

More than naysayers

By Dean Merrill

If you've ever raised a toddler — or even baby-sat for an evening — you know the importance of a tactic called "replacement."

Little Josh thinks he'd like to dig in the flowerpots with his stubby fingers. You say, "No, but look at this bright red toy! Isn't this neat? Let's play with this instead."

Allison decides she's going to sweep all the magazines off the coffee table onto the floor. You respond to her literary curiosity: "Let's read this picture book! Here — you can sit on my lap, and I'll read you a wonderful story."

Replacing an unpopular "no" with an attractive "yes" is a wise move with children — and with grown-ups as well. It is a good strategy not only in the day-care center but also in the workplace, the church and particularly the public square. Everyone appreciates being offered a better alternative.

Take abortion. For more than two decades, evangelicals have

said, "No! No! No! Don't kill that unborn child! It's wrong! It's murder!" And

we have indeed spoken the truth.

How have we done at following up our fervent condemnation with something that sounds like "yes"?

A few years ago, my wife and I called our local crisis pregnancy center and said, "We have a couple of extra bedrooms now that our kids are off to college. If you need a place for an expectant mom to stay until she delivers, we're available."

A staff member quickly came to interview us, and within days a shy 16-year-old, four months along, arrived on our doorstep. We welcomed her, got her enrolled at the local high school and introduced her to our youth pastor at church. Soon she was sitting in the "youth row" on Sunday mornings.

I asked the director, "How many of these 'shepherding homes,' as you call them, do you have here in Colorado Springs?"

"About three or four," she said.

"And what is the demand?" I asked. "How often do you need a place for a young woman?"

"Oh, at least twice a week," she said.

Here in a city of more than 300,000, with some 400 churches plus dozens of Christian organizations that produce passionate pro-life preaching, publishing and broadcasting — we've got only three or four Christian homes willing to say "yes" to a frightened teen-age mom-to-be. What's wrong with this picture?

If we condemn abortion as a vile evil in our modern culture (and it

is), we have got to say yes to some alternatives — and put our actions where our mouths are. We must show the better way and make it possible.

Jesus once scolded the righteous people of His day: "Woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger

to help them" (Luke 11:46, NIV). Moral principle is important, but so is moral demonstration.

In our modest case of reaching out to the 16-year-old: Our young guest decided to place her baby for adoption — and selected a childless couple in our own church who had been yearning for a baby for nearly a decade. Soon after the birth, she went back to her hometown — but the little boy remained for us to watch and love. Every Sunday

morning when he, now 4 years old, runs up to hug our necks and show us what he's made in his class, we rejoice in the goodness of God.

Not every attempt to help will turn out this delicious. But the point remains: Good things happen when we balance our condemnation of sin with the Christian graces of mercy, love and hope. The sternness of "no" cries out for an offsetting "yes." ■

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