



# Joanna Thompson 1949-2009

Joanna Thompson, who died on 24 July 2009 after a short illness, was the head of *CareConfidential*, a department of the well-known Christian charity CARE. She devoted her life to helping desperate women struggling with the crisis of unexpected pregnancy or with problems following abortion, and her deep faith and passionate convictions inspired and challenged many of the people privileged enough to meet her.

In 1985 Joanna began working in a LIFE pregnancy counselling centre in Basingstoke, where she provided compassionate support for women and their families facing unexpected pregnancies or suffering after abortion. She became involved in training and the setting up of two independent counselling centres, which was the starting point of the organisation *Christians Caring for Life*. The vision spread around the country, and eventually the charity became a department of CARE (under the new name *Care for Life*). Joanna was instrumental in this process, and joined the staff of CARE as *Care for Life's* National Co-ordinator.

Under her pioneering guidance, the centres continued to grow in number and flourish; today there are over 150 independent crisis centres affiliated to CARE. Joanna was responsible for developing and supporting this network of centres, as well as establishing the national free phone helpline for women in pregnancy crisis, and the web portal *CareConfidential*. This website provides access to local crisis centres where help and support for women are available. It offers online advisors, who encourage women and their families to think through all the options and make an informed and considered decision, and also enables them to find caring, ongoing support after abortion or baby loss, together with the opportunity for recovery.<sup>1</sup> It has helped tens of thousands of women.

Joanna was an inspirational speaker and was passionate about sharing God's love and grace for those affected by crisis pregnancy and abortion. She travelled to many other countries including South Africa, Russia, Romania, the Czech Republic and the Ukraine to run training courses and enable pregnancy crisis counselling centres to become established. Gail Schreiner, the National Director of *Africa Cares for Life*, recalls the impact Joanna had on her:

*We enjoyed many years of friendship, great leadership and insight into the ministry's needs. I had the privilege of knowing her personally; she was very instrumental in helping me as I started up Africa Cares for Life, we had her speaking at our annual conferences several times and we totally embraced the training modules Joanna developed. I have always found her to be incredibly wise and we still made plans for me to spend time with her at CareConfidential.*

Joanna was a deeply caring woman of God who lived out her convictions and touched many lives. I remember meeting Joanna

for the first time in Southampton – I can even remember what she spoke about, such was the effect that Joanna had on me. She spoke with passion and grace that immediately inspired you. The story of Suzanne, a woman in crisis, demonstrates how her life was transformed by meeting Joanna:<sup>2</sup>

*Suzanne and her boyfriend came to a local pregnancy crisis centre, both very young, frightened and shocked at the positive pregnancy test. They even thought of running away to avoid telling Suzanne's parents but realised this would solve nothing. Together with their counsellor, Joanna, they looked at the various options and were particularly struck by the leaflet on the development of the baby. Joanna and the rest of the team prayed for Suzanne, her boyfriend and their baby. They came back to the centre three times but remained undecided.*

## Joanna was a deeply caring woman of God who touched many lives

*In a seminar about ten years later Joanna was explaining how the counsellor's role is to love, care, and support women, offering them the opportunity to look at all the facts and explore their options so they can make their own informed decision; counsellors rely on the Holy Spirit to show women what is the right thing to do. A woman in the front row stood up and said 'That's what happened to me. I came to your centre and you showed me that I had a choice. I couldn't get over the fact that my baby already had fingernails.' Suzanne had decided to keep her baby, a boy who was now eleven years old.*

*After the meeting Suzanne told Joanna that her son had always talked to Jesus. Suzanne therefore decided to take him to Sunday school, where Suzanne also learned about the love of God and became a Christian. Joanna was reminded how, when the centres first began, the counsellors prayed for every child that was rescued from abortion. She told Suzanne 'We prayed that God would not only save these little ones' lives but also touch them spiritually'.*

All who were privileged to know Joanna were aware of the importance of her family in her life. She leaves Philip, her husband of 40 years, son Mark and daughter Charlotte, and grandchildren Sam, Rachel, Chloe and Hannah.

**Phil Clarke** is a GP in Southampton and Director of *CareConfidential*

### references

1. [www.careconfidential.com/AimsObjectives.aspx](http://www.careconfidential.com/AimsObjectives.aspx)
2. Adapted from Philip Clarke, *A Heart of Compassion*. Authentic, 2006. p115