the precious life in me growing, but also to feel embodied empathy for the issues I was researching. During my first trimester, I was extremely fatigued with hormone-induced depression. I kept thinking, what would this be like if I didn't have my husband and friends supporting me? What if I were working overtime to make ends meet? Pulling up a chair for my pro-choice friends showed me how much I have to learn about compassion and the struggles women face, even as I challenged their solution.

The second action is opening the doors, specifically opening the doors of our own lives to hospitality for the vulnerable. In my conversations with those in my generation, by far what I've heard the most, over and over, has been sadness and anger against the hypocrisy of those who claim to be pro-life but do not seem concerned about promoting life outside of the unborn, whether that be for environmental causes, immigration, etc. For these friends, it was maddening to look at Christians and see them exhort impoverished women to make sacrifices while they went ahead pursuing the American dream, living in big houses, walling themselves off from the needy.

On the one hand, you could call their concern an *ad hominem* attack, a distraction from the real question at hand. For me, however, these kinds of conversations are invitations to repent, to repent to God and also to these friends for the many ways I've failed to live out sacrificial love while telling women to do just that.

It's also an invitation to live out the fruit of that repentance, to open our doors to the suffering, whether that means supporting single moms, adopting a baby, caring for the elderly. There are so many ways for the church to be holistically pro-life; and to be a light in this way is a crucial part of our witness. It's our calling, and it's also our joy.

The third action, after pulling up a chair and opening our doors to the vulnerable, is uncovering the image beneath the thick gray paint. This is ultimately the image of a child, created in the image of God, an image that often gets lost under layers of argument.

In discussing abortion, I've tended to get stuck arguing about "gray issues"—whether rape, back-alley abortions, or fetal abnormalities. I've also gotten stuck arguing about public policy, or trying to convince people that abortion is morally wrong.

These things are important, but they are not my ultimate goal. My ultimate goal is to make the unseen visible, to help people see and love the unborn. One thing helpful to note is that I've found for my generation that categories such as "victim" and "oppressor" have more emotional resonance than categories such as right or wrong, especially regarding abortion.

This is one reason it's so helpful to set aside the legality of abortion at times, because this sets aside the vision of lawmakers as oppressors and women as victims. The hope isn't to recast women as oppressors, but to give them space to consider the unborn outside a political context, and to admit, if only personally and to themselves, that what happens in abortion is sad. This is a small step, but an important one.

In this context, apologetics can take on less the feel of a courtroom argument, and engage in more creative approaches to uncovering the image, giving a face to the unborn, whether that is through poetry, art, or testimonies. My hope is that in personally seeing the value of these beautiful tiny human beings, these persons would see more clearly the horror of abortion and move toward rejecting the violence on a public level.

Sometimes in these one on one conversations, starting at the public policy level can be a dead end. In my latest essay, "Does God Ever Look Like an Alien Worm?"<sup>1</sup> I share my own beliefs about the beginning of human life in the context of my Orthodox Faith. In it, I invite people to ask questions about where, and in whom, they believe God reveals Himself, as they know and experience God. It's less about convincing them of something new, and more about making connections—linking what they already believe about spirituality with the unborn. Can

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://veneratinglife.wordpress.com/2019/11/06/does-god-ever-look-like-an-alien-worm/>.

we find the face of God in the face of one who looks so radically different from our own? My hope is that questions like this might be part of the work of revealing the faces beneath the gray paint, revealing the face of a child.

In summary, as we face this room, this battleship-gray room, our labor of love is one of restoration, creating a home in which to relate to persons who agree with us, and to those who don't, for those who are born and those who are not yet born.

This includes first, pulling up a chair to listen. Second, opening the doors to the suffering. And third, participating in the work of restoring the image, revealing the face of the unborn. It's a work that can only be done in prayer, relying on God and not the force of our logic or eloquence.

I'm still just beginning this journey of advocacy, but after many conversations, it's clear the goal can't be success, but love. It's slow work, and we need one another. There are many approaches; and when they are done with love, they are all good.

Calhoun Mansion took five years to build, and twenty-five years to restore. A fresco restoration expert told me that sometimes his goal at work is to restore one square inch a day, or even a week.

So be encouraged! Revelation often can be a slow process. May we speak, may we listen, may we live lives that make God's love manifest—for children, their mothers, and all mankind.