

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ at Reformation Lutheran Church,

I am a member of St. Andrew's Lutheran Church in Columbia, Missouri and have only hours ago learned of the tragedy in your church. I am particularly saddened at the violent loss of your church member, Dr. George Tiller, because of the personal care which my wife and I received while at his clinic. I am aware that the topic of reproductive rights has been a controversial topic in your church and hope that sharing our experiences with Dr. Tiller may help provide some solace and affirmation of his commitment to his patients.

In brief, my wife and I had been unable to conceive after our first child and had even sought fertility treatments to have a second child. We were overjoyed when we learned that my wife was pregnant with twin boys but, sadly, late in the pregnancy learned that the twins suffered from twin-twin transfusion syndrome, a physiological difficulty affecting approximately 30% of twin pregnancies in which the blood of one twin becomes routed to the other twin. After seeking medical treatment to attempt to save both twins, and then traveling to a Florida hospital to receive surgery to save only one, we were rather abruptly informed that nothing could be done for the twins, that an abortion was necessary, and, as this was a Catholic hospital these services could not be provided, and that we should seek a late term abortion. After being referred to a clinic in Illinois which told us they could not perform the abortion due to the head size of one of the fetuses, we were told to drive to Wichita to Dr. Tiller's clinic.

I will spare you the details of the protestors we encountered, the difficulties of getting to the clinic, and the security procedures in place. Suffice it to say, however, that in the middle of a very dark time for my wife and I, Dr. Tiller and his staff took the time to listen to us as humans and to appreciate that this pregnancy needed to be terminated for the sake of my wife's health and to ensure the possibility of having a future pregnancy. We were triaged into a group of three couples who were in similar life situations. Dr. Tiller and his staff volunteered to do some group counseling with us, but the other couples declined this option due to their religious beliefs.

Although I was unsure of what was appropriate for a husband to do in this situation, Dr. Tiller asked me to be involved in all steps of the abortion, including the delivery of the lifeless bodies of our two boys. Although I am aware that, theologically speaking, Dr. Tiller's care after the delivery was not exactly Lutheran sacramental understanding, Dr. Tiller participated in a brief baptism ceremony after their delivery and let me hold them for a bit. I hope that it is not inappropriate to share that while I held the bodies of my sons Dr. Tiller wept briefly, but recovered himself and told me to take however long I needed and to let him know when I was done.

A few weeks after returning home and burying our sons in the family plot in Iowa, I was surprised to receive a letter from Dr. Tiller. When I opened it, I found a card with the words "Respect," "Dignity," and "Compassion." I opened it to find that Dr. Tiller had taken several pictures of our sons for us to have. Although it may be difficult for others to understand the gratitude I felt on receiving this unexpected gift, I can assure you that it meant quite a bit to me.

I felt I should write you the story of our experiences with Dr. Tiller especially since this contrasts so completely with his external "bedside" demeanor which seemed, on initial experience, as anything but nuanced, hesitant, or prone to half-measures so as to not risk offence. I believe you have lost a selfless and dedicated health care professional and someone who did the best he knew how to serve others with thoughtless devotion. I have since testified twice to the Missouri Senate Health Care committee concerning the issue of late-term abortion and some have asked me how I have found the courage to speak publicly on our family's experiences. I tell them that I am trying to pass along only in faint measure the care and compassion I have been shown during our experiences by Dr. Tiller and the other health care professionals we worked with during that time.

My prayers are with you and the body of Christ in Reformation Lutheran during this difficult time. If you feel that others can be helped by sharing this note, please feel free to do so. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have concerning this note or help in any way I can as your congregation navigates this difficult time of grief, reaction, healing, and recommitment to compassion so exemplified by Dr. Tiller.

Sincerely,

Phillip Wood