

## Why I support Planned Parenthood

by [Carol Howard Merritt](#)

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This week, there were many Evangelicals protesting Planned Parenthood. Reading about the gatherings made me remember why I support the organization.

It was over twenty years ago when my husband and I graduated from Bible school and moved to Brian's hometown, Lincoln, Nebraska, where the cost of living would be cheaper. It had other appealing qualities too. We were close to his family. We drove with the windows down because our little Hyundai didn't have any air conditioning. We traveled along abandoned roads, racing beside trains and belting out [Big Country](#) as loud as we could. Brian's childhood best friends became my best friends.

We both had degrees in International Ministries and searched everywhere for jobs. I realize we didn't have the most marketable educations, but we applied to churches, denominational staffs, and mission organizations. Brian got one nibble, from a congregation that needed a youth pastor. But then we found out that they weren't offering an actual salary. They figured that God would provide, but they had no intention of helping God out in that account. I desperately wanted to go back to Kenya, where I had done some mission work, but we didn't have money for flights or any way to live once we got there.

So, Brian went to work at Sam's Club and I worked at a car dealership. He stocked shelves and I answered phones. We lived in a one-room apartment that resembled a Motel 6, with cold concrete and yellowed buzzing lights. Rust stains dripped from the steel edges of the stairs. We had a couch and chairs that I rummaged from someone else's trash. We slept on a mattress situated on the bedroom floor. We brought Brian's bike into the small apartment, because if we left it out, someone would cut through the chain and it would be gone within hours. We learned that the hard way. Our next-door neighbor hated me, because she would leave her two-year-old boy naked and alone on the porch. He howled while she visited her boyfriend. I would clothe him with one of Brian's shirts and cry with him, while I called the police. She

would amble back, stoned and asking why I was making such a big fuss.

We had done everything right. We worked hard and went to college, but we were still way below the poverty line. Each month, I'd hold my breath and pray for my period. If I was late, I'd be utterly panicked. We couldn't afford a child. We could barely feed ourselves, so we certainly couldn't imagine bringing another human into our world. We didn't have any health insurance, and I needed to be on birth control. So, after one of my panicked near misses, I asked my co-workers what we should do and they told me that they all went to Planned Parenthood for the pill.

I was a serious sign-carrying pro-lifer who thought that the devil lived at PP. But I didn't have any other choice. I went. I got a gynecological exam and birth control pills. And I kept going there.

Throughout this time, the echoes of the Religious Right would reverberate. James Dobson would say that women shouldn't work. Pat Robertson fought against health care. Jerry Falwell decried feminism. They fought against wage increases. All of a sudden, these political positions that I held were not high-minded ideals and thought experiments about the way things ought to be. They were movements that were making it impossible for me to live.

I was one of them. But then I realized that **while the Religious Right was spending millions of dollars trying to gain more political clout in order to make it impossible for me to survive, Planned Parenthood was giving me the care that I needed.**

All of this has come back to me, because I try to fill my Twitter timeline with different voices. I don't want to preach to the choir all the time, and I still have many friends and family members who are Evangelicals.

Sometimes I can't handle the dissonance. I have to mute certain people, or walk away altogether. Lately, it's been particularly gut wrenching as people protest Planned Parenthood. I have watched as young evangelical white men have berated women for saying that they need the medical care. (God bless Rachel Held Evans for engaging this mess.) People act as if we can find everything that we need a crisis pregnancy center. They have *no clue* what it's like to be a poor woman who can't get pregnant. If I'm at a CPC, then it's too late.

And the worst part about it? They're not even willing to listen.

I left the Religious Right. I left Evangelicalism. I joined a progressive church that loves God and supports all women. I'm part of a religious movement who not only listens to women, but is made up of women. So now, when I watch all of this unravel, I thank God that I found a home where *all* women are appreciated, not just the ones who are well off enough to be mothers.