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Walk with Christ for Life hits a personal note with young family

Karla Wiegrefe

As we took our first steps for this year's Walk with Christ for Life, my 7-year-old daughter, Maria, was pushing her little brother in the stroller and smiling, so glad this day had finally arrived. She'd been counting down the days for weeks. Oct. 2 held two special events for her - the Walk and her long anticipated seventh birthday.

The Walk has been a big part of our life since we moved to Fargo 10 years ago, but even more so after Maria's birth. The last time the Walk fell on her birthday, she was turning 1-year-old and we decided that the Walk would be a beautiful way to honor our daughter's birth while at the same time praying for mothers and babies in crisis situations, for healing for post-abortive women and for an end to abortion.

"Ave, Ave, Ave Maria." I hear her sweet little girl's voice, along with the voices of other walkers, lifted up in song between each decade of the rosary. I remember the many years when Maria thought this was being sung to her, a special birthday song. As a toddler, she would grin anytime she heard it. As a preschooler, she would lean in and proclaim, "That's me, Mommy!" Now, she knows that Ave Maria means Hail Mary and loves being named after our beautiful mother in heaven.

In much the same way, her understanding of the Walk is growing ever so slowly as she has transitioned from stroller to walking, from babbling toddler to active prayer participant. Somewhere along the way, she became aware this day was about babies. Only in the last few years has she sensed sad undertones she didn't completely understand, finally making the connection this year that the building in the middle of the Walk where we stop for intercessory prayer and where holy water is sprinkled, is the place where abortions happen, a concept that is still very difficult for her to understand.

Today, she told me that she went on the Walk "to pray for babies who don't get to have birthdays because they die in their mom's tummies from abortion." That was ringing through my head as we walked. How poignant that my daughter celebrates her birthday on a day when we pray for babies who don't get to have a birthday. My eyes kept filling up with tears as I thought about all those babies whose lives have been cut short in this most deliberate way . . . and the women whose lives are forever changed as a result.

Back in my passionate teen years, I was part of many abortion debates. As enlightened kids, we knew which of our friends were conceived outside of marriage, when birth control failed, or long after the parents had declared themselves "done." These peers were real people that put the faces on unplanned pregnancies to me.

Roe v. Wade happened 18 months after I was born. And what I saw in my school as we descended through the grades was a growing despair, a growing helplessness. My younger sister's classmate often made comments that it wasn't any use waiting for Mr. Right because he'd probably been aborted anyway. This was a deep wound, not just for the people who actively participated in abortions, but for an entire generation.

My own best friend, born to a 16-year-old mother just 22 months prior to Roe v Wade, was told that had it been legal, she would have been aborted. I can't imagine life without her, but reality is that she is here only due to legal technicality. Her mom is now an active grandma, thoroughly enjoying the grandchildren my friend has given her, grandchildren who also would not be here had abortion been readily available in 1970.

Maria is still too young to understand the turmoil an unexpected pregnancy can cause. She doesn't see the pressure these moms receive from boyfriends, parents, peers, spouses, even society itself. She doesn't know that people think if the pregnancy goes away, then all the problems will be solved, too.

Maria just sees babies growing in their mothers' wombs, like the baby currently growing in my womb, the new sibling she eagerly awaits. She sees sweet little rosebud mouths and soft baby skin. She sees life as possibility, as hope for the future, as love.

But someday, she will have friends who face these seemingly impossible situations. She will hear the stories of friends who admit the pain their abortions have caused them. She will understand there is so much more to pray for. For now, she observes: "It hurts my feet with all the walking but I always offer that up for all the babies."

Karla Wiegrefe resides in Fargo with her husband, Jeff, and their nine children, including a baby due Dec. 28.