

focusonthefamily.com

The website for the ministry and advocacy organization Focus on the Family, that has published false and unsubstantiated claims about abortion and COVID-19.



Proceed with caution: This website fails to adhere to several basic journalistic standards.

Score: 57/100

Financing

Focus on the Family is a global Christian ministry and 501(c)(3) organization based in Colorado Springs, Colorado. According to its most recent filings with the U.S. Internal Revenue Service, Focus on the Family earned \$96,692,676 in 2019, including \$82,633,920 in contributions and grants and \$4,517,573 in program service revenue.

The website says on a Financial Accountability page that 87.5 percent of Focus on the Family's revenue comes from donors.

While Focus on the Family operates as a nonprofit organization, it changed its tax status to operate as a church in 2017. Focus on the Family Vice President of Communications Paul Batura told The Christian Post in April 2018 that the organization sought the new classification to protect the nonprofit organization's donors.

"In recent years there have been several occasions on which nonprofit organizations were targeted for information, including the names and personal details of their donors," Batura said. "In order to protect our constituents' privacy, and because Focus does, in fact, meet the definition of a church under IRS regulations, we applied for and received this designation."

According to the IRS' Tax Guide for Churches & Religious Organizations, churches classified as 501(c)(3) organizations "are absolutely prohibited from directly or indirectly participating in, or intervening in, any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for elective public office."

Before it changed its tax status, Focus on the Family donated to Republican candidates' campaigns in 2010, 2012, 2014, and 2016, according to the Center for



Does not repeatedly publish false content (22points)



Gathers and presents information responsibly (18)



Regularly corrects or clarifies errors (12.5)

Handles the difference between news and opinion responsibly (12.5)



Avoids deceptive headlines (10)



Website discloses ownership and financing (7.5)

Clearly labels advertising (7.5)



Reveals who's in charge, including any possible conflicts of interest (5)



The site provides names of content creators, along with either contact or biographical information (5)

Criteria are listed in order of importance.

[More information.](#)

Responsive Politics. Focus on the Family's spending was greatest during the 2012 cycle, when it spent approximately \$2.5 million. The organization did not donate to political campaigns in 2018 or 2020.

Focus on the Family produces 17 syndicated podcasts and radio shows, including the Focus on the Family Broadcast, a half-hour show that "provides daily encouragement that helps families thrive each day" and is co-hosted by Focus on the Family President Jim Daly.

The Focus on the Family store sells subscriptions to its print magazines, which include the Focus on the Family Magazine, Brio Magazine, Clubhouse Magazine, and Clubhouse Jr. Magazine.

The website does not run advertisements.

Content

On its About page, Focus on the Family describes itself as "a global Christian ministry dedicated to helping families thrive. We provide help and resources for couples to build healthy marriages that reflect God's design, and for parents to raise their children according to morals and values grounded in biblical principles."

Content is divided into sections including Marriage, Parenting, Faith, Pro-Life, and Culture. Articles cover related topics from a Christian point of view and often dispense advice on topics such as parenting and relationships. Typical headlines include "Restoring Trust After Pornography Addiction," "Purity and Your Teen," and "10 Things Everyone Should Know About a Christian View of Homosexuality."

The website's Get Help section includes a "Family Q+A" that answers common questions about marriage, faith, sexuality, and abortion. The section also publishes a database of "licensed Christian counselors in your area" for users. According to the website, credentialed therapists can apply to the Christian Counselors Network for an annual \$129 fee, "which supports our family ministry."

On its Culture page, Focus on the Family publishes news and political articles from The Daily Citizen, a political news domain that Focus on the Family launched in 2020 to publish “timely and relevant analysis of current events and cultural trends -- all from a biblical worldview,” according to The Daily Citizen’s About section. Typical headlines from The Daily Citizen include “‘Roe v. Wade’ May Be Closer Than Ever to Being Overturned, But There’s Still a Long Way to Go,” “Searching for Norman Rockwell’s America in the 2020 Election,” and “Believing Children Should ‘Transition’ Genders is at Odds with Science.” Daily Citizen also published a Voter Guide ahead of the November 2020 presidential election, featuring the positions of President Trump and Democrat Joe Biden on issues such as abortion and religious freedom for business owners.

Credibility

Much of the content on FocusontheFamily.com consists of first-person essays on topics such as parenting, advice columns, and stories about Christian theology. However, the website has also published false and unsubstantiated claims about abortion and about COVID-19.

For example, in a November 2019 article headlined “When It’s Not Too Late: Can the Abortion Pill be Reversed?,” the website promoted the false claim that it is possible to safely reverse medical abortions by giving women high doses of progesterone. “Simply put, abortion reversal for medication abortion is both possible and safe,” the story stated. “When proper protocol is followed, it is successful in about two out of three pregnancies when given to a woman who had changed her mind after taking an abortion pill.” The article did not cite any research to back the statistic.

Advancing New Standards in Reproductive Health (ANSIRH), a collaborative research group at the University of California, San Francisco’s Bixby Center for Global Reproductive Health, defines abortion pill “reversal” on its website as “an experimental treatment that involves administering repeated doses of progesterone after a patient has taken mifepristone, the

first of two drugs used for medication abortion.” However, ANSIRH says, “there is no evidence that progesterone treatment increases the chance of the pregnancy continuing.”

No reliable research exists to back the claim that reversing medical abortions is “both possible and safe.” In 2019, researchers at the University of California at Davis led a randomized, placebo-controlled trial that aimed to recruit 40 volunteers who had already opted for a surgical abortion. Women in the study would be given the first abortion pill, mifepristone, followed by either supplemental progesterone or a placebo.

However, the researchers only enrolled 12 women before they had to halt the study due to major bleeding in three participants. “Women who have medical abortions bleed, but this was not typical medical abortion bleeding,” Mitchell Creinin, the researcher who led the study, told SELF magazine in February 2020. “It wasn’t safe for me to expose women to this treatment.”

In a paper published in the peer-reviewed journal *Contraception* in November 2019, Creinin and his colleagues wrote that when it comes to abortion reversal, “the answers can only be found in properly conducted clinical trials” that have not been performed yet.

Focus on the Family has also promoted the false claim that abortion is linked to an increased risk of breast cancer. An undated article on the site, titled “What can you tell me about the possible link between abortion and breast cancer?” stated that “recent studies reveal a correlation between abortion and breast cancer.” The article does not identify any of the “recent studies.”

An article titled “ABORTION COMPLICATIONS,” which was first published in 2013 and headed the website’s Abortion section in October 2020, definitively stated that “abortion can increase your risk for breast cancer. A review analyzing 23 studies on breast cancer and abortion identified 17 of those studies indicate an increased risk of breast cancer among women having an abortion.”

The article identified the review that it cited as one published in the Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health in 1996. Planned Parenthood says on its website in a fact sheet titled “MYTHS ABOUT ABORTION AND BREAST CANCER” that that study “has been criticized for attempting to calculate the odds for developing breast cancer from widely varying studies ... some of which have been criticized for methodological flaws and for failing to calculate their results from the raw data of the original studies.”

A number of global health organizations, including the World Health Organization, U.S. National Cancer Institute, American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, and American Cancer Society (ACS), have published statements denying a link between abortion and breast cancer. “At this time, the scientific evidence does not support the notion that abortion of any kind raises the risk of breast cancer or any other type of cancer,” the ACS says on its website.

Another undated article on the website, titled “Unmarried and Pregnant: Reasons to Consider Adoption,” claimed without substantiation that women who have had abortions “are more likely to experience future pregnancy complications such as preterm labor.”

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, which says on its website that “most health care providers agree that one abortion does not affect your ability to get pregnant or the risk of future pregnancy complications.” The U.K. National Health Service writes on its website that while there is “a very small risk to your fertility and future pregnancies if you develop a womb infection during the procedure that’s not treated promptly,” abortions typically will not affect a woman’s fertility or the course of any future pregnancies.

In 2018, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine released a consensus report on the safety and quality of abortion care in the U.S., which concluded that abortions in the U.S. yield few complications and do not have any long-term consequences for women’s physical or mental health.

“I would say the main takeaway is that abortions that are provided in the United States are safe and effective,” Ned Calonge, co-chair of the committee that wrote the study, told National Public Radio in March 2018.

In articles attributed to the Daily Citizen that appear on FocusontheFamily.com, Focus on the Family has also published false or unsubstantiated claims about COVID-19.

In a September 2020 story titled “Chinese Virologist Claims COVID-19 was Intentionally Manufactured and Released by China,” the author promoted the debunked theory that the COVID-19 virus was created in a lab in China.

“A Chinese virologist, Dr. Li-Meng Yan ... has made a shocking new claim that the virus was manufactured and intentionally released by the Chinese government,” the article stated. “Dr. Yan published a scientific report on September 14 claiming that the ‘unusual features’ of the novel coronavirus suggest ‘sophisticated laboratory modification’ instead of ‘natural evolution.’”

The article did not note that Yan’s report was a non-peer-reviewed paper posted to Zenodo.org, an open-access repository for research that is not monitored for quality.

Global health authorities, including the World Health Organization and U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, have concluded that the COVID-19 virus is natural in origin and likely first developed in bats. A March 2020 study published in the journal Nature Medicine concluded that the virus “is not a laboratory construct or a purposefully manipulated virus,” and in a May 2020 interview with National Geographic Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, said that “if you look at the evolution of the virus in bats and what’s out there now, [the scientific evidence] is very, very strongly leaning toward this could not have been artificially or deliberately manipulated.”

Another September 2020 article, "Nashville Officials May Have Covered Up Real COVID-19 Numbers to Promote Lockdowns, Emails Show," falsely claimed that Nashville, Tennessee, officials refused to release statistics about COVID-19 cases at bars and restaurants because the numbers were too low to justify temporarily closing bars and restricting capacity at restaurants.

Citing emails between city officials obtained by Nashville television affiliate Fox 17, the article said, "The emails raise concerns that in Nashville, a city of nearly 700,000 people, the surprisingly low number of coronavirus cases traced back to bars and restaurants may have been withheld to keep lockdowns and restaurant restrictions in place." Contrary to the article's claim, Nashville officials had disclosed the number of COVID-19 cases traced to bars and restaurants -- which were 30 infections at 10 locations at the time -- at a press conference on July 2, 2020.

Fox17 deleted from its website the article that had cited Nashville officials' emails two days after its September 2020 publication. In a statement to CNN, the station said, "In a segment that aired earlier this week, we incorrectly asserted that [Nashville] Mayor [John] Cooper's office withheld COVID-19 data from the public, which implied that there had been a cover up. We want to clarify that we do not believe there was any cover-up, and we apologize for the error and oversight in our reporting."

Because Focus on the Family has published false claims about the safety of abortions and unsubstantiated claims related to COVID-19, NewsGuard has determined that the website does not gather and present information responsibly.

Asked for comment about the false claims in the articles cited above, Paul Batura, Focus on the Family's vice president of communications, told NewsGuard in an October 2020 email: "We stand by articles posted on our website." Batura did not respond to a follow-up email seeking comment on claims about stories in the Daily Citizen about COVID-19.

Focus on the Family does not publish a corrections policy, and NewsGuard did not find any corrections on the site. Batura did not respond to questions from NewsGuard about the website's corrections policy.

Headlines are typically broad and do not repeat the false claims included in stories. For example, articles that have promoted false information about the mental and physical effects of abortion are titled simply "ABORTION COMPLICATIONS" and "POST-ABORTION EMOTIONAL STRUGGLES." Because of this, NewsGuard has determined that Focus on the Family avoids deceptive headlines.

The majority of the content on the website is opinionated, and opinionated articles are not labeled. However, on a page titled Our Vision, Focus on the Family states that its "primary reason for existence is to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ through a practical outreach to homes ... we have firm beliefs about both the Christian faith and the importance of the family." The page also discloses the organization's opposition to abortion, and other issues such as same-sex marriage.

Because Focusonthefamily.com is clearly the website of an advocacy organization and clearly discloses its mission, NewsGuard has determined that the criterion for distinguishing news and opinion does not apply to it.

Transparency

The website's About page describes Focus on the Family's ministry. A Make A Donation page describes the organization's status as a public charity, and the website publishes annual financial statements. However, the website does not disclose information about its major donors, which does not meet NewsGuard's standard for disclosing ownership and relevant financing.

The website's Financial Accountability page says, "we will never sell, rent or share our list of friends and donors."

"Out of respect for the privacy of our supporters, we do not publish their information," Focus on the Family spokesman Batura told NewsGuard. "As I'm sure you

know, there have been instances of individuals and groups being harassed.”

The site’s About page identifies several Focus on the Family leaders, including founder James C. Dobson and its president and CEO, Jim Daly. However, the website does not disclose who manages editorial content on the site, which does not meet NewsGuard’s standard for disclosing who is in charge.

Articles on the website are attributed to authors, and short biographies for those authors are included at the end of each article.

The website’s Contact page lists a general email address as well as Focus on the Family’s phone number and address.

Focus on the Family does not run advertisements.

History

According to the website’s Historical Timeline page, James Dobson, a psychologist and the University of Southern California School of Medicine associate clinical professor of pediatrics, took a leave of absence in 1977 to launch Focus On the Family.

“I loved what I was doing,” Dobson told The Christian Post in April 2017. “But I saw the institution of the family starting to disintegrate.” In March 1977, Focus on the Family aired its first 25-minute broadcast, titled “Let’s Get Acquainted.”

The website launched in 1997.

Dobson, whose daily radio broadcasts regularly attracted 1.5 million listeners, stepped down as president of Focus on the Family in 2003, and in 2009 he resigned as chairman of the board.

In his last radio broadcast for Focus on the Family in 2010, Dobson said that the organization’s board of directors had voted privately to ask for his resignation, noting that “we can only guess the reason for their decision because, frankly, I don’t know. But it apparently has to do with the desire for closure on my tenure and the beginning of another.”

Dobson went on to launch the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, and a radio show called “Family Talk with Dr. James Dobson.”

Written by: [Anicka Slachta](#)

Edited by: [Amy Westfeldt](#)

Send feedback to NewsGuard: [Click Here](#)

Sources

Ownership and Financing

<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/donate/financial-accountability/>
<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/about/>
<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/annual-report-2019-2.pdf>
<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/2018-focus-on-the-family-990-Public-Copy.pdf>
<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/2017-Focus-990-Public-Copy.pdf>
<https://projects.propublica.org/nonprofits/organizations/953188150>
<https://store.focusonthefamily.com>
<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/shows/>
<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/shows/broadcast/>
<https://dailycitizen.focusonthefamily.com/about/>
<https://jimdalys.focusonthefamily.com/about-jim-daly/>
<https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p1828.pdf>

Content

<https://www.focusonthefamily.com>
<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/about/>
<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/parenting/purity-and-your-teen/>
<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/faith/10-things-everyone-should-know-about-a-christian-view-of-homosexuality/>
<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/parenting/the-consequences-of-sexting/>
<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/parenting/helping-kids-recognize-the-myths-in-transgenderism/>
<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/marriage/restoring-trust-after-pornography-addiction/>

<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/episodes/broadcast/finding-gods-light-in-dark-times/>
<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/marriage/>
<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/parenting/>
<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/faith/>
<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/topic/pro-life/>
<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/culture/>
<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/get-help/family-qa-articles/>
<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/marriage/10-ways-your-marriage-can-survive-the-coronavirus-quarantine/>
<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/parenting/coronavirus-s-safety-tips-for-kids/>
<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/marriage/covid-19-helping-your-spouse-grieve-loss/>
<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/get-help/counseling-services-and-referrals/>
<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/pro-life/unplanned-a-triumph-and-a-trigger/>
<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/family-qa/post-abortive-symptoms/>
<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/family-qa/post-abortion-emotional-struggles/>
<https://www.apa.org/pi/women/programs/abortion>
<https://www.healthline.com/health/post-abortion-syndrome#real-or-fake>
http://reproductiverights.org/sites/crr.civicaactions.net/files/documents/pub_bp_tk_myths.pdf
<https://www.apa.org/pi/women/programs/abortion/mental-health.pdf>
<https://www.guttmacher.org/gpr/2006/08/abortion-and-mental-health-myths-and-realities>
<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/family-qa/what-can-you-tell-me-about-the-possible-link-between-abortion-and-breast-cancer/>
<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/pro-life/abortion-complications/>
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1060338/pdf/jepicomh00185-0007.pdf> --
https://www.plannedparenthood.org/uploads/filer_public/af/1a/af1ae95f-de81-43dd-91a3-470043b06dce/myths_about_abortion_and_breast_cancer.pdf

<https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJM199701093360201>

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/25568519?seq=1>

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1251638/>

<https://www.cancer.org/cancer/cancer-causes/medical-treatments/abortion-and-breast-cancer-risk.html>

<https://www.acog.org/clinical/clinical-guidance/committee-opinion/articles/2009/06/induced-abortion-and-breast-cancer-risk>

<https://www.cancer.gov/types/breast/abortion-miscarriage-risk>

<https://www.cancer.ca/en/cancer-information/cancer-type/breast/risks/?region=bc>

<https://web.archive.org/web/20110113001029/http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs240/en/index.html>

<https://www.cancer.gov/types/breast/abortion-miscarriage-risk>

<https://www.rcog.org.uk>

<https://ww5.komen.org/BreastCancer/Table25Abortionandbreastcancerrisk.html>

<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/family-qa/unmarried-and-pregnant-reasons-to-consider-adoption/>

<https://www.acog.org/womens-health/faqs/induced-abortion>

<https://www.nhs.uk/common-health-questions/womens-health/can-having-an-abortion-affect-my-fertility/>

<https://www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/practice/dsm/feedback-and-questions/frequently-asked-questions>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/30/well/can-an-abortion-affect-your-fertility.html>

<https://www.actioncanadashr.org/campaigns/commit-resist/common-myths-about-abortion>

<https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2018/03/16/593447727/landmark-report-concludes-abortion-is-safe>

<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/about/foundational-values/#mission>

<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/get-help/new-research-on-same-sex-parenting/>

<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/parenting/are-the-kids-really-all-right/>

<https://www.prweb.com/releases/2006/07/prweb412920.htm>

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/07/17/AR2006071701530.html>

<https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2011/07/20/us-senator-catches-anti-gay-testifier-misrepresenting-study#more-7295>

<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED476114.pdf>

<http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1568485,00.html>

<https://www.mediamatters.org/time-magazine/time-gave-dobson-platform-misrepresent-again-science-same-sex-parenting>

<https://www.mediamatters.org/time-magazine/experts-say-dobsons-time-column-distorted-their-research-denounce-same-sex-parents>

<https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=news/11AA3D8CECB1E500&f=basic>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KPuTQAoO7qo>

<https://truthwinsout.org/pressrelease/2006/12/37/>

<https://www.guttmacher.org/claim-most-abortion-clinics-are-located-black-or-hispanic-neighborhoods-false>

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/fact-checker/wp/2015/08/18/carsons-claim-that-planned-parenthood-targets-blacks-to-control-that-population/>

<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/pro-life/discovering-abortion-impact-on-the-black-community-moved-me-from-apathy-to-action/>

<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/pro-life/when-its-not-too-late-can-the-abortion-pill-be-reversed/>

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2019/12/24/some-lawmakers-push-abortion-reversal-treatments-new-study-shows-how-dangerous-they-are/>

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2019/12/24/some-lawmakers-push-abortion-reversal-treatments-new-study-shows-how-dangerous-they-are/>

<https://www.ansirh.org/news/there-no-evidence-support-abortion-pill-“reversal>

<https://www.self.com/story/myth-of-reverse-abortion>

<https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/teens/ask-experts/can-the-abortion-pill-be-reversed-after-you-have-taken-it>

<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/episodes/broadcast-abortion-pill-reversal/>

<https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/2020/09/18/fact-check-nashville-mayor-cooper-coronavirus-stats/3491786001/>
<https://www.cnn.com/2020/09/18/media/nashville-coronavirus-fox17-right-wing-media/index.html>
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cdcreponse/about-COVID-19.html>
<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-who-virus/coronavirus-very-likely-of-animal-origin-no-sign-of-lab-manipulation-who-idUSKCN223180>
<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/science/2020/05/anthony-fauci-no-scientific-evidence-the-coronavirus-was-made-in-a-chinese-lab-cvd/#close>
<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41591-020-0820-9>
<https://apnews.com/article/9391149002>
<https://dailycitizen.focusonthefamily.com/chinese-virologist-claims-covid-19-was-intentionally-manufactured-and-released-by-china/>
<https://dailycitizen.focusonthefamily.com/nashville-officials-may-have-covered-up-real-covid-19-numbers-to-promote-lockdowns-emails-show/>

Transparency

<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/about/>
<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/about/foundational-values/>
<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/about/media/>
<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/marriage/finding-my-inner-handyman-for-my-wife/>
<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/parenting/4-words-kids-use-when-coping-with-emotions/>
<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/pro-life/are-you-pro-life-or-anti-abortion/>
<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/faith/bringing-the-bible-to-life-that-the-world-may-know/>

History

<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/about/historical-timeline/>
<https://www.christianpost.com/news/focus-on-the-family-defends-irs-classification-as-a-church-says-its-meant-to-protect-donors.html>
<https://govinfo.library.unt.edu/ngisc/members/dobson.html>

<https://www.rightwingwatch.org/post/focus-on-the-family-has-declared-itself-a-church-avoiding-irs-disclosure-rules/>