

A woman's decision

by [John Buchanan](#) in the [October 28, 2015](#) issue



Planned Parenthood in Highland Park, St. Paul, Minnesota. [Some rights reserved](#) by [Fibonacci Blue](#).

My wife, Sue, and I have supported Planned Parenthood for years. Its work is critically important. Planned Parenthood provides family planning consultation and birth control, and 500,000 breast exams and 400,000 pelvic exams per year. More than 5 million women, men, and adolescents turn to Planned Parenthood for help every year. For many, it's the only affordable source of sexual and reproductive health services.

Much of Planned Parenthood's work stems from its original purpose: preventing unwanted pregnancies. Something like 80 percent of clients receive birth control services, and approximately 516,000 unwanted pregnancies are prevented annually, which means that Planned Parenthood prevents a lot of abortions. Three percent of Planned Parenthood's work involves providing abortions.

Raw statistics became lived reality for me when my spouse served as a volunteer “accompanier.” Sue’s job was to be with a client before, during, and after the abortion procedure, as a caring presence. Each one came with a unique, urgent set of circumstances.

One client was an East Asian graduate student. If continued to term, her pregnancy would have meant the termination of her academic program, a return to her country in shame, and the end of her dream of a career in biochemistry.

Each woman, said Sue, made the decision to terminate her pregnancy only after a long and serious struggle. “No one I met did this casually.” Many women expressed feelings of guilt, self-loathing, and the sense that God could never love them again. Sue assured them that God is gracious and that God continued to love them.

I believe that the decision of whether or not to have an abortion is one that the woman, in conversation with her spouse, partner, physician, and spiritual adviser, should be free to make herself. I base that belief on the responsibility given to human beings by God in the story of creation, and don’t think it’s a matter for elected officials or judges to decide.

Abortion is a litmus test for a portion of the electorate and a hot-button issue politically. Planned Parenthood and its financial future are under attack. Positions are drawn so sharply that civil conversation is virtually impossible, and disintegrates into name calling, personal accusation, and insult. I lament that the heat generated by abortion opponents has in the past expressed itself in violence. Sadly, public discourse about the issue has not improved much.

One thing is sure: the good and needed work that this organization does must continue. Planned Parenthood and the critical services it provides should not fall victim to ideological warfare in Congress.