

A Defense of Red Rose Rescue Against Accusations by Lauren Muzyka of Sidewalk Advocates for Life

On June 10, 2020 Lauren Muzyka, Executive Director of Sidewalk Advocates for Life sent a private letter to me, Monica M. Miller, director of Citizens for a Pro-Life Society and founding member of Red Rose Rescue. She accused participants of the May 13, 2020 Red Rose Rescue in Grand Rapids, MI of: "haranguing," "aggressive," and "intimidating behavior." I quickly responded to Muzyka to inform her that I needed a few days to pray and discern how to make a "gracious response" to these false accusations and that I would send her a reply. However, without waiting for my answer to her letter Muzyka saw fit to publically post whole sections of her letter to me on the SAFL Facebook page accompanied by a video—thus publicly and unjustly criticizing Red Rose Rescue in social media. Her actions are unfair and unjust to members of Red Rose Rescue that necessitates the response you are reading now.

In her letter to me Muzyka begins her criticism by accusing RRR of violating one of its own rules, that RRR will not conduct a rescue at abortion clinics that have a consistent sidewalk counseling apostolate and those local activists prefer that Red Rose Rescues not be conducted where such sidewalk counseling is taking place. She refers to this as a standard that we violated. First of all, that "standard" is not a rule for Red Rose Rescue—it is a guide for RRR decision-making when we choose where to conduct a Red Rose Rescue—as we wish, as far as possible, to respect the wishes of local activists. It is but a courtesy we try to extend, but it is in no way a hard and fast rule that was violated. In any case, it wasn't violated when we chose to conduct the RRR at the Heritage Women's Center abortion facility in Grand Rapids, MI.

In the SAFL Facebook posting Muzyka states that on May 13, 2020, members of the SAFL-Grand Rapids team “arrived for regularly-scheduled outreach.” However, other sidewalk counselors, not associated with SAFL, had informed us that members of SAFL in Grand Rapids had been absent from the abortion clinic for several weeks. Apparently, following guidelines issued by Muzyka regarding the corona virus pandemic, Grand Rapids SAFL counselors made a decision to not engage in public gatherings and to respect the Michigan governor’s “stay-at-home directive.” Guidelines from Muzyka indicated: “Our locations seek to comply with federal and local guidelines for public safety.” Thus it seemed evident to us that SAFL counselors choose to at least temporarily cease sidewalk counseling even though abortion centers remained open. However, other sidewalk counselors in Grand Rapids who continued their ministry at the Heritage clinic welcomed and supported the Red Rose Rescue in their community. In fact, the support was overwhelming. With the information we were given, we felt that a decision to conduct the RRR in Grand Rapids was perfectly legitimate and was made in good faith.

However, two SAFL Grand Rapids members showed up during the Grand Rapids RRR. I was completely taken aback, totally surprised to see them! Indeed, I asked one of them why they had made a decision to return and she explained that they felt they had been gone long enough and needed to come back. Given that in the past SAFL has openly derided and criticized Red Rose Rescue I expected a cool if not hostile reception from these two SAFL members. But, their response to us was quite the opposite. They were friendly and gracious to me and we exchanged phone numbers and email addresses. Indeed, if these two SAFL members believed that their being present during a Red Rose Rescue would spoil the reputation of SAFL, they could have left. There were plenty of other experienced sidewalk counselors present, in addition to the six Red Rose Rescuers. But they didn’t leave, they chose to stay. And ironically, I sidewalk

counseled with them! Furthermore, they had every opportunity to complain directly to me about the so-called “bad behavior” of the Red Rose Rescuers and they never did. These accusations are surfacing now, three weeks later!

Several accusations against Red Rose Rescuers are posted by Muzyka on the SAFL Facebook page reproduced here in blue font. I will respond to each one in red font:

The following is what our Sidewalk Advocates witnessed: Members of the RRR approached clients in a manner described as “aggressive,” “intimidating,” and “haranguing.” This depiction of the behavior of the 6 Red Rose Rescuers is absolutely false, and potentially libelous. Six RRR members, a mere two at a time, quietly, and peacefully walked on the parking lot of the abortion center and approached women, boyfriends, family members as they exited their vehicles, all of us wearing PPE. We simply did what sidewalk counselors do. We talked to the women about the humanity of their babies, let them know material help was available, gave them pro-life pamphlets and offered them red roses as a sign of life, love and peace. We chose to approach the women on the parking lot because, contrary to Muzyka’s claim in her letter to me, sidewalk counseling is very difficult at this clinic. The parking lot is configured in such a way that it presents a true obstacle to meaningful dialogue with the women scheduled for abortions. The other sidewalk counselors, who also have been at this clinic for years, confirm that this is the case. Indeed, of the 10 customer cars that pulled into the lot the day of the RRR only three stopped at the entrance to talk with us—and two of them were boyfriends or family members *exiting the lot* after they had dropped off the women! When the Red Rose Rescuers entered the parking lot we had that more meaningful engagement with the women entering the clinic—engagement sidewalk counselors on the street were not able to have. Women at least heard us, some took our pamphlets, a few of them or their boyfriends took roses, thus the potential for babies to be saved increased by our actions!

A member of our team heard someone with their group tell a client, “There’s a special cage in hell for you.” Your CPLS director was present the entire three hours the Red Rose Rescue took place—most of my time spent either on the parking lot or near the driveway and I never heard anyone make such a statement. I asked some of the other sidewalk counselors and prayer warriors who were there with us and they too vouch that such words were not spoken. One RRR member occasionally paced in the “middle of the driveway” –though never blocking the driveway—and did preach to the police officers assembled not to arrest the pro-lifers, as the officers were placing me in temporary custody. But this could hardly be described as “intimidating” and “haranguing”! In any case Red Rose Rescue does not condone such harsh, judgmental speech and if I had heard it I would have admonished whoever spoke in such a manner.

Members of the RRR were eventually cited or arrested on site. In response, Sidewalk Advocates were tasked with having to distinguish themselves to police rather than focus on reaching abortion-bound clients. The possibility that anyone on the sidewalk who did not enter the abortion clinic parking lot needed to “distinguish” themselves from the police and thus be distracted from “reaching abortion-bound clients” is totally bogus. There was no threat to anyone other than those of us who entered the lot of possibly being subject to arrest. The other sidewalk counselors, pro-life picketers and prayer warriors never felt this need to distinguish themselves to the police officers! Furthermore, “reaching abortion bound clients” was effectively accomplished by the Red Rose Rescuers who talked to abortion-bound women on the parking lot!

Since community members were unable to verify whether any mother accepted help at a life-affirming pregnancy center or otherwise chose life, our Sidewalk Advocates said there were no confirmed turnaways/babies saved that day. In some ways this may be the most perplexing of all SAFL complaints and is the most ironic. There was a bonafide turn-away during the Red Rose Rescue. And indeed, one of the SAFL counselors was credited by CPLS with influencing that couple to leave the clinic. Why Muzyka claims that no abortion-bound woman left the clinic is a mystery. A few days after the RRR CPLS sent out an email summary of the event and we gave that SAFL counselor credit for aiding that turn-away. *I felt I was doing the honorable thing* in giving SAFL public credit, rather than just making it appear that the turn-away was due exclusively to the activity of the RRR. Having publicly given credit to SAFL at least partly explains why Muzyka feels it is necessary to “distinguish” her group from Red Rose Rescue. By giving the SAFL counselor credit we never intended to imply that SAFL approved of the RRR. And by the way, how would the so-called “community members” or a “life-affirming pregnancy center” be relied upon to confirm or verify that there was a turn-away? Is such verification the only acceptable criteria upon which a turn-away can be confirmed? How would they know unless indeed the woman who turned-away went to such a center? This whole part of Muzyka’s complaint is strained and contrived. The fact is, we saw the couple leave after the SAFL counselor, yes to her credit, flagged down the car at the parking lot entrance, talked to the boyfriend and gave him a pamphlet and after I offered a rose to the mother (which she declined to receive). How is it that the SAFL counselors didn’t know this couple left the parking lot?

It appears that the RRR had alerted some media to join them to witness the incident, but our leaders and Sidewalk Advocates had no idea that this was going to take place. A press release was sent out by CPLS ten minutes after the RRR was already in progress and it was sent out only to local Grand Rapids media which resulted in a very fair and balanced story by the secular WOOD TV 8 News, NBC affiliate. Indeed, you can be assured that if the secular press had witnessed any hateful statements or “intimidating” behavior by the rescuers—they would not have missed a chance to report on it! Pro-life/Christian media was also told about the RRR and thus Church Militant and LifeSite News were on site and reported on the rescue. In any case, due to the recent absence of the SAFL counselors, we did not expect them to be there.

As one local pro-life community member said, "It's unfortunate that they come down here one day and put on this massive show, their theatrics, and they stir the pot of emotion, and then they leave. The people who are normally here every day — we are the ones who have to deal with that." This also puts their site, as well as sites across the state, at greater risk for a buffer zone — among other legal risks — potentially leaving the local pro-life community to fight an unjust law in court. The "community member" referred to here is a staff person at the pro-life community house next-door to the abortion center whose members refuse to cooperate with the local sidewalk counselors not affiliated with SAFL, those sidewalk counselors who did welcome the RRR. They sadly refer to the life-saving actions of the RRR as "theatrics"! Talking to women moments before they walk down a hallway to the death chambers, offering them that last chance to turn away from killing their babies and offering a peaceful, non-violent defense of the abandoned unborn is hardly theatrics! And once again Muzyka brings up the threat of buffer zones being enacted against the local sidewalk counselors, a fear she raised three years ago when RRR began. The fact is, no buffer zones have been put in place, not even a whisper of such buffer zones being put in place—I mean, *absolutely none* and there is *zero evidence* that this will occur after three years and 19 Red Rose Rescues!

We want to make clear that SAFL, along with the SAFL-Grand Rapids team, does not condone the methods exhibited during this incident and was in no way involved with it; even more so, we're saddened that the team was prevented from fully ministering to abortion-minded mothers and abortion workers that day. The SAFL counselors, after a lengthy absence, were not prevented "from fully ministering to abortion-minded mothers and abortion workers that day." The fact that a SAFL counselor did stop one car and spoke to the boyfriend that led to a turn-away is evidence that they were not prevented. However, it is Red Rose Rescuers willing to risk arrest by entering the parking lot aided by local sidewalk counselors and other pro-lifers who supported us, who indeed that day did "fully ministered to abortion-minded mothers" in a more personal engagement. We gave to them, without having to shout across the expanse of a parking lot, those final words of encouragement.

SAFL likes to pride itself on being the "peaceful, law-abiding" pro-lifers—and anyone who does not subscribe to their brand is subjected to public criticism. If SAFL has a rule, and requires its members to pledge never to break the law, that is their prerogative. However, to vow never to break an unjust law when one may need to do so to save or at least defend the life of another person is hardly a virtue.

SAFL posts its many saves and turn-aways on its website. God bless their work. However, several women have turned-away from their scheduled abortion appointments during the Red Rose Rescues—up to as many as 12 women in the RRR that we did Dec. 2, 2017 at the Women's Center abortion facility in West Bloomfield, MI. Court testimony was entered, complete with a chart, by the abortion clinic manager under oath that due to our RRR 12 women did not go through with their abortions that day! By any sidewalk counseling standard, 12 turn-aways in one day would be considered an enormous pro-life victory. One of those women who

turned-away did so right during the RRR, after rescuer Patrice Woodworth talked to her—and was also noted on the chart as having done so!

The mere fact that Lauren Muzyka did not afford me even a few days to answer her letter is grossly unjust. In fairness she needed to wait for my response before posting her accusations on the SAFL Facebook page. Indeed, she assured me “please feel free to take your time.”

Perhaps my rebuttal and explanations would still not have convinced her, but she did not even afford me the common courtesy of allowing me to reply to her letter. I truly do ask God to bless her and the life-saving work of SAFL, but Lauren Muzyka owes me, Red Rose Rescue and the entire pro-life community an apology.