

Article published April 11, 2008

A message matured

It's a far cry from billboards or posters showing bloody aborted fetuses discarded in a trash can. The electronic exhibit by a local pro-life group at Westfield Franklin Park is a positive change in approach from the in-your-face tactics used previously by many anti-abortion activists.

A small kiosk screens multidimensional ultrasound images of a 7-week-old embryo advancing in development to the baby's birth. At the "Truth Booth," passers-by can pause to watch the images of a developing fetus and pick up a small booklet chronicling the 40 weeks of pregnancy. Or not. And that's the difference from the starkly confrontational methods pro-life advocates used to press their position on the public. This display is unmanned and unassuming precisely because its backers didn't want people to experience any pressure or feel threatened.

The booth, sponsored by Foundation for Life, a nonprofit organization in Toledo, is meant to be educational as well as subtly provocative. The aim is to show the beauty of an unborn baby in the womb, explained the group's development director Paige Scarlett.

"We hope it will attract people and cause them to think," she said. More than that, no pro-life or pro-choice advocate can ask. It will cost the Foundation for Life between \$25,000 and \$30,000 to rent the kiosk from the mall for a year, which members say will be paid for by donations.

The group worked with Lifeworks, a nonprofit group from Cleveland to bring the Truth Booth to Toledo. Molly Smith of Lifeworks said similar kiosks in Cleveland-area malls have generated favorable feedback and given some mothers who've never had an ultrasound the chance to see what one looks like.

The whole idea of the project, said Ms. Smith, is to eliminate the political controversy that too often surrounds pro-life and pro-choice issues and present information without "anybody there talking or pushing an agenda."

While this newspaper has long championed the pro-choice cause, the kiosk is an indication that the pro-life message has matured. If that concept catches on, who knows how much further the decades-long national debate on abortion might progress beyond entrenched contentiousness.