

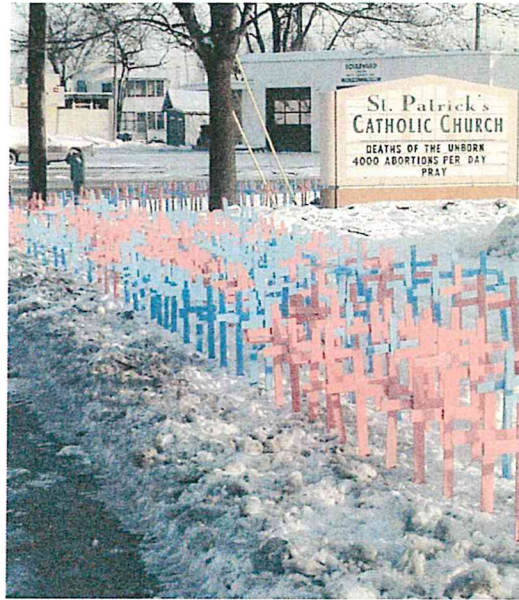


The History of Our Organization

Published February 2016

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Pink and blue crosses installed along US-31 commemorated the more than 4,000 babies lost each day to abortion in the U.S.



TCRTL members walking through the snow
2014 Memorial for the Unborn

In the Beginning...

In November, 1972, a Referendum to legalize abortion in the state of Michigan was put to a vote. The Referendum was defeated decisively by Michigan voters by a 2-1 margin. At this time, abortion was legal in only 7 states, and was subject to certain restrictions.

Just two and a half months later, on January 22, 1973, the U.S. Supreme Court issued two decisions: Roe V. Wade and Doe v. Bolton. These rulings legalized abortion for any reason, throughout all nine months of pregnancy, in all 50 states.

After the Supreme Court ruling in 1973, the floodgates opened for legalized abortion. As of January 2016, over 58 million abortions have been performed in the United States.

Since 1973, Americans of all faiths have answered the call to serve the pro-life movement, founding a variety of national, state, and local organizations to protect and defend life from conception to natural death. Prayer and the promises in God's word sustain all who work in this great cause.

Some organizations focus on education and political action, while others minister directly to abortion-vulnerable women, or to those who have been wounded by abortion.

In Michigan, the group that opposed the 1972 referendum was initially organized as 'Voice of the Unborn' and eventually became Right to Life of Michigan (RLM). Local groups within the state began to organize as affiliates of RLM. The Tri-Cities Right to Life affiliate (TCRTL) was formed in Grand Haven in March 1973.



Activities of Tri-Cities Right to Life

In the PAST, the affiliate:

- Held ice cream socials in downtown Grand Haven
- Set up a Right to Life booth at the Ottawa County Fair
- Held bake sales and garage sales
- Placed a full page ad in the Grand Haven Tribune on the anniversary of Roe v. Wade, listing names of residents signing in support the Life Issue
- Distributed Gerber's baby spoons to all babies born in local hospitals
- Developed hotlines for crisis pregnancies
- Distributed baby items for mothers in need (this ministry was passed on to The Salvation Army and eventually to Love INC)
- Served cookies and donuts at St. Patrick's Church Friday Bingo Night
- Made preparations for the Mother's Day Sale held at St. Patrick's Church—crafted/sold merchandise for sale to kids to be given as Mother's Day gifts
- Purchased two pro-life VHS tapes for broadcast on Grand Haven's local TV channel
- Purchased a life-size fetal model for displays at public events
- Sponsored a local oratory contest. Local winners present their speech at the RLM state competition (which some TCRTL local winners have won!)
- Participated in the January March for Life organized by the Muskegon Right to Life affiliate
- Formed a Ways & Means Committee which held craft fairs
- Created a "Cemetery of Innocence" cross campaign along US 31
- Held the Most Beautiful Baby Contest: Parents were asked to submit picture of their babies to TCRTL. The photos were then voted on by residents of Christian Haven Home. Prizes donated by Aberdeen's Children's store were awarded to the top three during a small reception at Christian Haven Home
- Purchased a paving brick at St. Lazare Retreat House in Spring Lake with a pro-life message

At PRESENT the affiliate:

- Hosts the annual 'Focus on Life' dinner, presently at Spring Lake Country Club. The event was first held in 1995
- Holds annual 'Memorial for the Unborn' each January with a walk and prayer service to commemorate the anniversary of Roe v. Wade (since 2011)
- Designs and implements a January billboard campaign with community-wide sponsorships. This began in 2010, and replaced the former newspaper signature ad. In 2015, with the generous support of billboard sponsors, TCRTL purchased three January billboards and two Mother's Day billboards
- Offers scholarships for students to attend the March for Life in Washington D.C.
- Provides materials and offers educational presentations to local churches and youth groups on current Right to Life issues and events including bulletin inserts for Mother's Day and Father's Day
- Hosts annual breakfast for local pastors to inform them about current pro-life issues and potential church/affiliate partnership opportunities
- Organizes and accompanies a local student group to RLM's annual Legislative Day in Lansing
- Publishes a quarterly newsletter, *Lakeshore Life News*, sent to over 500 members
- Publicizes and supports the work of Positive Options/ Lakeshore Pregnancy Center, the area's pregnancy resource center
- Informs citizens and lobbies legislators to support pro-life legislative initiatives at the state and national level. In 2013, area citizens signed and circulated petitions with the help of TCRTL to prevent taxpayer funding of abortion in Michigan through the Obamacare health exchanges. More than 315,000 signatures were collected statewide to support the citizen-initiated law. On December 11, the law was passed by large majorities in both the Michigan House and Senate.
- Educates local voters about candidates endorsed by the RLM Political Action Committee and works toward their election

- Cooperates with and supports the efforts of RLM to accomplish its statewide goals
- Solicits local businesses to advertise in RLM's annual Conference Book.
- Maintains a strong presence on the internet and social media:
 - website: www.lakeshoreprolife.org
 - facebook: [facebook.com/LakeshoreProLife](https://www.facebook.com/LakeshoreProLife)
 - email: info@lakeshoreprolife.org

TCRTL Officers/Board Members

1973-1983	Betsy Ripple - President Charter Members: Grace Bauuw Joan DeGarmo Sharon Leach Claire Pinsonneault Vickie Tober Dee VanOordt
1984 -1989	Adele Zelenka - President Rita Schillo - Treasurer
1990-1991	Dennis Flahive - President Ev Fennema - Secretary Rita Schillo - Treasurer
1991-2002	Ev Fennema - President and Secretary Dennis Flahive - Treasurer
2002-2004	Sandy Rezny - President David Carlson - Treasurer
2005-2006	David Carlson - President Ev Fennema - Vice-President Nellie Kuzma - Treasurer/Secretary
2007-2009	Ev Fennema - President Nellie Kuzma - Treasurer/Secretary

2009-present Lisa Peters - President
Ev Fennema/Laura Alexandria - Vice President
Peggy Boismier - Secretary
Nellie Kuzma/Cheri Ter Haar - Treasurer

Reflections from TCRTL Presidents

Betsy Ripple | President 1973 - 1983

Betsy became involved in the pro-life movement as a result of her interest in the 1972 Referendum to legalize abortion.

A number of concerned citizens started meeting at local churches and then formed into one group in March 1973, officially founding the Tri-Cities Right to Life affiliate. The first meetings were held at St. Patrick's Parish in Grand Haven. Two of the early Board members, Sharon Leach and Dee VanOordt, were both adoptive mothers.

Connections between TCRTL and leaders at the state level were strong. Board members attended monthly RLM meetings in order to stay informed about the issues statewide and around the nation. Jane Muldoon was on the RLM Board from the beginning.

Early affiliates had to learn about politics. Local churches were not seen as political elements; priests and pastors and their ministries could influence church members but were reluctant to speak about abortion at the pulpit.

Some Favorite Memories:

- Betsy recalls a guest speaker at the annual RLM convention who was from Great Britain and spoke on the subject of Hospice. Betsy received an autographed copy of her book on dying with dignity.
- Betsy also remembers a story of a retired St. Mary's teacher who spoke about abortion to the girls in the Home Economic Classes at Spring Lake High School. She hung pictures on the wall showing a baby's growth during pregnancy. She was encouraged by how receptive the students were to the information.

Adele Zelenka | President 1984 - 1989

Adele first attended TCRTL when the vote came on the ballot in Michigan to allow abortion on-demand and there was much work to be done. The committee covered the Tri-Cities geographic area, going house to house, educating residents about prenatal development, and trying to convince them that these were children in the womb that they wanted to kill.

She recalls the excitement when the bill in Michigan was defeated and the disappointment that came when the Supreme Court ruled differently just a few months later.

Some Favorite Memories:

- Adele recalls having surgery in 1986, after having been president for almost 3 years, and remembers how board members blessed her family with delicious dinners.
- "I always remember Grace Baauw, Betsy Ripple, Vicki Tober, Ev Fennema, Chris LeFebrve and Sharon Leach to be the most ever-lasting members of TCRTL. There were many more and I'm unable to remember their names right now. I'm very sure that God will never forget them for their love of children in the womb and for their obedience to His commandment not to kill."

Recent Pro-Life Activities

Adele volunteered at Lakeshore Pregnancy Center from 2006-2013 and felt privileged to provide mothers and children with material provisions and parental education. She continues to meet with pregnancy center staff for prayer.

Dennis Flahive | President 1990-1991

Dennis was president of TCRTL when monthly meetings were held at the First Christian Reformed Church of Grand Haven on Waverly & Ferry St. During his tenure, the committee organized the first affiliate pro-life oratory contest, with the winner moving on to compete at the state contest. Five students participated that year. Polly Boyink took first place; Audra Richert took 2nd; and Diana Plant took 3rd. Polly took 3rd place in the state competition.

Much work was put into the election of John Engler as the 46th governor of Michigan. Pro-abortion opponents boasted Engler

would lose by 41,000 votes from a Detroit district. In an ironic twist, Engler won by that many votes from that exact district.

A Favorite Memory:

- Denny and Rita Braun responded frequently to Letters to the Editor in the Grand Haven Tribune. Denny recalls that on one occasion he attended an “open” pro-choice meeting in Grand Haven. Not knowing who he was, the group was discussing a letter of his that was in the previous day’s paper. He listened politely, silently entertained.

Evelyn Fennema | President 1991- 2002

While living in Moline, MI, Ev heard a group from Kalamazoo discuss right to life issues and felt compelled to find out more. Shortly thereafter, Ev and Rusty Dutkiewicz started a Right to Life affiliate in Allegan, Michigan in the late 1970’s. Ev joined TCRTL in 1984 when she and her husband Dave moved to Grand Haven.

A Personal Comment:

Ev says “As a Protestant, I would like to say ‘Thank You’ to the Catholic Church for their leadership these past 42 years. The Right to Life movement would have folded if it had not been for the persistence and drive of the Catholic Church.”

Recent Pro-Life Activities:

Ev and her husband moved to Grand Rapids in 2013 and she is now a volunteer with the Grand Rapids RLM affiliate.

Sandy Rezny | President 2002-2004

Sandy has always held strong pro-life beliefs and even when not serving as a board member, kept informed of the local affiliate’s activities.

During Sandy’s presidency, as part of an education campaign, TCRTL started a “Cemetery of Innocence” cross campaign along US 31 in front of St. Patrick Catholic Church. Over 4,000 pink and blue crosses were “planted” in the ground to represent the number of abortions performed each day in the United States. They also held a community candlelight service on the evening of the anniversary of Roe v. Wade each year.

David Carlson | 2005-2006

Dave became interested in the pro-life movement when his granddaughter Becca was born with Down Syndrome. Becca is now grown, has graduated high school, plays piano, and has a business of her own. Dave feels that abortion is the defining issue of our time just as slavery was in the 1800's.

During his tenure as TCRTL president, Dave met with pastors in the community to share a brochure published by RLM about how to speak with parishioners and counsel on abortion.

Recent Pro-Life Activities:

Dave went to the abortion clinic in Muskegon weekly, from 10:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. for almost 5 years, carrying a sign that read "The Miracle of Life is God's Choice". He prayed that he could help to save a life by showing, through his presence, that there is a different choice and that he cared. In 2012, following the first local 40 Days for Life campaign, the abortion clinic in Muskegon closed, putting an end to Dave's faithful and prayerful vigil.

Ev Fennema | Acting President 2007-2009

See above, 1991 to 2002

Lisa Peters | President 2009-present

Lisa became involved in the pro-life movement in 1995 when she trained as a counselor at Pregnancy Aid, a crisis pregnancy center in Detroit. She later became president of that organization and was active there until moving permanently to Grand Haven in 2008.

Lisa first attended a TCRTL meeting in the fall of 2008 and became president in 2009. She has served on the Board of Right to Life of Michigan since 2000, and was the administrative coordinator for the Grand Rapids area 40 Days for Life campaign for several years.



Reflections from Charter/Long-time Members

Grace Baauw | Charter Board Member

Grace was involved with Right to Life from the first moment she learned what abortion was. She recalls, "I first heard about abortion at an altar society meeting at St. Patrick's. Mary Heilig was presenting the information and a film that evening. Mary Lothschutz and Betsy Ripple were among those present. I could not even imagine that something that horrific needed to be put to a public vote. As shy as I was/am, I went out there with many others going door-to-door letting people know what Proposal B was all about."

While the tradition of hosting an annual dinner had not yet begun, there were occasional guest speakers to encourage committee members in the battle, including Judy Brown and Jane Muldoon (former long-time president of RLM).

Vickie Tober | Charter Board Member

Vickie attended her first meeting in 1973 after the Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision at the Knights of Columbus Hall and has been with the affiliate ever since. She says of her time as a board member: "I have not held office, {choosing instead to be} a behind-the-scenes type of member lending support where I can."

Some Favorite Memories:

- One early fundraising project involved creating craft items to be sold to children who could give them as gifts for Mothers Day. This bazaar was held for several years.
- One story of particular significance to Vickie was during the years of the "Cemetery of Innocence" cross campaign. She recalls families and teens gathering on snowy January days to place the crosses together. Sometimes they worked in blizzards, and she remembers that it was no small feat to get 4,000 crosses into the frozen ground. "I believe the first year they were displayed," Vickie recalls, "a couple from Holland was driving by, a doctor and his wife, and read about the crosses on {the St. Patrick} marquee. The couple was so impressed that they began taking classes to become Catholic and are members of our parish today."

Recent Pro-Life Activities:

Vickie continues to serve as a member of TCRTL, and has been instrumental in organizing recent Youth Oratory Contests. She is especially moved by the impact of the affiliate's work with youth. "Seeing teen abortion rates drop has been wonderful," she says, "and {I appreciate} the teens who get involved by going to the March for Life and the Legislative Day in Lansing. These kids are the future of this movement!"

Nellie Kuzma | Long-time Board Member & Treasurer

Nellie has been with TCRTL for over 20 years and served on the first Right to Life Committee with Jane Muldoon in 1973. Nellie served as treasurer for the affiliate for many years.

Recent Pro-Life Activities:

Nellie continues to support TCRTL by representing the affiliate to her congregation at First Reformed Church of Grand Haven, and by organizing the annual gathering at First Reformed Church where participants gather following the Memorial for the Unborn prayer service.

Chris LeFebvre | Long-time Board Member

Chris was a member of TCRTL for several years, beginning in the 1980's, until she and her family relocated to Tennessee, where she remains involved in this cause.

Favorite Memory:

In 1987, RLM undertook to end taxpayer funding of abortion through a referendum on the November ballot. Legislation to do this had been passed multiple times by the legislature only to be vetoed by Michigan governors. To get the referendum on the ballot required a petition drive, which if successful, would be followed by a voter education campaign.

"In Ottawa County, we went door to door collecting those signatures as well as setting up tables in churches and at events. Once the referendum was on the ballot, we began an information campaign that consisted of distributing yard signs and hang bags throughout 25 precincts in Ottawa County. That campaign was run off my dining room table. Dozens of volunteers came and went from our house for weeks leading up to the election.

The state organization ran as many television ads as they could afford, but in the last few weeks before the election pro-abortion groups established a political action committee called, "Michigan Citizens for Life" and poured enormous amounts of money into an ad campaign diabolically designed to confuse voters-even some of our own volunteers! It was a very discouraging time to keep going against such odds, but we persevered.

We never had more than a dozen regular volunteers, increased by the occasional youth group devoting a Saturday to the effort. Still there were enough hardy souls to get it all done, right down to manning the phone banks in the last days and poll sitting at every precinct on the bitterly cold Election Day. No matter what happened we could rest assured that we had done everything we could to try and win!

And we did win-despite being outspent several times over, despite having few volunteers, despite discouragement and confusion caused by pro-abortion forces and the biased media, we won in every precinct-even in the ones we were *certain* we would lose.

[In the following year], abortions dropped by an incredible 46%! We learned that God was faithful and we just had to persevere, no matter what the obstacles."



TCRTL Annual 'Focus on Life' Dinner

The annual TCRTL 'Focus on Life' dinner promotes the ideals of Right to Life and serves to challenge and encourage the pro-life community in the Tri-Cities area. Listed below are the courageous speakers who have stepped forward to tell their story.

1995 Brian Cusack	2006 Ed Rivet
1996 Ed Rivet	2007 Dr. Mark Blocher
1997 Richard Thompson	2008 Barb Listing
1998 Janet Folger	2009 Bryan Kemper
1999 Dr. Joel Nederhood	2010 Eileen Smith
2000 Rebecca Kiessling	2011 Mary Verwys
2001 Dr. Jean Garton	2012 Marlene Elwell
2002 Joseph Perkins	2013 Rebecca Kiessling
2003 Teresa Tomeo	2014 Brad & Jesi Smith
2004 Georgette Forney	2015 Dr. Danielle Koestner
2005 Pastor Paul Clark	

Thank You!

Tri-Cities Right to Life is one of the more than 85 affiliates of Right to Life of Michigan. We honor the members profiled above, along with many others. We thank the speakers who inspired us with their stories. We celebrate you...the faithful who pray, who give financially, who sign your name to the cause, and who attend our events. Your commitment to protect the most vulnerable in society is the foundation upon which the Right to Life movement is built, and the assurance that with God's help, it will succeed in the Tri-Cities, in Michigan, and beyond.



Dr. Danielle Koestner shares her experience as a pregnant teen and the blessing of releasing her child for adoption; 2015 Focus on Life event



January Billboard campaigns promoting the sanctity of all human life raise awareness in the Tri-Cities area



Students from TCRTL with
Senate Majority Leader Arlan Meekhof
at RLM's 2014 Legislative Day in Lansing



Candle procession during the annual Memorial for the Unborn in
memory of unborn children lost to abortion from the Tri-Cities area