A Generation Making a World of Difference

A BRIEF HISTORY OF HEARTBEAT INTERNATIONAL
“Where Hitler compelled people to do the killing, today millions of people choose to abort their babies of their free will...If we are not pro-life, we are against our own survival.”

- Lore Maier
Co-Founder, Heartbeat International
It feels like a miracle. It is not an actual miracle—because Heartbeat International is simply a community of God’s people doing faithfully what God calls His people to do every day: by the power of neighborly love, compassionately rescuing those left to die (following the example of the Good Samaritan). But to a pregnant woman, so immobilized by fear and difficult personal circumstances that she feels she has no choice but abortion, Heartbeat’s impact feels like the sea parting and God Himself showing her the very pathway of life!

After nearly 45 years, we can see that what started out as simply neighbors helping neighbors has become a true movement of God in our time—a generation making a world of difference. How did it start?

THE FIRST RESPONDERS

The story begins years before the Supreme Court decided, in 1973, in Roe v. Wade, that a “right to privacy” includes abortion and that laws prohibiting abortions were unconstitutional.

In 1875, the laws in every state banned abortion. At the turn of the 20th century, new efforts to overturn state bans arose. The most powerful leader of this movement was the American Birth Control League (now Planned Parenthood), founded by Margaret Sanger in 1917. They saw birth control, including abortion, as a necessary tool of their eugenics philosophy: that some races were better than others and thus abortion should be available to all and actually encouraged among certain races.


Pro-life physicians were among the first responders to come to the aid of women with untimely pregnancies. They understood that women would feel pressured to have a “safe, legal abortion.” They would succumb or resort to abortion far more often than choose it. These visionaries determined to create a safety net of support and to reach these vulnerable women with “alternatives-to-abortion” services.

Since, at this time, pregnancy tests were sent to medical labs for results, doctors and nurses were in a position to help. They set up “emergency pregnancy services,” sometimes within their offices. Heartbeat of Toledo (Ohio) was one of the first. It operated out of a small office in conjunction with the medical practice of Dr. John Hillabrand. One of his nurses, Esther Applegate, and one of their friends, Mrs. Lore Maier, operated this “center,” beginning in 1971.

Another approach to rescuing women from abortion was to talk to callers by phone. Also in 1971, Sister Paula Vandegaer, a recently graduated social worker, organized one of these early telephone hotlines for pregnancy counseling in Los Angeles.

Talking to women about abortion and being with them when they confirmed their pregnancy were two practical ways to reach and rescue those vulnerable to abortion. Others, men and women, professionals and non-professionals, were reaching out and helping pregnant women from their homes and offices, and even at coffee shops and other meeting places. They were also eager to learn how to do it effectively.
Dr. John Hillabrand, Lore Maier, and other pioneers met in Chicago, in November 1971, to formally turn their passion for life and their compassion for women into the first USA-based pregnancy help center association. They named it Alternatives to Abortion Incorporated (AAI). Today you know it as Heartbeat International.

Dr. Hillabrand and Mrs. Maier, both now deceased, were part of the so-called “Greatest Generation.” They came of age during World War II. Some of their early writings and speeches show how closely they saw this new, life-saving work connected to the war and the Holocaust.

In a 1979 newspaper interview, Dr. Hillabrand asked: “Because you can’t see the child, should you kill it? Are they like bomb victims about which the inventor of the atom bomb said, ‘We don’t mind dropping bombs if we can’t see faces?’”

German-born Mrs. Maier and her sister were the only members of her family of six to survive Nazi Germany. She was a court recorder during the Nuremberg trials and knew how the killing had escalated, with the “imperfect” being the first victims. With perfect moral clarity, she saw the dehumanizing process unfold again with the legalization of abortion. In 1979, Mrs. Maier commented: “Where Hitler compelled people to do the killing, today millions of people choose to abort their babies of their free will…If we let this go on, what is now a matter of choice could very easily become mandatory…If we are not pro-life, we are against our own survival.”

Dr. Hillabrand became AAI’s first board President. Lore Maier answered the call to rescue the innocent by agreeing to serve as Heartbeat’s first Executive Director. Sister Paula Vandegaer, a member of the religious order of the “Sisters of the Social Service,” was the secretary of the founding Board of Heartbeat. Applying some of the principles of counseling and social work, she also devoted herself to training and equipping people to be winsome, discerning, and effective counselors. As almost everyone did for our first 20 years, they all served as volunteers.
THE FOUNDATIONS

Together, these three brought leadership, standards, objectives, and camaraderie to the fledgling pregnancy help movement. Their early decisions continue to define us today.

Dr. Hillabrand’s obstetrics and gynecology office, with his emphasis on the true reproductive health and safety of women, laid a foundation for the professionally run, ultrasound-equipped pregnancy help clinics so common today.

Lore Maier was a volunteer “counselor.” She embodied and exemplified the one-on-one support and help that one individual can provide another through personal relationship. While our movement has matured, and paid staff members are now common, Heartbeat affiliated pregnancy help organizations currently engage over 25,000 volunteers in ministry, and hundreds of thousands more as voluntary financial partners.

Mrs. Maier’s European roots and Dr. Hillabrand’s international professional contacts meant that their vision for “emergency pregnancy services” extended to other countries. Within a year of the founding of AAI, Lore was corresponding with people in Austria, Italy, Germany, India, Australia, and elsewhere, encouraging their interest in the new alternatives to abortion movement.

Sister Paula taught the new volunteers, who simply had a heart to help, how to help—how to approach a woman in crisis. She laid the foundation of compassionate and competent client care, based on relationship, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. These values permeated the movement and are evident even to this day in Heartbeat’s best-selling, foundational training manual, *The LOVE Approach.*

These foundations proved historic in other ways. According to Sister Paula, “crisis intervention” was brand new in the counseling profession at the time our early pregnancy help centers were forming. She wrote, “It was our movement that really developed this new area of counseling.” Sister Paula wrote the first counseling materials ever used specifically for helping women with unexpected pregnancies. Without fully realizing it at the time, she pioneered a new, specialized field for counseling and social work focusing on women with “crisis pregnancies.”

Hotlines are now a natural part of crisis intervention. But they were a new concept in the early 1970’s (the only hotlines were for suicide prevention). Today there are hotlines for everything—even how to cook your Thanksgiving turkey! But our grassroots movement birthed the idea of providing immediate and personal pregnancy related crisis intervention by phone.

These foundational practices, creative solutions, and teachings were disseminated through the first professional periodical for this new field—incidentally and prophetically called *Heartbeat.* Of historical note, in this magazine, the editor Sister Paula published the first research on the psychological effects of abortion on women. Her article included how to recognize what we now call “post abortion syndrome” and how we can help.
6 FOUNDING GOALS REALIZED

1. Training resources
2. A regular newsletter
3. Consultation and training on site
4. An annual conference to share ideas and programs
5. A directory of all existing pregnancy help services
6. A toll free number to help connect women in need with a pregnancy center.
During our first 20 years, the vision of the first generation of “neighbors helping neighbors” spread from town to town, and even country to country, carried on the winds of stories of babies saved and lives of women and families transformed. These stories inspired many more calls to Heartbeat.

“Can you tell us how to start a pregnancy center?”
“Yes, we created a manual to guide your start-up team through the process.”

“If a young woman is afraid and says, ‘I think I need an abortion,’ what do we say?”
“You will want to understand why and address these problems with life-affirming solutions. You will want to ask her what she understands abortion to be. We can train you how to do that.”

Others asked: “How do we raise the money we need to operate?”

“How do we register as a nonprofit ministry?”

“We need a maternity home in our area. Who can we talk to?”

“What are others doing to help prepare mothers for parenting or adoption?”

The calls poured in.

Heartbeat responded with manuals, consultations, and, of course, an annual training conference so that more experienced leaders could teach and mentor new directors and volunteers. People with a passion for life saw that by partnering with Heartbeat they could help build a network of pregnancy help centers, maternity homes, and adoption agencies. Heartbeat served as the fan that spread the flames.
n 1992, twenty-one years after our founding, three events led Heartbeat, still known as AAI, to reorganize for greater impact. Internally, some of our founding leaders, who had served for two decades as volunteers, stepped down. They believed that new initiatives needed new leadership. Externally, two other events prompted change. First, the Supreme Court handed down the “Casey Decision,” which reaffirmed Roe v. Wade, the judicial foundation for legalized abortion. Second, Americans elected a committed pro-abortion president, Bill Clinton.

Pro-life people were deeply discouraged by these political setbacks. At the same time, these events underscored the wisdom of the “alternatives to abortion” effort that we know today as the pregnancy help movement. Saving babies one woman at a time, by providing pregnancy help, can never be overturned by an election or a court. Those who were already providing alternatives to abortion sensed a new wave of energy coming their way. They were right.

The AAI Board met two days after the 1992 presidential election. Trusting in the Lord’s provision, they dedicated themselves to moving forward and to becoming a much larger and more effective network of pregnancy help ministries worldwide. They voted to reorganize and change our name to Heartbeat International. They moved away from the volunteer model to a more “professional” model of leadership. Margaret (Peggy) Hartshorn, Ph.D., who was Chairman of the Board at this time, assumed the presidency. She began, in 1993, as our first full-time, professional staff member.
Early on, AAI (and the pro-life movement in general) had made a strategic decision to avoid referring to abortion, or our work to end it, in “religious” terms. The founders believed AAI could be more effective and obtain more support if they described abortion as a “civil rights” issue and their work as “humanitarian.” This strategy seemed best because it was still presumed that Americans shared a Judeo-Christian value system. In addition, since the initial or “first wave” of pro-life activism was predominately led by Catholics, this approach would guard against being marginalized as merely a religious or a Catholic concern.

But this strategy changed in the 1990’s. The common ground of Judeo-Christian values in America was gone. Our programs, especially post-abortion programs where forgiveness is central, had an overt Christian basis. In addition, the pro-life movement was experiencing a “second wave” of new engagement. Evangelical Christians flooded into the pro-life movement in the 1980’s and surged into pregnancy help ministries. In spite of acknowledged differences, Catholics and Evangelicals eagerly agreed to work together within Heartbeat to effectively answer the Biblical call to “Rescue the weak and the needy” (Ps. 82:4). In so doing, they would summon all Americans of good conscience to recognize that the “unalienable right to life” begins in the womb. So, when we became Heartbeat International, we also became explicitly an interdenominational or ecumenical Christian association dedicated to Biblical orthodoxy, as reflected in the Apostle’s Creed or Nicene Creed.

As Heartbeat grew, we also matured in our understanding of what it means to help a woman and couple choose life. As a distinctively Christian movement, we unapologetically brought our own personal experiences of the transforming grace of God into our local centers. Today, it is common for staff, volunteers, and Board to pray together, think Biblically about what we do and how to do it, and help women and couples lay hold of the Gospel and get rooted in a local church. We hope that the “fragrance of Christ” spreads through us and to others as the “very aroma of life” (2 Cor 2:14-16).
GOOD FAITH GOALS...

In the beginning, our visionary founders committed, in good faith, to work on a few key goals. Hard work and God’s grace have resulted in many fruits. Their first goal was to publish a Directory of all of the movement’s service providers. In 1972, the first Directory was a mimeographed sheet with about 100 entries. Heartbeat has continued to keep track of pregnancy help ministries as they emerge all over the world. Our current Worldwide Directory (now updated on our website) contains over 6,000 entries in 100 countries.

The second early goal was to host an annual training conference. Today, Heartbeat International’s Annual Conference gathers 1,000 members of the pregnancy help community in locations throughout the United States. One of our highlights every year is to hear what God is doing all over the world by welcoming non-U.S. affiliates from upwards of 20 nations to this wonderful event.

The third goal was to create and disseminate training resources. Several small how-to booklets were produced in the early 1970’s. Currently, Heartbeat provides 30 in-print training resources, a distance-learning curriculum via the Internet (Heartbeat Academy), an intensive Pregnancy Help Institute, and our very own professional designation, known as a Life-Affirming Specialist.

The last of our founders’ original hopes was to have a national toll-free line to connect pregnant women with help in their area. In God’s time, the means and the technology were developed to bring this vision to fruition. Option Line, our 24/7/365 contact center, answered its first call in January of 2003. In July, 2014, Option Line answered its 2 millionth contact! Currently, Option Line handles approximately 240,000 calls, emails, instant messages, and chats per year, in English and Spanish, from coast to coast in the U.S. and Canada. Option Line pregnancy consultants answer immediate questions, reassure young women that they are not alone, and then connect them to a nearby pregnancy help ministry.
...AND FAITHFULNESS

When the founders retired from leadership in the early 1990’s, official affiliates registered about 250. Heartbeat International today is a community of tens of thousands of Christians serving in and supporting a network of about 2,000 affiliated pregnancy help centers, medical clinics, maternity homes, and adoption agencies, reaching approximately one million people in need each year.

The impact of pregnancy help centers on our nation, in our quiet campaign for women’s hearts and minds, was recognized in a TIME magazine cover story in 2007. The next year, 50 Heartbeat-affiliated pregnancy help centers were among the recipients of the President’s Volunteer Service Award in a formal ceremony in Washington, D.C. In 2009, the Family Research Council report *A Passion to Serve, A Vision for Life* featured many Heartbeat affiliates as it documented the positive impact of pregnancy centers on maternal and child health in the United States.

Our work and history have also been featured in sources as wide-ranging and far-reaching as the *San Jose Mercury News*, *WORLD Magazine*, National Public Radio and *The Washington Times*, the latter of which was recognized in a hand-written note from prestigious Kentucky Senator Rand Paul.

In 2007, Heartbeat International launched an urban pregnancy help center in Miami, the only pro-life center at the time in an area with 37 abortion clinics. In late 2015, the center, Heartbeat of Miami, opened its fourth ultrasound-equipped location in its second former abortion clinic. That same year, Heartbeat of Miami watched as a prominent inner-city Planned Parenthood closed its doors across the street from one of their locations.

Starting in 2009, Heartbeat International began a program called “Babies Go to Congress,” which introduces mothers and the babies they rescued from abortion because of pregnancy help to their congressmen and women in Washington, D.C. In 14 trips between 2009 and 2016, a total of 120 moms (plus their babies!) have visited over 250 congressional offices in one event Planned Parenthood could never dream of pulling off.
Beyond abortion-plagued American cities lies a world of people, families, and cultures gravely wounded by abortion.

Approximately 50 million abortions occur annually throughout our world. With a remarkable perception, the founders of Heartbeat realized, almost from the beginning, that we were facing a global evil requiring a global response. By 1975, we were already working with groups interested in starting centers in 22 other countries. So, that year, the founders added “international” to our corporate name. Alternatives to Abortion Incorporated (AAI) became Alternatives to Abortion International (AAI).

A generation later, affiliates in 50 countries, on every continent except Antarctica, make up Heartbeat International! Our materials have been translated, licensed, adopted, and adapted into a variety of indigenous-appropriate formats. Heartbeat partners make it possible for us to make special training trips into areas of great need, such as Eastern and Western Europe, Africa, Asia, Latin America, and even into some places where our presence, due to persecution of Christians, must remain confidential.

Heartbeat is a generation of Christians making a world of difference. Now, we summon the next generation to carry it forward. The first generation has given, prayed, wept, and worked to make abortion unwanted. It is our hope that the next generation will make abortion unthinkable. After 45 years, this seems like just the beginning!
10 THINGS YOU CAN SAY AND DO...

to make abortion unwanted today... and unthinkable for future generations.

1. Pray daily for an end to abortion, for hope and healing of those involved in abortion, and pray to be used to save and change lives through your words and actions.

2. If you communicate with a woman or man who faces an unexpected pregnancy, use Heartbeat’s LOVE Approach.
   - Listen and Learn about her feelings, thoughts, wants, values, and beliefs, her perceptions of her needs, pressures, strengths, and resources.
   - Open her Options of abortion, parenting, and adoption — lovingly, with accurate facts.
   - Introduce a new Vision and Value that she is made in His image and has been redeemed. She can be forgiven, healed, and can make positive choices.
   - Extend and Empower her to carry through, with concrete resources and support.

3. Memorize (800) 712-HELP (4357) and OptionLine.org – Heartbeat’s 24/7 hotline that connects those in crisis to life-saving help in their community.

4. Affirm every child as a welcomed child. Congratulate every pregnant mother (and father) you know or even casually encounter. Never imply that more children will be a burden – to the parents or the earth – or that two children “is just right.”

5. Make a point of telling all the young people in your life that there is nothing they could ever do to make you stop loving them, like God loves us despite our faults and sins. They never need to fear telling you anything.

6. Affirm birthmothers who choose adoption as good mothers and adoption as a life-giving choice for all involved.

7. Affirm hope and healing after abortion. Never say, “How could anyone ever have an abortion?” To a woman who is or might be pregnant, this says that you would never understand her desperate feelings.

8. Encourage sexual integrity among single people and within marriage. Inspire, don’t frighten, young people into reserving sexual intimacy for marriage.

9. Promote a pro-life, family-friendly environment in the workplace in your conversations and in your organization’s communications.

10. Give of your time, talent, and treasure within the pro-life movement. If you don’t know where to start, find your local pregnancy center at OptionLine.org, or begin with us, Heartbeat International! You are needed!
**HEARTBEAT INTERNATIONAL JOURNEY**

1968
First future Heartbeat International center founded in L.A.

Dr. John Hillabrand and Lore Maier founded “Alternatives to Abortion International.”

1971
First pregnancy help hotline is formed by Sister Paula Vandegaer.

1972
First Heartbeat Directory is published.

1973
*Roe v. Wade* U.S. Supreme Court Decision makes abortion on-demand legal in all 50 U.S. states.

1978
First *Heartbeat* magazine is published.

1981
President Ronald Reagan commends pregnancy help centers on Heartbeat’s 10th anniversary.

1992
Alternatives to Abortion International becomes Heartbeat International.

1993
Peggy Hartshorn becomes president of Heartbeat International.
THROUGH TIME

1994
First edition of *The LOVE Approach* staff and volunteer training manual is published.

1997
Project Reach is launched in NYC as the first urban initiative.

2003
Option Line 24/7 call center is started.

2006
Heartbeat of Miami urban initiative begins

2011
Heartbeat launches online Academy

2014
Option Line reaches milestone 2 million contacts

2016
Jor-El Godsey becomes President of Heartbeat International

2016
Heartbeat reaches milestone 2,000 affiliates