




Original article found online at: <http://www.arkansas-catholic.org/news/article/4170/Life-Center-in-Little-Rock-building-memorial-garden>



Rocks and building materials are piled outside the Life Center in Little Rock for building a memorial garden for aborted children at the Life Center in Little Rock. (Aprille Hanson)

## **Life Center in Little Rock building memorial garden**

**Space will be place for prayer, healing for women who have had an abortion**

Published: March 19, 2015   

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An artistic interpretation of Jesus' body by Christian artist Joe Barnett hangs among trees at the Life Center in Little Rock in what will be a memorial garden for remembering aborted children, opening around Easter.

Sandy recently made a healing pilgrimage back to Little Rock to grieve the loss of her child, which she aborted in 1979.

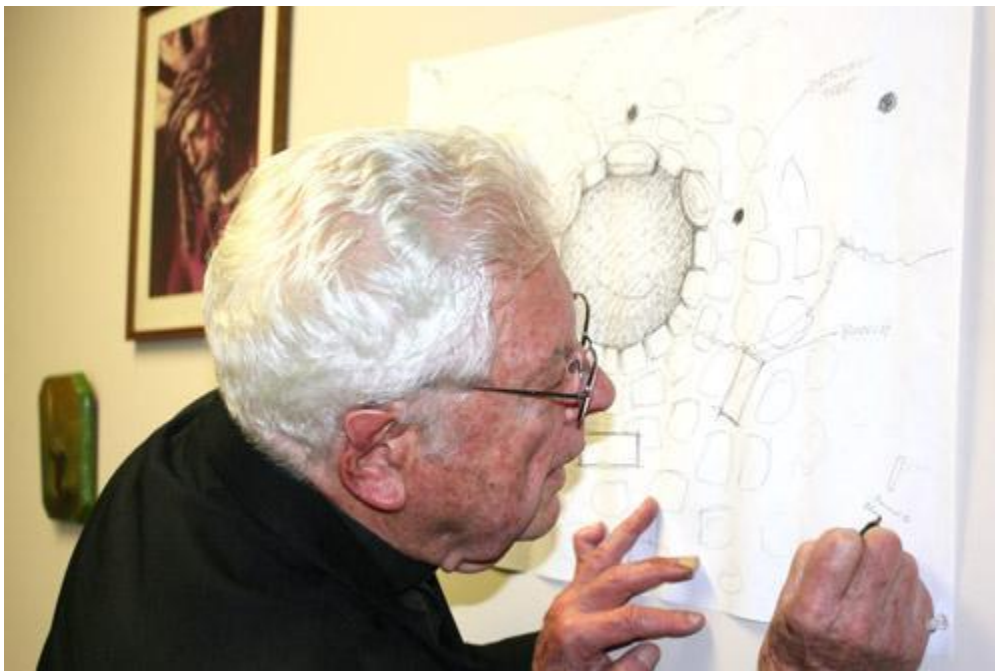
Rose Mimms, executive director for Arkansas Right to Life, told the woman that the abortion clinic on Markham Street no longer exists, that it's merely an empty lot. But to the woman who is now a minister in Louisiana, has been married for 36 years and has three daughters, it was important to reflect on the decision she made at just 17.

"I was dazed, in pain and sorrowful," Sandy told Mimms in an e-mail about the day she had her abortion. "I just can't shake the feeling (that) I want to return to the place where I chose to shed innocent blood."

For Mimms, it was the perfect example of why building a memorial garden on the grounds of the Life Center for all who have been touched by abortion would be a blessing for the Little Rock area.

“I know women who have had abortions when they are seeking reconciliation and healing from that going to the physical location is important to them,” Mimms said, explaining that the property next to the Life Center was an abortion clinic that closed in 2004. The center was a place for prayerful protest of the thousands of abortions that took place throughout the years when the clinic was open, Mimms said. “If a mother can’t go to the exact location, at least she can come to our location and spend time in prayer or reflection.”

The garden — which will be located behind the Life Center at 1515 South University Avenue in Little Rock where Arkansas Right to Life is also headquartered — broke ground in February and is scheduled to be completed by Easter. The property and center is owned by Father Thomas Keller, a retired priest who bought the land about 25 years ago. The project will cost \$6,500, which Father Keller has financed. About \$3,000 has so far been raised, but more donations are needed, Mimms said.



Retired priest Father Thomas Keller writes about a memorial plaque on the design plans for a planned memorial garden behind the Life Center in Little Rock on March 9. Arkansas Right to Life is headquartered at the Life Center on University Avenue in Little Rock, owned by Father Keller. (Aprille Hanson)

“The memorial will be specific to those who lost their lives at the clinic,” Father Keller said, adding it will include a memorial plaque.

Father Keller, 81, said there wasn't the concept of being "pro-life" when he was a child.

"I was not a pro-life person. I didn't know anything about it. My mother always told me she had a miscarriage before me and she" disposed of the child, he said. "They didn't know anything about that 80 years ago. Now we know if we have a miscarriage, it's a life. The Church has claimed it's a life and the Scriptures are very clear about it. Jesus was alive in his mother and he was there when he was immaculately conceived."

The memorial will incorporate the natural foliage on the property, including five trees that might not be much to look at, but pull the whole design together, said Joe Barnett, owner of Little Rock Land Design who is creating the garden. The trees encircle a wire sculpture Barnett created of Jesus' body, set in a circular water design with rocks, rock benches and lights surrounding it.



Christian artist Joe Barnett said the red wire in his artistic representation of Jesus' body represents arteries. It is part of a memorial garden for remembering aborted children, opening around Easter at the Life Center in Little Rock. (Aprille Hanson)

"Even though it's so ordinary, the body of Jesus is made with wire I bought at Home Depot ... but out of that comes something very beautiful," Barnett said.

The water represents the healing Pool of Bethesda mentioned in the Bible because "Bethesda" has roots in the meanings shame and guilt but also grace and mercy.

"The women who have come who have had an abortion before and they've come to the place to mourn their loss and pray and going to those waters with that in mind just fits so perfect,"

Barnett said. "I've looked at pictures of the Pool of Bethesda, which had rocks hollowed out. I will add those, so they can dip their hands in the water and experience the water."

A member of St. Andrew Anglican Church in Little Rock, Barnett has been a Christian artist for many years and said he enjoys projects that incorporate his faith. His interpretation of the body of Christ at the memorial is wire, with bright red paint representing the arteries.

"I really feel like the body of Jesus is the central theme in Christianity. I think people lose focus; it's not the cross, but the body of Jesus," Barnett said. Incorporating the 8-foot sculpture with the trees signifying the cross he said will create a "powerful spiritual connection."

While the purpose of the garden is a memorial for the unborn, it will also be a prayerful place for those living in the lower-income section of the city, Barnett said.

"I so appreciated Father Keller ... he wanted the 'riff-raff' to come there, he wanted it to be seen. That it would be a prayer garden for Arkansas Right to Life, but also for the whole community and whatever is going on there," Barnett said, adding that Father Keller's inclusive attitude, "let me know all the more that we are doing the right thing."

Church groups of adults or youth are invited to volunteer to complete the garden. Call (501) 663-4237 to sign up.

Those who want to donate to the project can send cash or checks made to Arkansas Right to Life specifying the "Memorial Garden," to P.O. Box 1697, Little Rock, AR 72203.