

WHY I AM STILL A CATHOLIC

VOLUME FIVE

From Ex-Catholic to Joyful Catholic

By Carol S. Gignac



*“The Church is like a great ship
being pounded by the waves
of life’s different stresses.
Our duty is not to abandon ship,
but to keep her on her course.”*

St. Boniface

Why I Am Still a Catholic
Volume Five
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**ABOUT THE
WHY I AM STILL A CATHOLIC
SERIES OF BOOKLETS**

by Ronda Chervin, Ph.D., Editor

Dr. Ronda is a Professor of Philosophy, a Presenter on
Catholic TV and Radio, and a Dedicated Widow

In the year 2016 I read somewhere that 60% of Catholics have left the Church or only attend occasionally!

I was shocked! Myself a convert from an atheist but Jewish background, Jesus, manifested and coming to me, in the Catholic Church is the greatest joy in my life...from time into eternity!

How could it be that so many Catholics have lost faith in a church that offers so much?

I believe it was the Holy Spirit that suggested to me a remedy.

Suppose the parish racks had little booklets written by strong believers, such as myself, describing why we are still Catholics in spite of many of the same experiences which have alienated other Catholics! Such a series of booklets could attract wavering Catholics or be given by strong Catholics to family and friends who have left us. In this way our series was born.

So, now I address all wavering Catholics, and all those who have left the Catholic faith, and beg you to give us one more chance. Could it hurt to say a little prayer, such as this?

Jesus, if you are really the Son of God, and you want me to receive fullness of grace through the Word and Sacraments in the Catholic Church, open me to the witness of the writers of these booklets. As they tell me why they are still Catholics, please tell me why I should still be a Catholic!



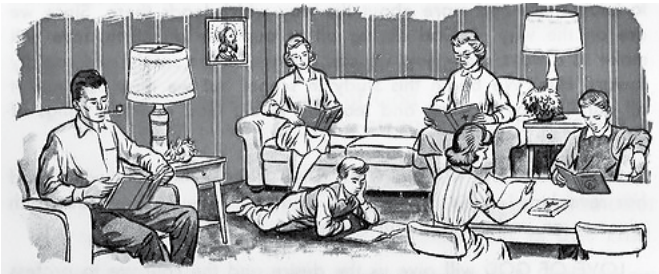


LIFE IN CHRIST AS A CHILD AND TEENAGER



I was raised in a Catholic and military family, the second of ten children. Five of us received earthly life and five others were miscarried in my mother's womb. My deeply loving parents practiced the teachings of the Catholic faith in simple and committed ways.

I was blessed with the virtue of discipline through my father and the gift of prayer through my mother. We worshipped weekly as a family and I learned the Catholic faith through the Baltimore Catechism in grammar school.



We were a Navy family that was transferred every three years to a different military base. For those who are not familiar with the military way of life, there is a kinship that exists among military

families – a sense of belonging no matter where we were.

My years of education through two years of college were in the Catholic tradition. I grew up and lived in a time when sexual issues were not discussed, nor displayed on television, movies or public advertisements. My mother never talked with me about sexuality; nor had anyone else. I knew sex outside of marriage was a mortal sin. Although I went to Mass and confession regularly in college, I fell into sexual temptation.

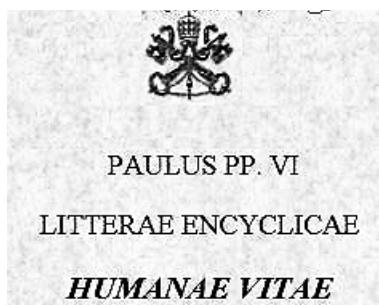


Even after confessing fornication, I felt that I was “damaged goods.” I thought that no man would have me as his wife. I did receive Christ’s forgiveness for my mortal sin in confession. What I did not know then is that I was plagued by buried trauma of childhood abuse at a pre-cognitive age. That is why I could not be reconciled to myself emotionally, even though I was reconciled to Christ in my soul.

I was 19 and in college when my boyfriend proposed and we were married in the Catholic Church. I dropped out of college and we had a

baby boy ten months after our wedding and a baby girl one year later. The challenges of a new life unfolded. My first husband left school to get a job. I was an at-home mother and with a fulfillment and belonging that I had never known before.

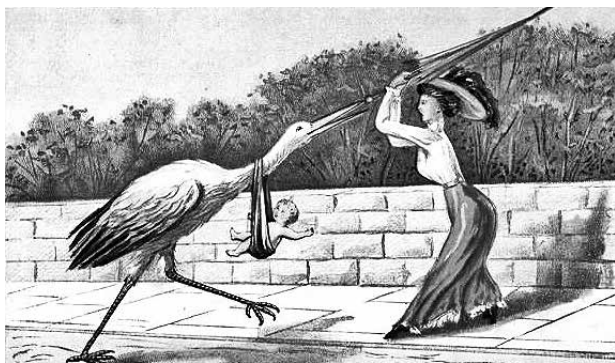
In July of 1968, with a month-old infant at my breast and a thirteen month-old toddler at my side, I read a newspaper report about Pope Paul VI holding fast to the Church's age-old prohibition against the use of artificial contraception within marriage. We were surprised by his decision because the media had led the public to believe, incorrectly, that the Church would relax these restrictions.



I knew and followed the teaching of the Church. I was further confused when I read the full-page advertisement by priests and religious saying that it was up to the conscience of the married couple to make their own decision about artificial contraception. I did not know how to process such dissent within the Church.

My babies took up all my time; so I dismissed it for the time being. Many months later, when I erroneously thought I was pregnant once again, my husband and I began to talk about using birth control. Our lives were busy. We no longer made the time to pray at home; nor do I remember receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation as a young wife and mother. Weekly Mass was the only grace in our life. Our prudence and fortitude were weakened. My husband stopped going to Church first; then I stopped months later.

We followed dissenting priests and theologians who said it was valid for couples to follow their own consciences. Instead of seeking wise counsel, we let go of Christ's guiding hand and our practice of the Catholic faith. What God had joined together, we divided by our use of artificial contraception.



YOUNG ADULTHOOD



In the encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*, Pope Paul VI prophesied four effects of widespread use of artificial birth control within marriage, all of which have come to pass since 1968.



“A widespread road towards conjugal infidelity.

A general lowering of morality, especially the young who are so vulnerable on this point.

Men may lose respect for the woman and ... consider her more as a mere instrument of selfish enjoyment and no longer as his respected and beloved companion.

A dangerous weapon in the hands of public authorities who take no heed of moral exigencies. Who will stop rulers ... from even imposing upon their peoples... the method of contraception which they judge to be most efficacious?”

We now steered our lives with priorities influenced more and more by worldly ways. My first husband took a sales job that required him being away during the week. In his absence from home, I became lonely. I was moved when reading about children in foster-care who needed families. So we adopted a 15- month-old boy who came to us with his own unmet needs. Some have said to me that you can't love an adopted child as much as your own. God and I know differently. True love is of the heart and not just of flesh and blood.

My first-husband and I turned to alcohol and marijuana to escape from individual and marital troubles. Because he was out of town regularly, I was completely alone. I went back to school and earned a graduate degree. I found meaning at school and with my children but not with my first husband.

Over time, both he and I turned to adultery; and we divided our marriage.

A house divided against itself cannot stand
(Matthew 12:25).

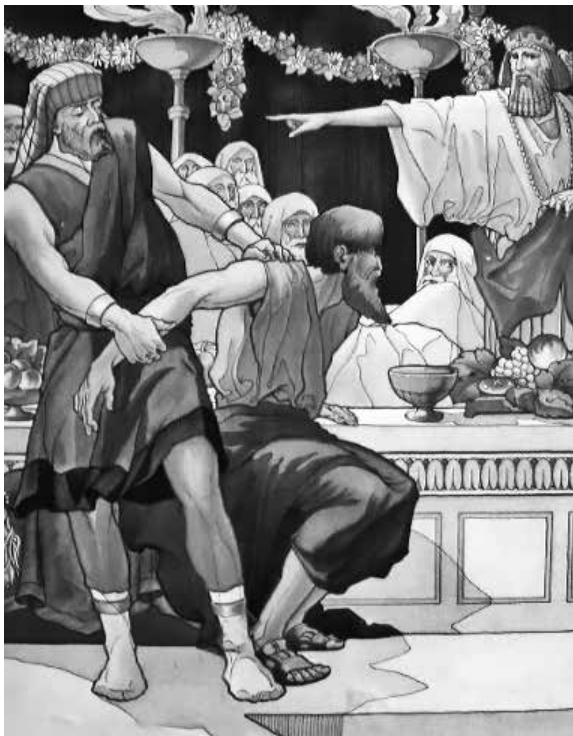
We were living two of the effects prophesied by Pope Paul VI: "a lowering of moral standards" and "conjugal infidelity."

I reached a point where I thought I could no longer risk even the minimal possibility of another

pregnancy. I was 30 years old. Abortion was legal; but I could not take the life of an unborn baby within me. Consequently, I had a surgical sterilization of my ovarian tubes.

As our sins grew, our marriage collapsed over increasingly bitter arguments that led to divorce. Most of our 13 years were lived in self-serving idolatry. We injured each other and damaged the spiritual and psychological growth of our children. We played with fire and all five of us were badly burned. He moved out of state with our oldest son while I stayed with our two youngest children to finish school.





LIFE RESTORED IN CHRIST THROUGH COMMUNITY



Upon finishing my graduate degree, I moved to CT to give our children more frequent time with both of their parents than what could be arranged by flying between separate states. On Columbus weekend in October, my parents visited us. That weekend, I decided unexpectedly to join them at Mass. There, I heard the gospel of the man thrown out of the wedding feast because he didn't have the proper garment. I asked them why that happened because I thought it was unfair. Both Mom and Dad didn't know.

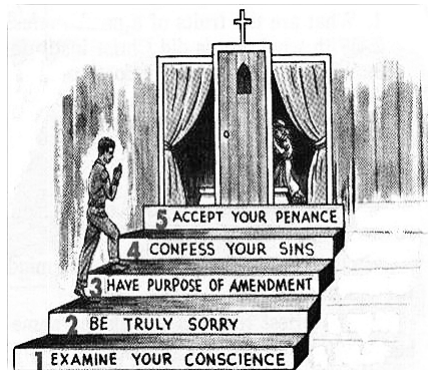
Later that day, Dad explained the custom of those times was to provide a wedding garment for each guest. That particular invited guest had come but refused to wear the provided garment. Years later, I came to understand that I too had refused to put on the garment of faith by leaving the Church.

Soon, I started going to Sunday Mass by myself. I was prepared to stop going if I heard any "hellfire and damnation." Rather than that, I only heard "God loves you" over and over again. I was truly baffled. How could God love me? No one else but

my family loves me. At an unspoken level, I was ashamed of my sins and could not believe in God's merciful love.

Later, I attended an Advent mission in the parish. There the preacher talked about sin and the great balm within the Sacrament of Reconciliation. He told us: "Don't come to confession with a laundry list of sins. Tell me where it hurts." Within myself, I responded: "I can do that. I have a lot of hurts."

On Christmas eve morning, I knelt in the confessional and said: "Bless me Father for I



have sinned. I have been away from the Church for 13 years and I want to come back." The priest said; "My dear, 13 years is a long time to be away. I want you to know that in

all those years, God has loved you." A tear trickled down my cheek. I had opened the door of my soul a tiny crack; and God's divine love slipped into that very narrow entrance. The next day, His merciful love overwhelmed me when I receive Holy Communion at Christmas Mass.

A month later, I went to a nearby Charismatic

prayer group. By watching and listening to others, I learned anew what to believe and how to pray. I took a Life in the Spirit Seminar and heard the personal prayers of others for me. Never had I experienced such love as this.

During that 8-week seminar, I was most impressed by a woman who gave her testimony saying she had always been faithful to God in the Catholic Church but thought she didn't have much to say. While other speakers told of major healings from unbelief and living outside the Catholic faith, her story was of a constant, gentle beckoning to receive new graces and His Divine Providence as wife and mother.

Her testimony has stayed with me. To those of you who are like her, I praise God for His faithfulness in you. Through your Godly lives and continual prayers in union with the Catholic Church, I have been drawn back to the Good Shepherd and experienced many healings to become like you. Thank you for your openness and your faithfulness.

I also offer a word of wisdom that has helped me along the way: "Never compare your experiences or your prayer life to that of others." God is doing something unique in each of us and will do so for all eternity.

Later, I heard about Mother Mary's request. "If my people would go to confession once a month, the Church would be healed." I didn't know why the Church needed healing. I only believed if Our Blessed Mother asked this, then I would do it. I had also learned that many of the saints had confessors. Since I now wanted to be a saint – after only 9 months of being back in the Church – I asked a parish priest to be my confessor. Unbeknownst to me, a trusting relationship developed. Over years, I unburdened my guilt and shame one confession at a time.

I wanted nothing to do with male-female relationships because I thought all men were dominating. This particular priest was gentle, patient and generous. His consistent kindness was the first step of my inner healing. I grew in openness and trust as he challenged me to apply for an annulment. I did not want to re-marry. So why would I need an annulment? I did so in faith, even over my ex-husband's anger and refusal to participate. It was painful healing to write about my first marriage and my many sins. I put my trust in God and not in my own understanding. A year later, the Church granted an annulment. By the light of a single candle, I read the Church's decree of annulment. I wept for so much loss.

LIFE RESTORED IN CHRIST THROUGH SUFFERING



A year passed and there was another Advent mission. I confessed the sin of “not wanting to



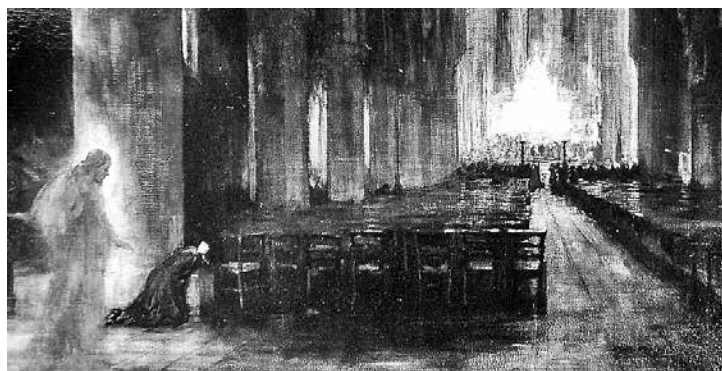
be loved.” The kindly priest replied: “My dear, you have not confessed any sins. You need the help of a clinical psychological counselor.” He blessed me and I went home and cried for an hour.

Through a friend’s referral, I went to a Catholic psychologist who diagnosed me with post-traumatic stress disorder. During the slow and anguishing process of healing, I worked as a single parent staying faithful to Christ.

At work, I was on a publish-or-perish, tenure-track faculty position that required research productivity in addition to teaching college courses. I came to a point where it became clear I had to choose between the time needed for academic research or investing in the emotional labor of psychological healing. Through fidelity to the Most Holy Rosary, I chose the path of healing

at the expense of my career.

Ever so slowly, therapy helped me to heal and trust life again. I am reminded through my prayer journals how much anguish God will bear with another person. Yes, my healing process was traumatizing and paralyzing; but He carried me through it. “My child, in your deepest anguish, it was I that carried you” (Footsteps poem)*. I believe I would not have made it without Him because, for me, it was impossible. “With God, all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26). “My yoke is easy; my burden is light” (Matthew 11:30).



MISSION IN MARRIAGE & FAMILY



I attended a regional prayer group meeting where I met a gentle man named Steve who played soul-soothing worship music in a 4-person music ministry. At the end of the meeting, we met at the food table. He wanted to learn how to dance because he would be best man in his brother's wedding. I told him of a ballroom dance studio near my home. He invited me to go with him. We became friends, dated, courted and then married sacramentally in mid-life two years later.

I am going to ... lead her out into the wilderness and speak to her heart. I am going to ... make the Valley of Misery (Achor) a gateway of hope. There she will respond to me as she did when she was young.... When that day comes – it is Yahweh who speaks – she will call me “My Husband.”
(Hosea 2:16-18)

I will betroth you to myself forever, betroth you with integrity and justice, with tenderness and love; I will betroth you to myself with faithfulness; and you will come to know Yahweh. (Hosea 2:21-22)

God gave me Steve's family name as His covering of grace and Divine Providence. We have grown in marital love for over 25 years. He knows me and he



loves me. Of course there are struggles in our marriage. We are an imperfect yet sacred union in Christ. Steve and I don't think the same; emote our feelings the same, process decision-making

the same, or act the same. We are two separate persons whose souls Christ has bonded together in sacramental love. With Him, we are a union. Apart from Him, we are separate. Indeed, it's taken years for each of us to let Our Lord mold our stubborn wills.

At a Sunday Mass, our pastor recently asked all who were married over twenty-five years to raise their hands. He then said to all of us: "Wasn't she, and wasn't he, a mystery when you dated? Many nodded. Then he added: "I'll bet each of you are still a mystery twenty-five years later!" We laughed, recognizing truth. It takes sacramental grace and purposeful effort to become truly married in Christ.

A major conflict between us was where we would live and work. I had resigned from college teaching to find another academic job. On the other hand, Steve was born and raised in Connecticut and adamant he would not move out of state. It was natural for him to stay locally and for me to follow the job market wherever that would lead.

Instead, God led me into another desert in which I suffered the loss of academic status and the ability to depend on myself economically.

At that time, my self-importance was tied to what I could accomplish as a professional and not on my being His



precious daughter and sister of Christ. On the other hand, Steve is a life-long native of Connecticut who was rooted in extended family, music ministry and a large friendship network. He was fine with my teaching but wouldn't move out of Connecticut.

Instead, Steve went back to school and I took an office job for our bills. It was shocking in our mid-life years to be stripped economically to the bare bones. We took in borders to help with the bills but it impeded our growth in intimacy as a couple. Later, I changed to part-time adjunct faculty

positions at two local universities. After finishing school, Steve found a good job and worked full-time.

After two years of apartment sharing, we moved to Bristol. We were now a married couple in our own apartment and had the space and privacy to work on our own intimacy issues. I have heard intimacy described as “into me you see.” It was harder than we thought to reveal ourselves in vulnerable trust.

We developed deep bonds with our upstairs neighbors, the Brophys. Through them, Steve and I learned how to nurture our marriage. God gave the Brophys to us as a relatable model of holy matrimony. The Holy Spirit bonded our hearts and our lives together in Christ.

During three consecutive summers, I prayed a 54-Day Rosary Novena for academic work at the Catholic College of the Lord’s choice. I had been applying for academic work and obtained interviews but never a job offer.

After years of prayer, economic struggle and job searching, I was heartsick. It took a long time; but I finally understood God was not supporting my academic aspirations. The rosary novena that has “never been known to fail” gave me God’s answer; but not the one I wanted. I went to a church with

a life-sized Pieta statue; wept profusely; and then finally surrendered my academic job search. God used the circumstances of our lives to change our minds, our hearts and our wills.

God blessed two of my children with college education through my brief academic career. College was not for my youngest son who chose a different path. He is a successful business manager. I needed Steve in order to learn how to trust another man to provide for our family's needs. It took a long time to let go of my self-sufficiency.

My problem was a lack of trust in Steve's economic provision even as he was paying all the major bills. His problem was a location-based security that couldn't be violated. Our marital union was purged in the desert that we shared together and moved forward, inch by inch.

Christ fed us His own Body and Blood in Holy Eucharist; in every grace-filled confession of sin even though we couldn't lay the axe to the root of the pride separating us; and in our praying with the Brophys. We could minister to the needs of the poor but not to our own poverty.

At long last, I was open to whatever God wanted. To my surprise, I obtained a job as Director of Religious Education at Saint Ann Church in 1996. It was difficult and exhausting; but I experienced

a sacred meaning to my work that I had never known before. Deacon Joe and Ardy Levesque along with others who were a part of our prayer group genuinely welcomed us.

We didn't know we had stepped into the beginnings of a larger faith-based community at Saint Ann. We learned together how to nurture the faith life of children, teens and adults within and beyond our parish. We were a community of one mind and heart with Christ Our Lord. For Steve and me, these were our "glory years."

After eleven years, our parish experienced financial problems and my full-time position was eliminated. We all anguished over the changes that resulted.

There is a season for every affair under the heavens, a time to gain and a time to lose (Ecclesiastes 3:1,6).

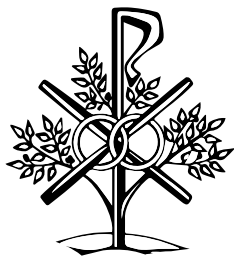
I went on the job market once again, sure that I would continue working as a DRE at another parish. Much to my dismay, that did not happen. I was hired as the Director of the Mass Association at Holy Apostles College and Seminary where I recently retired. I have experienced different blessings through the prayer life, guest speakers and their Theology courses. A bonus was that Steve and I were now on the same work schedule.

We have evenings and weekends together and more time for each other. Our devotion to Our Blessed Mother has increased and we take time to attend to our marriage.

While work is essential for our livelihood, it's only a tool in the hands of the Master. Nothing else is important. God has done for us what we could not do on our own. He has:

- ♥ Softened our hardened hearts;
- ♥ Humbled our pride in ourselves and accomplishments;
- ♥ Taught us to depend on Him through His Sacraments, Mother Mary, community prayer;
- ♥ Given us the only gifts that last forever – faith, hope and charity.

In short, we've found meaning, enduring peace and lasting love.





MISSION IN THE WIDER COMMUNITY



Prayer, faith and an ongoing relationship with Christ in the sacraments deepen my trust in Our Lord's provision for me. I have become like the man who made daily visits to church and piqued St. John Vianney's curiosity. "What do you do when you just sit there in church?" he asked. The man answered: "I look at Him and He looks at me."

Over many years and in small incremental steps, I too learned to be still in the presence of Our Eucharistic Lord. Over time, I noticed changes in me that had occurred outside of adoration time. I had become less self-centered; more patient; attentive to others; and a better listener. It happened just because I wanted to be with Him and He with me.



Later, I was drawn to praying the rosary with Father Pavone's "Rosary for Life" meditations. It strengthened my soul's commitment to Pro-Life prayer. Later, I read an article about "40 Days for Life" in College Station, Texas. I saw that faith, prayer and repeated sacrifices were a powerful spiritual attack on the evil of abortion.



In 2005, there was a 40 Days for Life Prayer Vigil in Norwich. I went with some seminarians from Holy Apostles to Planned Parenthood in Norwich. We prayed outside in the cold and then returned to the seminary. I knew interiorly that being part of 40 Days for Life was a blessing of remarkable spiritual power.

The Almighty has done great things to me; and Holy is His Name (Luke 1:49).

In 2006, the Hartford Archdiocese started 40 Days for Life locally. Since then, I have been on a small team of faith-filled people of different denominations who believe that the power of

collective public prayer will “move mountains of unbelief” to protect the unborn.

During my regular adoration time, an unexpected and deeply personal revelation came to me. Instead of continuing to pray for others tempted to abort their preborn babies, I found that I was praying for myself. In the “still small voice” deep within me, I sensed that I too had aborted my own



unborn babies through the contraceptive means I had used in my first marriage.

I sought counsel to find out if this was even biologically possible. Three wise people confirmed the scientific and spiritual truth of this revelation. Indeed, chemical abortion routinely happens one or more times a year in women who use artificial contraception.

I later read Janet Morana’s testimony about being convicted of unknowingly terminating the life of her baby in utero while she was watching a show about the effects of contraception. She discussed how much a Rachel’s Vineyard retreat healed her soul.

As a result, I went on my own Rachel's Vineyard retreat in the summer of 2006. A compassionate and gifted retreat team helped me to mourn



Rachel's Vineyard

the loss of my unborn babies who could not attach to the wall of my uterus due to effects of contraception. Steve supported me, prayed for me and stood with me as I gave them back to God in a moving farewell prayer service. That set me free and opened a new door of ministry.

I stayed with 40 Days for Life once a year but was also drawn to the Precious Infants ministry. It meets monthly to pray publicly on the sidewalks of abortion centers for conversions for pregnant women who are planning an abortion. We depend on God to touch their souls by praying for them at Mass; walking together for two blocks from the church to the Hartford abortion mill; peacefully praying the rosary and Divine Mercy Chaplet outside the abortion mill; and then returning to the church.

We do something very ordinary but in an extraordinary setting. We offer our collective free speech outside of an abortion center and trust in the power of Eucharistic worship and public prayer to

do what we cannot humanly do: change the hearts and minds of those who support elective abortion rights. We are not alone for Mother Mary, the holy angels and saints and countless millions of aborted babies are with us.



There is a great cloud of witnesses who surround those who pray; help mothers-to-be; work individually or collectively to defend the unborn whether on small or large scales of effort. Knitting prayer shawls for mother-to-be is as important as legislating reform protection for the unborn. Each pro-life action is needed to reverse the culture of death.

Since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us; and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us (Hebrews 12:1).

I was touched by one retired man who prays daily outside the abortion mill in every kind of weather. I heard the story of a woman who saw him praying when she went in for her abortion appointment. While she was inside waiting, she couldn't get the picture of this man out of her mind, fingering his rosary while standing in silent prayer. In her soul, she knew it was wrong to end her baby's life; so she left the building. She then shared with another that it was the one man's public prayers that changed her heart. Not a word was spoken to her – except the Eternal Word in her soul: "Choose life."

That story moved me to increase the sacrifices I make for the unborn. I did so for years by praying the rosary with Mother Mary outside the abortion center. Many of us pray with, or near, those who are dying. I go to pray for the babies who will die that day, and for their mothers who will suffer the traumatic grief of terminating their babies lives, just to let them know they are not alone.

I knew I could not change anyone's decision; but I do firmly believe that God will intervene. I go to offer reparation for my sins as well as for the sins of our culture that advocates and aggressively protects a woman's right to kill the unborn human life within her womb.

Later, I shadowed a sidewalk counselor; and learned how to say a few words to those seeking abortion who might listen. One particular Scripture challenged me to step out of my comfort level and let Our Lord use me as His witness to life.

If you faint in the day of adversity, your faith is small. Rescue those who are being taken away to death; hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter. If you say: "Behold, we did not know this," does not He who keeps watch over your soul know it? And will He not requite man according to his work?" (Proverbs 24:10-12)

What I do is ordinary Christian life empowered by a regular union with Christ in the sacraments and daily prayer. I go to a public place; pray the Rosary; offer women an alternative to abortion; accept their varied responses; and go on to the rest of my day.

What God does is up to His divine will. I will not know the fruit of my offerings until I see Him face to face. I do know He can do more than I possibly ask for or imagine (Ephesians 3:21).

My grace is sufficient for you; for power is made perfect in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9).

My husband and I recently retired. I began volunteering at a charitable organization that sells

Pro-Life license plates as a traveling advertisement for protection of the unborn. Monies raised through the license plates are contributed to the Pregnancy Care Centers of the donor's choice. Funding Pregnancy Care Centers provides the needed services that help pregnant women choose life.

While I can offer hope outside abortion clinics, the delivery of hope comes through the tangible help of those who serve at Pregnancy Care Centers and people who make a difference in the lives of needy pregnant mothers. Together we can and do move mountains of unbelief.



*One night I dreamed a dream.
As I was walking along the beach with my Lord.
Across the dark sky flashed scenes from my life.
For each scene, I noticed two sets of footprints in the sand,
One belonging to me and one to my Lord.
After the last scene of my life flashed before me,
I looked back at the footprints in the sand.
I noticed that at many times along the path of my life,
especially at the very lowest and saddest times,
there was only one set of footprints.
This really troubled me, so I asked the Lord about it.
"Lord, you said once I decided to follow you,
You'd walk with me all the way.
But I noticed that during the saddest
and most troublesome times of my life,
there was only one set of footprints.
I don't understand why, when I needed You the most,
You would leave me."
He whispered, "My precious child, I love you
and will never leave you
Never, ever, during your trials and testings.
When you saw only one set of footprints,
It was then that I carried you."

Bulk purchases of booklets in this series can be arranged by contacting fauxpas@swbell.net.

