

GOD MOMENTS III

True Love Leads to Life



Foreword by Robert Westenberger

WRITTEN AND COMPILED BY
Michele Bondi Bottesi

GOD MOMENTS III

TRUE LOVE LEADS TO LIFE

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MICHELE BONDI BOTTESI

FOREWORD BY
ROBERT WESTENBERGER



Award-Winning Books Available From Joseph Karl Publishing

Your Personal Apostolate: Accepting and Sharing the Love of God

Michele Elena Bondi

2010 CATHOLIC PRESS ASSOCIATION BOOK AWARD WINNER

“***Your Personal Apostolate*** is a small book that packs a big punch. Walking in the footsteps of St. Therese of Lisieux and Blessed Teresa of Calcutta, Michele explores what it means to “accept, return, and share God’s love.” This book would be a wonderful resource for a Bible Study or prayer group. I heartily recommend it.”

—*Patrice Fagnant-MacArthur*,

Editor, *Spiritual Woman* www.spiritualwoman.net

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“Scripture Passages are illustrated with stories from teen’s lives which makes the book very attractive during their formative years. Reflection questions and a meditation accompany each chapter for integration of the principles in the easily read book for teens.”

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“Scriptural, devotional and practical, these books (***Your Preteen Apostolate*** and ***Your Teen Apostolate***) present wonderful life lessons that celebrate teens and preteens and their faith. Excellent not only for preteens and teens, but also for those who walk with them on their daily journey of faith in accepting and sharing the love of God.”

—*Catholic Press Association of the United States and Canada*

God Moments: Stories That Inspire, Moments to Remember

Written and Compiled by Michele Elena Bondi

2011 ROYAL DRAGONFLY BOOK AWARD WINNER

“Even devout believers sometimes feel that God remains somewhere far away, distant and uninvolved in their daily lives. But, as Michele Bondi Bottesi suggests in her book ***God Moments***, God draws near in everyday situations. When one opens one’s eyes, one can see God at work—providing, caring, and teaching. Catholics like Bottesi will be inspired and challenged by this book, which celebrates the intimate faith many adherents crave...However, any Christian believer uninhibited by Catholic theology will also appreciate this discovery of God in the everyday.”

—Diane Gardner, *ForeWord Reviews*

God Moments II: Recognizing the Fruits of the Holy Spirit

Written and Compiled by Michele Elena Bondi

2012 CATHOLIC PRESS ASSOCIATION BOOK AWARD WINNER

Catholic authors, pro-life advocates, bloggers, home educators, a radio show host, speakers, a Marian Catechist, and publishers share their encounters with the Divine through stories that encourage you to recognize the Holy Spirit working within you and through you. May *God Moments II* create a greater awareness of God’s unfathomable love for you and for every person, increase your understanding of the meaning and purpose of your life, and inspire you to greater virtue and deeper surrender to God.

One Man’s Journey to Freedom: Escape From Behind the Iron Curtain

Gene X. Kortsha

WINNER OF FOUR ROYAL DRAGONFLY 2011 BOOK AWARDS

2011 CATHOLIC PRESS ASSOCIATION BOOK AWARD WINNER

“This book has all the ingredients of an exciting novel...drama, romance, suffering, hardship, friendship, sacrifice, betrayal, intrigue, human dignity, human savagery, endurance, expectation, surprise, illusion, disillusion, defiance, defeat, triumph, and much more. The book is full of such beautiful pieces to read along with very interesting events. All is skillfully and truthfully told.”

—Gjon Bucaj, M.D.

Our Treasure

Written by Michele Elena Bondi and

Illustrated by Kristina Marie Pope

WINNER OF FOUR ROYAL DRAGONFLY 2011 BOOK AWARDS

WINNER OF FIVE PURPLE DRAGONFLY 2011 BOOK AWARDS

“This award-winning picture book from Catholic publisher Joseph Karl Publishing asks First Communicants where our true Treasure can be found. It’s a fun way for kids to learn about the search for what truly matters in our lives, with delightful illustrations. It is a great keepsake book and would be perfect for classrooms. Those who are preparing children for their First Eucharist will find this a joy to share with their students.”

—*Nancy Carabio Belanger*, Author,
Olivia and the Little Way and
Olivia’s Gift

A New Voice for a Broken Soul

Paul A. Ray

Journey with Catholic author Paul A. Ray through the years of his self-destructive addiction to alcohol, to the moment of his miraculous and dramatic healing and life-changing response to being called to serve the Lord within His One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. Paul’s powerful testimonial reveals the unfathomable love and mercy of God, and assures us that every single person can find hope through Jesus Christ.



God Moments III: True Love Leads to Life
is dedicated to Belinda Bondi (1963–2011).

Her holy life and legacy remind us
that every immortal soul
is loved into being with great purpose,
is valued by God beyond measure,
and is to be loved and valued by each one of us.

Our beloved Belinda,
sister, daughter, granddaughter, niece, aunt,
cousin, colleague, and friend,
we love you forever.

*O God,
show yourself more and more to this poor heart of mine,
and complete in me the work you have begun.
I hear deep within me, a voice which says to me repeatedly –
sanctify yourself and sanctify others.*

— St. Pio of Pietrelcina

EXPLANATION OF THE FRONT AND BACK COVERS

The picture on the front cover is based on the devotion of placing baby socks, booties, or other items on images or statues of Blessed Mother while praying for the unborn, as in *Damian and the Miraculous Devotion* presented in Chapter 3. Thank you to Linda for her delightful suggestion to use this particular image on the cover of the book, Father Luigi Gabris for lovingly arranging the picture and photographer Tim Fuller for acquiring the image.

In this book comprised of so many deeply personal and meaningful stories, one individual's life is highlighted throughout to profoundly show how every single life has great purpose. That person is the author's late sister, Belinda. Belinda points us to Jesus, the central figure in the history of mankind, our model to follow, and the One we must turn to for an end to abortion. +

"There is no stopping abortion without the Eucharist." ~ Father John A. Hardon, S.J. ¹

1. John A. Hardon, S.J., *There Is No Stopping Abortion without the Eucharist*. Copyright © 2000–2012 by www.therealpresence.org. All rights reserved worldwide. Used with permission.

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FOREWORD

Robert Westenberger

I believe everyone who seeks God with an open mind and heart will have God moments. Some God moments can be as subtle as an unexpected kind word from a friend at a moment when you needed it most, or they can be as dramatic as a healing, whether physical, emotional, or spiritual.

God moments are as different as the people who experience them. God knows exactly what we need and when we need it for the benefit of our soul and the souls of others, like many who have suffered traumatic loss or pain and have then turned to God for healing.

I have had my share of God moments. I almost died in a car accident in 1990, and my 20-year-old brother Glenn was killed in 1991 on the same road where I had my accident. We were both intoxicated and had fallen asleep at the wheel. When I was woken up early on December 21, 1991 by my brother Steve, he said two words with tears in his eyes that would forever change my life... “Glenn’s dead.”

Like many who have gone through a traumatic experience, I can’t say I was aware of God’s presence at that time, but looking back it was obvious He had His hand in guiding my family and me through the trial we faced. It was only years later, after another storm came my way in the

form of divorce and separation from my children who were 11 and 12 at the time, that I cried out to the Blessed Mother for help. I had not returned to the Church yet, but one night the pain from not living with my children anymore was so great I called out to God's Mother for help.

I had gone to Catholic school for nine years and even though I had lived like a pagan for the last 20 years, I always remembered the beautiful statues of Our Lady with her arms open wide so as to welcome any one of her children who needed to be comforted. I experienced a peace that night that was not of this world. All I can say is that it was like a warm embrace; I knew I was loved. The next morning I woke up with a profound feeling that everything was going to be all right.

So while I'm sure I had God moments before that, the night I asked Our Lady for help was the first of many memorable moments when God manifested His love for me. Not all God moments are comfortable ones. The evil one can attack us in various ways and since God allows it, it is a God moment. When I first came back to the faith, I experienced different manifestations of the evil one and his minions, both visually and spiritually. It was scary, but confirmed to me that spiritual warfare is a reality and we ignore it at our own peril.

Our wonderful God will use any means necessary to wake us from our spiritual slumber. But often times God moments are beautiful spiritually and to the senses. The God moment that motivated me to go to confession after 30-plus years of being away from the Church occurred when I awoke one night to the smell of incense while visiting my parents. Right away I recognized the scent as the same smell that I experienced as a child when I went to Mass. It was clear to me: God wanted His son to come home, back to the Catholic Church.

God wants every moment to be a God moment, and the more we conform ourselves to His will, the more we will recognize these precious moments.

Robert Westenberger is a cradle Catholic who came back to the faith in 2006 after living like a pagan for over 25 years. He is devoted to the Blessed Mother and credits her with leading him back home to the Catholic Church and to Our Lord. A divorced father of two teenagers, Glenn and Jenna, he is involved in the pro-life movement and is a member of Pro Bikers for Life, which is associated with the Sisters of Life in New York City. Robert prays the Rosary daily and is preparing to write a book on the Seven Sorrows of Our Lady. He lives in the mountains of southwestern Virginia with his two dogs.

INTRODUCTION

CUSTOM MADE BY CHRIST

Michele Bondi Bottesi

Imagine you had an ancestor who lived at the time of Christ, that your forebear was a neighbor of the Holy Family, and he had commissioned St. Joseph to make a table. St. Joseph gave the job to Jesus, who created an exceptionally handcrafted, unique table of the highest-quality materials. Jesus made the table with the greatest care, and poured tremendous love into His work because He valued the owner. That table was truly a masterpiece of exceptional quality.

Imagine that His holy Mother had brushed the table with her mantle many times when she walked into the workshop to bring a cool drink and a meal to her humble and hardworking Son. As a caring mother would, she also placed great value on the care that was poured into its creation for the sake of the owner.

Now imagine that the very same table was passed down through the years, and at one point it was given to you. Just think about the significance of having such a priceless treasure in your home!

What would you do with an item of such incalculable worth? Would you reject it, give it away, try to sell it, or would you throw it away? Would you accept the table from the one who gave it to you? Would you value it, perhaps have it appraised? How would you treat it?

Would you be proud of the table, and welcome family, friends, and perhaps even strangers into your home to see something so priceless? Maybe after seeing you regard it so highly, others would value the table just as much. Maybe they would value the table even more than you!

Actually, you do have something in your home that was exceptionally well handcrafted by God, is totally unique, and was made with the greatest care, tremendous love, and out of the highest quality materials. That which you possess is also valued greatly by His most loving Mother!

In fact, every home has an item of such great significance, and God has placed immeasurable value on His creation. We must, too.

YOU were created by God, and He loves and values you beyond measure. Likewise, everyone you know and everyone you do not know were also created by God, and He loves and values them beyond measure too.

The personal stories in *God Moments III: True Love Leads to Life* take you straight to the heart of the right-to-life movement, allowing you to experience real life-and-death situations seen through the eyes of God, children, and the men and women on both sides of the abortion debate. Learn the many ways people choose to support the culture of death, oftentimes with very good intentions and completely unaware of the consequences. Step onto the battlefield during the most colossal humanitarian disaster in the history of mankind and ask yourself, “Whose side am I on?”

The third book in the award-winning *God Moments* series integrates Catholic Church teaching on the sanctity of life to cultivate an unconditional respect for the great dignity of the human person, and encourages you to trust in the Lord’s judgment and reverence His most perfect timing.

True love leads to life, and so many other wonderful things! Do not wait to get involved in the pro-life movement; God has prepared a very special place within it just for you.

“God has allowed the plague of abortion, I hope you will believe me, because of our sins, and don’t change the phenomenal adjective, because of OUR sins, yours and mine.” ~ Father John A. Hardon, S.J.²

2. John A. Hardon, S.J., *Sermon on Abortion*. Copyright © 2000–2012 by www.thealpresence.org. All rights reserved worldwide. Used with permission.

CHAPTER 1

HUMAN LIFE IS SACRED

Forgiveness Is Its Daily Bread • 3

These Are the Children God Blessed Me With • 13

God Doesn't Give Us Anything We Can't Handle • 17

The Value of One Life • 19

Assuring the Self-Doubting Husband • 21

Just a Glimpse of Christ's Agony in the Garden • 29

*"If we do not teach people that abortion is wrong,
others may convince them that murder is right."*

~ True Love Leads to Life

FORGIVENESS IS ITS DAILY BREAD

Michele Bondi Bottesi

In the second half of last year, *God Moments II: Recognizing the Fruits of the Holy Spirit* was being edited one final time before heading off to print. My sister Belinda had graciously given permission to include several of her beautiful poems in the book. She had been diagnosed with late stage 3 breast cancer two years prior, and told me the news when I called to wish her a happy birthday the day she turned 46.

When she was diagnosed, Belinda's medical team determined that aggressive treatment was necessary to try to save her life. She immediately began chemotherapy, and after her first treatment she almost died. That story was shared in the first God Moments book, *God Moments: Stories That Inspire, Moments to Remember*, and is presented again here to provide the background for what followed two years later.

How Jesus Made His Way to His Beloved in Isolation

This is what your Beloved says: I am your salvation, your peace, and your life; keep close to Me, and in Me you will find peace. Abandon the love of passing things and seek those that are everlasting. What else are the things of time but deceptive? And how can any creature help you if your Lord abandons you?

Therefore, leaving all creatures and worldly things behind you, do your best to make yourself pleasing to Him, so that after this life you may come to life everlasting in the kingdom of heaven.

—Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ* ³

In September 2009, I called my sister Belinda to wish her a happy birthday and during our conversation, she told me that just the day before, her doctor informed her she had stage 3 breast cancer. In that moment, the world as we knew it changed forever. Immediately she endured a hectic, weeklong battery of tests, doctor visits, and meetings with her oncology team. For her and our mother who accompanied her, it was a brutal test of mental and physical endurance.

Right after that, she began chemotherapy and went on medical leave.

During that first round of chemo, she developed a life-threatening infection, was admitted to the hospital, and was placed in isolation. A few days later I dropped my children off at their schools and went to Holy Mass at our former parish. Toward the end of the Mass, the Lord told me to bring the Eucharist to my sister. After the final blessing, I signed out a pyx and placed the Blessed Sacrament inside.

During the half-hour journey to pick up my mother before going on to the hospital, I held onto the pyx and contemplated the fact that *the Creator of the universe was with me!* At that moment I knew without a doubt that something extraordinary was going to happen. *Something extraordinary was already happening!*

Before entering Belinda's room in the oncology unit, my mother and I put masks on to protect her from infection. We walked into the room and into one of the most transforming moments I had ever experienced. My suffering sister sat in a chair by the window. Immediately, before even one word was said, the three of us were united in a very powerful moment of shared sorrow. We were also united with our suffering Lord, who was with us.

After greeting one another in that profoundly sorrowful moment, I held the pyx out to my sister and said, "Guess Who I brought with me? I

brought Jesus.” Belinda started to cry, and the incalculable presence of God in the tiny white Host there in the isolation unit of the very large medical complex was incredibly merciful and comforting.

As I hugged my sister I cried too, and said to her, “*We suffer with you, because we love you.*”

Once she had a private moment with our Lord after having received Him in the Eucharist, Belinda told me that she had called the chaplain that morning and asked him to please bring her Holy Communion. However, after having visited others in the hospital, he decided not to risk further endangering her health by going into her room in isolation.

I said to her, “Belinda, Jesus was going to make it to you, one way or another.” Our Savior knew the desire of her heart, and made sure He was there with her when she needed Him most.

Jesus loves each one of us and wants to come to every one of us, no matter where we are.

After Belinda finished her regimen of chemotherapy, she had surgery and then radiation therapy. She went back to work immediately after having completed her final round of radiation, and was told by her doctor that the cancer was in remission. At that point, everyone was hopeful that the aggressive treatment had worked. But Belinda’s health was not improving.

Belinda wrote the following poem, which she framed and gave with appreciation to those who had been so kind to her.

Thank You

I light a candle when I pray,
And often when I do,
I sense my soul touched by grace,
Gently, as night turns to dawn, to day.

I have a hidden spring within,
Where there's a flowing fountain,
Overflowing with gratitude,
Because my heart's been touched by you.

Touched by all you've done for me,
Your thoughtful generosity,
That I think of frequently,
For it has meant so much to me.

My heart is full of gratitude,
When I think of how blessed I've been;
And when in pensive solitude,
I ask, "What for others *I* can do?"

The candle in my room burns bright,
In the silence of the night;
Shimmering in breath of wind,
Or fanned perhaps by angel's wings.

—**Belinda Bondi**

“God, I Can’t Believe You Would Ask This of Us”

Not long after, Belinda learned that the cancer had aggressively spread throughout her body. She began treatment again, but it was apparent that without a miracle, she did not have much time left before she would enter eternity. It was God’s will that she would enter into eternity soon.

The news deeply touched everyone who knew Belinda, and led me to think one morning in church while in the company of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, “God, I cannot believe that You would ask this of us, not after everything that has happened to us already.”

As soon as I had finished the thought, I looked at the crucifix and that is where the thought ended. For God did not say to us, “I cannot believe you would ask this of My Son, after all that I have done for you already.”

Love lives only by sacrifice.

How can we not endure all that God asks of us when His only Son willingly suffered and died, in the most barbaric manner, for our redemption?

Sweet Jesus, we ask you for the strength to persevere and to accomplish the will of our Father, just like You did. Truly, truly, God is so in love with us. My Lord and my God, I love You back. Forever!

“Forgiveness Is Its Daily Bread, and to Patience Is Love Wed”

One evening, I called Belinda on the phone to chat. Earlier that day, I had been working on the final revisions to *God Moments II*. During a previous visit, she mentioned that she had taken a book out of the library about writing poems, and had subsequently made changes to one of hers. That poem was in the manuscript, and so during our phone conversation I asked her to tell me the changes.

I put the phone down on the desk in my home office and picked up my pen.

“True love is not made of sand, that’s why it withstands the test of time,” she began.

As she read the poem, I crossed out words and phrases, and noted her changes. That moment was so deeply moving and meaningful.

My sister was born a year and a half before me. When we were little, our mother used to make us cute outfits and dress us like twins. She was my only sister, my friend, playmate, and companion. In adulthood she was a second mother to my three children and my confidant, a holy soul who understood the tremendous challenges of living a holy life in our modern era.

The changes she made to her poem were numerous, and so she read her poem back to me a second time. As she did so, I cried silently, for so many different reasons.

Life is such a precious, priceless gift from God. Sacrificial love is a tremendous gift of unfathomable worth, too. After all the changes were made, she asked me to do one of the most difficult things I have ever had to do. She asked me to read the poem back to her.

Together, we brought to a close the end of a significant chapter of our shared experience. The moment also signified the precious opportunities God gives us to cooperate with His grace and love one another as He commanded us.

And so I read her poem back to her, after quickly asking God to give me the strength to get through it.

"True love is not made of sand, that's why it withstands the test of time. It does not fade like a rainbow does, or the sun that dims at dusk.

"For forgiveness is its daily bread, and to patience is love wed. It is lasting, and never gives up, And it loves, it loves, very much.

"Its heart does not break for pity's sake, or leave memories at wakes. True love is not made of sand, that's why, It withstands the tests of time.

"Nor does it change like the seasons do, for it's genuine and true. It is golden and will never rust, and it loves, it loves, very much.

*"It does not fade like a rainbow does, Or the sun that dims at dusk. True love is not made of sand, that's why, It withstands the tests of time."*⁴

God Moments II was published in October 2011. On June 22, 2012, the Catholic Press Association of the United States and Canada recognized *God Moments II* with a book award.

The Angel by the Tabernacle

One morning toward the end of Belinda's life, during her final hospitalization, I remained in church after the Latin Holy Mass to say the Rosary during Eucharistic exposition and adoration. While praying, I noticed that the statue of the angel to the left of the monstrance and tabernacle *was moving*. The other angel statue, on the right side, was not moving. The movement was unusual, and did not have the appearance of what motion looks like when we move.

I told Jesus that I found it curious that only one angel was moving, and even more curious that even though the angel was moving, it *did not seem to be going anywhere*. The Lord flooded my soul with such sweet consolation. He then said that Belinda would not die within the next few days as her doctors had predicted, and *we were being given the opportunity to suffer longer*. It was very clear that this precious opportunity was a tremendous gift to all of us from God.



The Angel by the Tabernacle

When Jesus provides the soul with even a glimpse of the enormous, eternal value of suffering which is truly beyond our human comprehension, one is willing to do anything for Him. After all, He emptied Himself completely for us. God shows us great favor when He asks us to suffer in imitation of Christ.

That same Wednesday morning, two people visited Belinda in the hospital and asked the dying, suffering woman all sorts of personal things, openly questioned her apostolate, *and asked her how she could put her family through so much grief*. The devil was mocking her through those people, because he is well aware that redemptive suffering in imitation of Christ is priceless.

The next morning before Holy Mass, I prayed and because so much was happening, had forgotten all about the angel by the tabernacle. The Lord brought it to my attention, so I looked at the angel and saw that it was no longer moving.

I was then reminded of my remark the previous morning that *the angel was moving but did not seem to be going anywhere*, and it was revealed that the angel had gone to my sister and was with her as the demon assaulted her in the hospital the day before, while patiently suffering as she journeyed along her Way of the Cross.

I called my sister after Holy Mass that morning, and told her about the angel by the tabernacle that the Lord had sent to be by her side. I reminded her that her suffering had tremendous value, and that she was chosen by God to bring Christ to people because so many do not know Him.

Belinda entered into eternal life on December 14, 2011, on the Feast of St. John of the Cross, at the age of 48. There was so much more that Belinda had hoped to accomplish. She always put the needs of others before her own. Parting caused every member of our family profound sorrow. Our consolations are that during her life, she was properly loved and valued in return by her family and friends, her soul was prepared to enter into eternity, and God's will had been accomplished.

Belinda's beautiful book of poems was on display at her wake, and we

heard many loving testimonials from family and friends who confirmed that her holy life had profoundly impacted the lives of many. Those she loved and who loved her in return were given copies of *God Moments II* as a memorial of her beautiful life and legacy.

My entry in the funeral home's online guest book read:

My beloved sister Belinda passed into eternal life on the Feast of St. John of the Cross. How appropriate, for she embraced her cross faithfully and heroically, and truly lived, loved, served, and suffered in imitation of Christ. We love our dear Belinda forever, and today are two days closer to seeing her again, in eternity.

In a dream I had shortly before God called her home, Belinda was walking down a corridor. She was heading toward heaven, and my three children Andre, Nick, and Alyssa were walking by her side (she was a second mother to them). I was several feet behind them. Belinda left a trail of relics in her wake, and I collected them as we journeyed forward. So many relics trailed behind her, and they were all different sizes and shapes. I quickly glanced at the relics as I picked them up off the floor. Some of the saints I knew, and others I did not.

Belinda is a very holy soul, who now lives forever among the saints. She is most willing to intercede on your behalf from the Beatific Vision, so consider her your sister and friend in heaven. Be sure to turn to her in times of trial, or for inspiration on your journey toward greater Divine intimacy. She continues to value being of service to anyone in need.

On behalf of her entire family, I thank you for all that you have done during Belinda's life and illness to bring the love and mercy of Christ to us. Your kindness has imitated our most loving Savior, Who poured Himself out completely for each one of us. It meant a lot to her, and it meant a lot to us, which also meant a great deal to her because she always thought of other people first.

Commensurate with the simple and holy way she led her life, we ask our dear friends who would like, to please have a Holy Mass said for Belinda at your parish. That would mean the most to us.

The morning after Belinda passed away, during a Holy Hour before

Holy Mass, I stared deep into eternity and said to her over and over, “*I’m looking for you.*”

The day after her funeral, my children and I were returning home after visiting with family, when the grief of our temporary separation caused me great sorrow. Then I noticed the license plate of the vehicle in front of us: LOOK4ME.

Yes, my dear sister, I will always look for you, and I will always find you, because I know just where you are.

Thank You, God, for creating Belinda. Her life and legacy are powerful reminders that You create every single life with great purpose. She remains an irreplaceable gift to us, and we love her forever.



Belinda's senior picture

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3. Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ* (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Corporation, 1993), p 100.
 4. Michele Elena Bondi, *God Moments II: Recognizing the Fruits of the Holy Spirit* (Rochester, MI: Joseph Karl Publishing, 2011), *True Love* by Belinda Bondi, p. 10.

THESE ARE THE CHILDREN GOD BLESSED ME WITH

Christy O'Brien

We are all created for a purpose: To know, love, and serve God! When we know Him, love Him, and serve Him we are at the center of God's will for our lives. His will becomes our will and our lives are forever changed. When we follow God's plan He can make the impossible happen. Once we experience this we have our daily proof that we are living our purpose.

We are all called to holiness. This does not mean we have to be perfect. It's a way of life that allows us to unite ourselves with Christ. We either love God or we love "the earthly city" built "by love of self to the exclusion of God," St. Augustine wrote. Will we choose God or earthly treasures? Seek, find, and embrace holiness.

I believe that God is in control of my life. I have said "Yes" because I have a choice. I have chosen to go to the hard places instead of remaining comfortable. I want to give my life away so His glory can be revealed in my life. As I live in the center of God's will I know it will not be easy, but this is what is best for me and for His glory. He will come with me to these hard places because I am doing what I was created for.

The theme of my life seems to be "openness." Openness to the will of God and openness to the gift of life. Through this journey of marriage and motherhood I have come to experience God's grace. His grace is

sufficient and enough. It allows me to become one with my husband and parent my children.

I never planned to have a large family. Over the years, I've come to believe and understand with more passion than ever that God is in control. His grace blessed and helped me to understand what He knew was best for me. I cherish the grace that is my unique family. I learned recently that my children aren't really mine to begin with; they are His. They are gifts that He has graced me with.

Would God give me more than I can handle? Yes, because as I've learned over the years that's when I surrender to Him and He takes over by doing the impossible in my life. I find myself wanting "more than I can handle" because it requires less of me and more of Him. This is where His glory can shine and there is no doubt who is in control. The people around me can see His grace and faithfulness shining through my life. There is a joy and a peace that comes over me as I surrender to Him and watch Him take over and do the impossible.

There is nothing spectacular about my everyday craziness. I've never in my life had to give so much of myself that some days it hurts, even to the point of feeling like I don't recognize my body anymore. This is happening because I'm following Jesus into the impossible, doing the little I can and trusting Him to do the rest. Jesus loved me first so I love Him back. When my days are difficult and I'm tempted to think, "How can I raise one more child?" I remember His promise. He sees, He knows, and He is with me. I want to be His disciple, and it requires that I carry my cross and follow Him.

I like being in the center of God's will for my life. God's plan is a lot better than mine would be with my limited sight. In the last two years impossible things have happened in my life. I believe it is because I said "yes" to God. I chose to not store up my treasures on earth but instead to store up for myself treasures in heaven.

Two years ago, after telling God our three grave reasons why we were going to use natural family planning (NFP) to avoid getting pregnant, He in His ultimate power took those reasons away. He not only took our

reasons away but then showered His abundant blessings upon us. As we discerned His call to be open to the gift of life I heard God ask me if I would be willing to have twins for Him. This was a big deal for me. I could handle one child. I had six children at the time so what was one more? However, the question wasn't one more but two.

I knew then exactly what my "yes" would mean, and it certainly wouldn't be about making my life easier. What I realized, though, is that life isn't supposed to be easy. Christ certainly didn't have an easy life. He suffered and died so I could spend eternity with Him. It seems to me that I would then need to go to the hard places to be able to fully appreciate the joy that comes from being at the center of His will and knowing that He coordinated everything to His perfect timing.

Well, our seventh child was born and he doesn't have a twin. I've often wondered, "Did I hear God correctly that night?" I was reminded recently that maybe through that dialog He just wanted me to grow, and wanted to see if I would say yes. Was I like Abraham, and He just wanted to make sure I was willing to sacrifice it all for Him, just to be told that I didn't really have to?

By saying yes to God, I now find myself in a dialog with the Lord in a way I've never been before. Would God call out to me in the middle of the night asking more of me? Does this kind of thing happen nowadays? The Lord talked to Jonah, Joshua, Abraham, Moses, and Samuel, but would He talk like that to me on a January night in 2012? We read these Bible stories without really giving them a second thought. These were real people with real families who answered His call. The God of then is the same God of today. These men took the task God assigned them and with His help they did it. He chose them. So why can't He choose me or you? I believe He can, and all He's waiting for is us to respond to His invitation.

It was this particular night in January that He was calling out to us to become one. The first time we didn't respond. The second time He set off our fire alarm after we'd been asleep a few hours. We rolled over and went back to bed. Then again the fire alarm sounded. In a very clear way that only comes from a dialog with the Lord, I heard him speaking to my

heart. “I’m calling out to you to trust in Me. Will you?” I almost said out loud, “Are you talking to me?” So with courage and not knowing the path, I took that first step. I felt like Peter getting out of the boat and stepping on the water. I had complete faith that Jesus would not let me drown.

The first reading at Mass that morning was from the book of Samuel, when he was sleeping and the Lord called to Him. He called him three times and he didn’t recognize it was the Lord calling him. Eli finally understood that it was the Lord who was calling Samuel and told him to reply, “Speak, for your servant is listening.” How many times does the Lord call each of us and we don’t recognize His voice? It was confirmation to me that I had heard the Lord calling me in the night and I had responded with a resounding “Yes!”

I want big things from God. So I don’t find it strange when He asks big things of me. I know what I’m living for. Resurrection is real. My openness to life is more powerful than death. With all my weakness God says I can do the impossible because I’m an ordinary person serving an extraordinary God. I need to live this kind of life because Christ present in me is the only hope I have of being Christ to my children.

God will provide. I’m not naïve; I’ve seen Him do it. I am dependent on a God Who loves my children more than I do. Daily, in my ups and downs, I am becoming transformed into the image of the One Who made me. He uses these ups and downs for His glory. Our souls are created to give honor and praise to God. What a blessing to bring one more soul into this world!

Yes, Lord, I trust in You! I trust that You know what’s best for me! I trust that you will provide for our needs! I trust that You can accomplish the impossible! And because I said, “Yes!” We will be welcoming another O’Brien into our family in October. Oh Lord, Who have given me so much, have given me one thing more, a grateful heart.

GOD DOESN'T GIVE US ANYTHING WE CAN'T HANDLE

Ellen Gable Hrkach

The meeting had ended and I was casually chatting with some of the attendees. One young woman handed me the ultrasound photo of her 14-week unborn baby.

“Beautiful,” I said.

“I’m going to have an abortion.” The words made me gasp. It was the last thing I thought I would hear from a woman showing me an ultrasound photo of her unborn baby. All I could manage to say was, “Why?”

“The doctor is pretty sure that the baby has spina bifida because he isn’t moving his legs. And I can’t deal with a handicapped child right now.” This particular woman already had two small children and she was currently separated from her husband.

“What about adoption?” I asked.

“Who would want to adopt a handicapped baby?”

“Lots of people would. I know many couples who have adopted babies with disabilities.”

She looked down at the photo and shook her head. “I’ve already made up my mind.”

I silently prayed, *Please God, give me the words to convince her not to kill her baby.*

“God doesn’t give you anything you can’t handle. He knows you can handle this. And...look at your baby. You have a picture of him right in your hands.”

She sighed as she studied the photo. “But his legs didn’t move.”

“Perhaps, but his heart was beating, right? He’s alive.”

“Yeah...I guess.”

Soon our conversation was interrupted. I was disappointed because I didn’t want it to end. Part of me wanted to shake her and say, “Please don’t kill your baby!” But I didn’t.

She walked out the door. On the way home, I continued to pray. I prayed for her over the next few days and weeks, afraid to call her, in case she had gone ahead with the abortion.

Two weeks later, she called me.

“How are you doing?” I asked.

“Okay.” Her voice sounded quiet, almost sad. A lump formed in my throat. A few seconds passed. Finally, she spoke.

“I didn’t have the abortion. I couldn’t do it.”

I breathed a sigh of relief. “That’s wonderful. You won’t regret it.”

“You were right.”

“I was?”

“Yes. When I went home, I thought about those words, ‘God doesn’t give you anything you can’t handle,’ and I realized that you were right. No matter what happens, I can handle this.”

Five months later, she gave birth to a healthy baby boy with no sign of spina bifida.

Ellen Gable Hrkach is a wife to James, mother to five sons, and award-winning author of three novels, *Emily’s Hope* (www.emilyshope.com), *In Name Only* (www.innameonly.ca), and *Stealing Jenny* (www.stealingjenny.com), and one non-fiction book called *Come My Beloved: Inspiring Stories of Catholic Courtship* (www.comemybeloved.com). Her blog is at <http://ellengable.wordpress.com>. She is a reviewer for CatholicFiction.net and a regular columnist for CatholicMom.com and AmazingCatechists.com. She is a frequent contributor to Catholic Exchange, Family Foundations magazine, and co-creator of the Family Life cartoon. She and her husband are a certified NFP teaching couple for CCL and are active in marriage preparation in their diocese.

THE VALUE OF ONE LIFE

Andre Bottesi

Sometimes I ponder the value of my own life. I think to myself, *What have I done to deserve all that I have? Why do I live while others die?* I have wondered how many cows have died just to feed me, how many trees have been cut down to make my home or to fill my books with pages.

I think about all the hours I spent at school and all the hours my parents spent caring for me. Am I really so special to be worth all this trouble? Why does my existence matter?

After much thought I have discovered why so much time and resources have been spent to keep me alive, and are spent to keep us all alive. The reason is that we are human beings; we are created in God's image. Each one of us was created for a purpose, and much time and many resources are required to fulfill each person's purpose. We are that special.

Never forget that there is a God who loved you so much that He made your existence possible and gave you your own unique purpose that is unlike anyone else's. Don't think that there are other teachers like you or other doctors like you or whatever other occupation you have. Just because you have the same job as someone else doesn't mean that your purpose is the same.

Unlike them, you have your own unique family and friends whom you affect, love, and care for. You help them out and make them happy. That is part of your purpose, and no two people have the same exact purpose. There is one thing that we do have in common though, and that is to get to heaven by serving God and becoming more like Him, as we guide others to Christ.

“Human life is sacred because each human being is personally willed by God in order to know, love and serve Him, and thereby reach its heavenly home in the Beatific Vision of the Holy Trinity.” ~ Father John A. Hardon, S.J. ⁵

So go fulfill your purpose, and show everyone that all the time and resources spent to fuel your existence were worth it, because they are. Your life is sacred!

Andre J. Bottesi is an award-winning Catholic author at Joseph Karl Publishing and a producer at Apostolate Films. He is in the 12th grade at Rochester High School and enjoys filmmaking, mini-figure modeling, building things, playing with his pets, and hanging out with his friends. Andre lives with his family in Rochester Hills, Michigan and is an altar boy at Ss. Cyril & Methodius Slovak Catholic Church. Currently, he is writing his second book.

5. John A. Hardon, S.J., *The Catholic Church: The Divinely Ordained Protector of Human Life*. Copyright © 2000–2012 by www.therealpresence.org. All rights reserved worldwide. Used with permission.

ASSURING THE SELF-DOUBTING HUSBAND

Chère Bernhard

Few of us have had to face our eternity as our immediate future, rather than the far-off imagined, fluffy-cloud place to dwell after we have turned gray and die. After having faced five previous miscarriages and losing six babies (one pregnancy was twins) due to a hyper-coagulation blood disease called Antiphospholipid Syndrome (APS), I had given up on having more children other than the one son I had, and more importantly and even more sadly, I had given upon God.

Miraculously, just before Christmas of 2011, when I thought I was having my sixth miscarriage, I instead saw a strong and steady heartbeat on the ultrasound in my OB's office. While I was trying to keep on track with my seventh pregnancy, and holding on to the eighth life within my womb as well as my faith, my condition became more difficult and required intense medicinal therapy, for my own life was in jeopardy. To make matters even harder to deal with, my second son who was growing within my womb would need to be born at 38 weeks to reduce the risk of stillbirth. This meant having a C-section. As most people know, surgery has its risks and benefits. However, for someone with APS, these risks grow astronomically. For these patients, even the most minor of surgeries can cause catastrophic results, including organ failure and even death. However, if it meant that my son would be born alive, then I would do the

C-section, no matter what anyone else said. I thought to myself, I have fought too hard to allow God to take him away from me now.

Despite my stubbornness, I feared for my family and this fear was compounded by a dream that I had at three months into my pregnancy of my own death after giving birth. However, in that dream I was given assurance from the good Lord that my son would be born, and a heavenly peace to write to the men in my life: my husband, my son, and the son yet to be born.

With a stoic face and strength of love that can only be given by our most merciful Savior, I wrote these letters, hoping to prepare them for a life without me.

Thankfully, the Author of life did not write “The End” for me yet! Instead I prefer to imagine He has written “to be continued...” with my son’s lives as the next book of an endless saga of which I happily enjoy playing a role in, no matter how small of a part it may be.

Chère shares all three of her letters. This letter to her husband Don is presented here in the first chapter; the letters to her sons can be found in Chapters 3 and 4.

My Dearest Don,

Where do I start? Writing to the boys was a lot easier...memories and emotion flowed more quickly into those letters. Liam told me this morning, after you left for work, the reason why he doesn’t want to be a priest. He said it was because he watched our Wedding DVD. He wants to have a wife and “maybe 10 kids.” I laughed, yet I wanted to cry so desperately. When I’m gone, I encourage you to be open and honest with him about the whole situation. You can’t hide anything from him because he’ll just go find out the answer from someone else. Assure him it wasn’t because of the baby but because of my APS disease that I’m no longer with you all. Reassure him of yours and my love for him frequently. I beg you not to hide your feelings from him. If you do, he’ll sense it and feel like he should do the same and that would be a shame because his love for others is deep and has no end.

Keep the appointment to sign on the house on August 2, no matter what. Keep your promise to me that our boys will have a place to be safe and play in their own backyard. Liam is going to need it as refuge when kids are unkind to him because of his cerebral palsy. And along with Max, he'll be able to forget more easily the harsh words spoken of the day, by looking out for him and teaching him new games to play. Let Liam help you with Max. He's so eager to be involved with Max, so if he's not, he may think he's been forgotten. Remind them often as they are growing up that they will be each other's life-long friend for no one will be able to understand them as well as the other brother.

After you move into the house, I ask you when you are cleaning out everything (and you will need to), please be sure to keep the things I've made or sewed, my jewelry, my genealogy stuff, and anything else that you think might be special for the boys (like the letters and cards I have in my craft dresser) and save it for



Max's baptism

them. Save my wedding band and engagement ring for them too. I've told them in their letters that you would. It would be a waste for me to be buried with them. The crucifix that my Grandma Holzschuh gave to me that hangs on the chain that my Grandma and Grandpa Sanborn gave me can be given to the boy who enters seminary first. If neither one does, then give it to the one who would like to have it. Anything else can be given away as you see fit.

When it comes to the future of the boys and all the great highs and lows of parenting them, just trust your instincts. Don't worry about what I would think or anyone else for that matter. Just do what you think is best for them. I trust you with them. You really are the best dad that I know they could have. Gently and firmly encourage them to keep up a life of faith within the Church and if you don't know what to do at certain moments, it's OK to ask for help. Asking for help is never a sign of weakness but one of strength. I trust you'll keep up your prayer life too. And keep praying with Liam and include Max. You will be the best witness to them of the strength that Christ can provide when you are struggling. You can show them that with Christ and constant prayer, He will help you overcome any hurdles you may face.

Hug them often for me. You'll need to be their mom too so when they feel like crying let them know it's OK. Assure them in the best way you know how that their broken hearts or physical hurts will heal over time and wipe their tears and worries away. You will show your strength as a dad and a man when you do this, and they will want to imitate you and become more like you every day. They will become secure in themselves, which is the greatest achievement a parent can hope to see in their child.

Now on to you and I, the ones who started it all:

I loved your awkwardness when you fumbled your proposal first by sending me the email that was intended for Kevin telling him

how you were going to propose to me and then when we were at old St. Michael's and you tried pulling the box that contained the ring out of your coat pocket. Those were fun times. I loved the day we got married. I was so happy to be your wife. I was so glad to have someone who freely chose to want to be with me. It was amazing to feel wanted and cherished by you and to share Christ as our center point of our marriage.

Little did we know what the Good Lord had in store for our lives, right?

We didn't get to have that joyous first year like most couples. We started off with our first miscarriage at the end of October after having wisely decided that we wouldn't wait to have kids once we were married. Then we were blessed with li'l Liam and his difficult pregnancy. I know there were times you were seriously worried about Liam and me. I told you, you were a horrible liar (laughing). However, we finally got to the end of the tunnel and we saw the light that shone brightly. Our X-Man was born with a strong spirit if not a strong body. We didn't hesitate, despite his circumstances, to try for a sibling for him just 10 months later. We felt we hit the lottery when we realized we didn't need to try hard but our hearts were crushed just two months later when we lost our third pregnancy to the angels (our second miscarriage).

With more heartache in store I began to retreat to myself, even you my best friend couldn't help me. However, I was bound and determined that God would give us another child for our family. With Liam's diagnoses and therapy on the bumpy path, we had three more miscarriages resulting in the loss of four more little angels, one of which we held in our hands small and perfectly intact and the discovery of my Antiphospholipid Syndrome as the evil culprit, the reaper of our beloved babies. I didn't think I would recover from my grief. I stopped praying. You continued. I blamed God; I was so angry with him. You continued to pray. I

wanted everything that made me a potential mother to be ripped out. My womb was nothing more than a hollow tomb to me now. You still prayed. Never had my faith been challenged in such a manner that I asked and pleaded to God for death, I welcomed the release from the pain no matter the consequences.

But oh, how God's mercy is so much greater than any one person's pain. I know you prayed for me, Don. Max is the answer to your faithful prayers. When we came back from vacation and I saw his heartbeat for the first time on ultrasound, I was so skeptical. I thought for sure this one was going to be like all the others. Arrogantly, I thought God was an "Indian giver." He giveth and taketh away. I resigned myself to preparing for another miscarriage and the last bit of my heart to die with it. However, God fooled me. Our little baby's heart got stronger and stronger. It grew larger every time I caught a glimpse of its life within my womb. I took my medicine, both from the doctor and our merciful Lord. His medicine being more figurative, of course, but more healing. Soon, we were looking at a little nose and lips of a child with a rather large forehead like its mommy's. I was so happy and nothing could steal my joy even when I finally understood the risks of this pregnancy that were not known to us beforehand but only revealed to us as my condition became more difficult to manage. Because of your prayers and God's faithful answer to them, I was not deterred from making this baby come to being born at any cost to myself.

I know that my decision frightened you even though it agreed with our faith. And I know why it frightened you. You never thought you'd be able to raise the two boys by yourself without me to help you. And that is where I knew you were wrong (trust that that will be the last time I tell you that, LOL) and I began to pray to the Lord for YOU. I prayed for Him to strengthen you and build a level of determination in you that would be encouraging to you. I asked Him to fill you with Godly assurance and in these

last months He has succeeded in going beyond the call of duty. I am proud to see the man and father you have become. And I thank you for being such a loving and supportive husband, especially on my weaker days. Remember that my family respects you too and I can tell you they have nothing but the highest praise for you as a dad. You have impressed them with how you interact with Liam and that is saying something. So not only do you have your family that loves and supports you but mine will as well.

Tend to these relationships like you would a garden for your own sanity and the kids' ability to maintain the close ties they have with their grandparents, aunties, uncles, and cousins and you will see these relationships flourish! Doing this will help you gain good memories to help ease the pain of the sadder ones.

Lastly, I want to address the word "regret." I beg you, no matter how life turns out for you and the boys, don't let the word "regret" enter your vocabulary. That simple word can be so painful and undo so many good things and so many good hearts. Never let the boys hear that word slip from you lips, for it's a slippery slope from saying the word "regret" to drowning in your own self-pity. It will undo every good thing you've built. You are better than that. Never forget it. If you fail your own expectations or God's, just get back up, dust yourself off, and try again. Failure is not the end of the spirit, but regret is.

I have faith in you and love you with whole my heart. Goodbye, honey. I'll see ya later.

Your Admiring Wife,
Chére

Chére Bernhard is a non-typical servant of our Lord, her husband, her boys, and anyone else who says, "Could use a little help over here!" She has no grand ambitions but to do whatever God leads her to do, so that she may meet her heavenly babies when eternity beckons. Lately,

that means helping her oldest overcome his cerebral palsy limitations, attending pro-life rallies with her infant, and defending the life of the innocent in the avenues of infertility-causing vaccines and routine infant circumcision against both sexes. Appreciating the simple talents God has given her, Chère enjoys sewing theatrical costumes (her oldest went as a Knight of the Holy Sepulchre for last year's Halloween), being an RCIA sponsor, shooting pool with her own cue stick (a billiards hall is one of the most intriguing places to be a witness to Christ), playing a variety of roles on stage and TV, being the handy-woman around the house, and throwing parties for her family and friends. Her biggest weakness is not accepting help when she needs it, but Christ is working on that through prayer and weakening her ego.

JUST A GLIMPSE OF CHRIST'S AGONY IN THE GARDEN

Michele Bondi Bottesi

Suffering brings us so close to our Savior.

One night early last year, I was lying in bed trying to sleep but was unable to because I was very sick. No doctor or emergency room visit brought any relief. It would be another year before the cause of my multiple health problems would be correctly diagnosed by a competent doctor, when I would hear the kind man say with a smile, "I can help you," and "You have been hurting for a long time."

The physical suffering had been tremendous, for years. As I sat up in bed in so much misery, our sweet and gentle Jesus came to me, and took me mystically into the Garden of Gethsemane.

Suffering brings us so close to our Savior.

There in the Garden, I was given a glimpse of the suffering that He endured for each one of us that Holy Thursday night.

"Yes, conformity to Jesus Crucified has more value and importance than all mystical graces! The whole spiritual life is dominated by the Cross and, as the Cross is the central point in the history of the world, so it is the central point in the history of every soul." Father Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen, O.C.D. ⁶

It was just a glimpse, a miniscule fraction of Christ's agony in the Garden, not all that He suffered for us there, not what He suffered during His entire life, not what He suffered during the scourging, or when crowned with thorns, or while carrying the Cross, not what He suffered from being mocked, rejected, scorned, spit upon, not what He suffered because of His Mother's suffering and the suffering of His friends, not what He suffered knowing that so many would reject His offer of salvation and sanctification, and not what He suffered for three hours on the Cross.

It was just a glimpse of His suffering for us in the Garden of Gethsemane.

To contemplate what Jesus endured for our salvation is to realize that we are loved and valued by God beyond measure.

What a moment of grace! The pain I experienced, and shared, with Christ in that one moment during that glimpse of His agony in the Garden exceeded beyond measure all the cumulative physical, mental, and spiritual suffering I had experienced during my entire life.

That was a very powerful moment.

"Jesus is Jesus Crucified; therefore, there can be no conformity to Him except by the Cross, and we shall never enter into the depths of the spiritual life except by entering into the mystery of the Cross." ~ Father Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen, O.C.D. ⁷

I began to cry—tears of gratitude to our Savior for what He endured for us, tears of humility, tears of sorrow for all my sins, tears because of all the precious souls who reject His love and mercy, and thankful tears for being granted that very profound and loving experience while I was suffering.

The tears led to more congestion, and made it even more difficult for me to breathe.

"Jesus," I said aloud with a smile, while very grateful to God for granting such a profound moment of mystical union and trying not to complain, especially under those circumstances, "My crying is making it even harder for me to breathe."

And just like that, with great mercy Jesus removed me from the

Garden, and left me to marvel at the wonders of God and to continue suffering in imitation of Christ.

“Every pain patiently borne, every blow to self, shapes the real eternal self. It was the Crucifixion of our Lord that prepared the way for His Resurrection and Glory.” ~ Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen ⁸

May we be on guard against our tendency to want to run from suffering, because this weakness in our fallen human nature fuels the abortion mentality and contributes to the existence of the global culture of death.



Meditate on our Lord's Passion

6. Father Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen, O.C.D., *Divine Intimacy* (Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publishers, 1996), p. 580.

7. Ibid, p. 578.

8. Fulton J. Sheen, *Our Grounds for Hope* (Totowa, NJ: Catholic Book Publishing Company, 2000), p. 36.

CHAPTER 2

HELP THAT KILLS ISN'T HELP AT ALL

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"Help that kills isn't help at all."

~ True Love Leads to Life

REMEMBERING SYDNEY

Anonymous

On a recent Saturday morning, my family gathered at our kitchen table for a relaxing weekend breakfast. Just after we began eating, I was overcome with great sorrow and began crying. Quite unexpectedly, the time had come to share something with the children. They looked intently at me because they knew what I was about to say was very, very serious.

I cried and then sobbed, repeatedly using my napkin to wipe away the tears that streamed down my face, as I told them that there was a person in our family they had never known about. They had a cousin who had been conceived out of wedlock, and although the circumstances were not pleasing to God, He still loved the parents as well as the child unconditionally. As with every single person He creates, that innocent child was planned and wanted by God.

They were stunned.

I went on with my testimony. One day, more than 20 years ago, my mother received a phone call from my brother Craig's girlfriend Tammy and her mother. They invited our families to get together, and it was at that gathering when we learned that Tammy and Craig had conceived a child. Craig offered to marry Tammy, but her mother took her to a clinic to have an abortion and the baby was killed instead.

My children were as shocked and horrified as the rest of the family had been when we found out. What tremendous grief the death of this child caused my loving parents.

I told my children about the horror of learning about my niece or nephew only after the child's life had already been taken. More tears flowed as I described the great tragedy that our side of the family was denied the opportunity to know about the innocent baby while he/she was still living. It was as if I was reliving the moment just as it happened, as if no time at all had passed.

The baby, so highly loved and valued by us in death, had been regarded as disposable and discarded as if he or she were a worthless piece of garbage. I sobbed as I repeated what I had just said, as if saying it again all these years later would help me finally understand the reality of what had taken place. No one in my family besides Craig was given the opportunity to help in any way. Would our help have made the difference between life and death?

The other side of the child's family never came to us while the child was alive because they had made up their minds to end the baby's life. What this immoral and tragic decision would mean to the child, themselves, our family, future generations, our community, and our world wasn't enough of a motivating factor to get them to change their minds. Perhaps they never factored anyone else into the equation.

I remember my utter astonishment at the grand finale to the meeting, as if the horror of what we had learned wasn't traumatic enough. Tammy's mother concluded by telling us that abortion was contrary to their religious beliefs. They had the child killed anyway.

What a terrible thing human pride is. How incredibly weak our fallen human nature is. This is why our Creator gave us the Ten Commandments to follow, and one of them is "Thou shalt not kill."

One of my children asked why no one had ever mentioned this child before. As often happens with such personal secrets, the uncomfortable details get buried in an effort to forget what happened so everyone can move on with their lives. That seems like the best way to go about it, because no

one wants to dwell on the negative, and we certainly don't want to cause anyone further harm.

Sometimes people suppress the horror of the guilt and pain to such a degree that they actually convince themselves that they did in fact make the best choice. The pro-abortion industry refuses to acknowledge to those who are grieving that the child was even a human person! As we all agreed right there at the kitchen table, the horror of the violent and unjustified death of this child, beloved and wanted by some family members yet discarded by other family members, never went away, and the profound grief over the enormity of the loss of his/her life never went away, either.

In failing to talk about the child's death, we were not able to talk about the child's life. It was as if he or she had never even existed. How absolutely horrible.

This child, who has so many cousins, aunts, uncles, and grandparents, has not been mentioned in over 20 years. This person, who is so loved and valued by God and by us, had no celebrations, no dignified burial, and no memorials. So many opportunities to love were denied so many people in one decision—in just one choice.

Something that I cannot fathom even all these years later is that a child, *a member of my family*, had grandparents, a mother, and perhaps at some point even a father who willingly took it upon themselves to end the life of this baby.

Many people believe or hope that unresolved post-abortion pain and grief will just go away. The abortion industry wants us to believe there will be no pain. No matter what anyone thinks or says, the grief and pain do not just go away, and they do not disappear. They remain if unresolved until resurfacing, sometimes many years later, often triggered by some event.

Many people in addition to the parents of the child(ren) also need healing following the loss of life by abortion. That includes grandparents, family members, friends, colleagues, acquaintances, and all those who participated in the abortion by word or deed.

My family has been called by God to do more in support of life and

to end legalized abortion and euthanasia in every nation on earth. This is a summons that every person must hear, for we are all called to do our part by living in imitation of Christ.

My children were aware that the night before I had begun reading the book *Unplanned* by Abby Johnson. As the director of a Planned Parenthood clinic, she experienced a Divine revelation when she was asked for the first time to assist during an abortion. She had worked at the clinic for years, and with good intentions incorrectly believed that she was helping women. That is, until the moment when she witnessed a child's death via suction abortion and the truth was revealed to her: The killing of unborn children helps no one and is contrary to God's will.

In fact, abortion is a multifaceted destroyer of lives.

If you have not read *Unplanned*, get the book, read it, tell others about it, and share it with everyone you know. Be sure the children in your life know the story.

It was amazing how reading that book triggered the dramatic resurfacing of the tragic events of one child's death, a child we never had the opportunity of knowing, after over 20 years had passed. The pain was still so profound, the anguish still so real, the incalculable loss still so great.

I can't think of one benefit that resulted from the killing of this child.

My children told me later, as we cleaned up the breakfast dishes and put away the food, that they thought I was going to tell them that years ago I was the one who had the abortion. They understood in that instant that every single one of us encounters temptation. All of us find ourselves in situations where we are tempted, and every one of us must ask God for His wisdom and strength to do what is right, and to ask for God's forgiveness when we sin.

While the story was not about me specifically, the story did have to do with me, and with them, and with all of us. Unfortunately, we were not the ones with the decision-making power at the time the story took place.

We went on to discuss God's plan for humanity, how we are called to be fruitful and multiply but within the context of marriage, and that the

moral order exists for our benefit. We discussed what happens when we choose to sin, and how many countless others are affected by the choices that we make.

We discussed the importance of holding ourselves accountable for our actions. We agreed that it is vital to remain very close to the sacraments so that with God's help, we make choices that are pleasing to Him and best for ourselves and others, especially when those choices are the most difficult to make. We discussed how important it is to go to Reconciliation often to receive God's forgiveness and bountiful graces, which help us grow in sanctity.

It astounds me that collectively, on both sides of our family, we have experienced the fallout from abortion, infidelity, abuse, divorce, artificial contraception, and artificial conception.

I was very sad to think that my children, so full of God's love and goodness, live in a world that has become so incredibly immoral by its own choosing. This rampant immorality signals a great distance that people have placed between themselves and God, for those close to God could not act in a manner that is so contrary to love.

On the other hand, we have countless, immeasurably wonderful opportunities to serve others and be living witnesses of Christ's love, truth, mercy, and healing.

We also have a tremendous moral obligation to teach our children right from wrong, in word and most importantly by deed. Our children are vulnerable to falling prey to people with misguided compassion, and those who seek to profit by killing their children. They must be taught the difference between true compassion that helps, and false compassion that kills. Our children must know the difference.

"It is we who must choose between good and evil." ~Pope John Paul II

My children will be facing these life-and-death situations themselves before too long. Fortunately, they have been taught since they were very young that abortion is immoral. Pro-life discussions are vital to our spiritual, physical, and emotional well-being, and must take place within the home of every single family with children.

My children asked if they could discuss this with their grandparents, and asked for permission to do so. I explained to them the profound sorrow that their grandparents must feel to this day because of the death of their grandchild at the hands of the child's other grandparents. It still makes me sad that such loving and generous people were never given the chance to properly love and help save this beloved, defenseless, wanted member of our family.

We discussed as a family what false compassion is and what true compassion expressed in imitation of Christ is. They are two very distinct things; one is immoral and the other is moral. One is the expression of selfish love while the other is the expression of selfless love. Our decisions to love selflessly demonstrates that we are true disciples of Christ.

We discussed the importance of knowing right from wrong and not allowing ourselves to be persuaded in a crisis situation to sin. We discussed that what sometimes seems like the "easy way out" turns out to not be easy at all, and how savvy the devil has become at marketing tremendous evil to us as good.

My children decided to name the baby. They were amazed when they learned that he/she would be an adult today. We discussed what the implications of his/her death are for all of humanity. All the plans God had for his/her life never came to fruition. The child's potential friends and classmates never knew of him/her, nor did his/her intended teachers. Perhaps he/she would be married now.

None of his/her children can ever be created. That entire lineage of people, and all their descendents, were stopped from existing forever in the moment that our loved one was killed via abortion. How many people who will never exist now because of that one abortion is anyone's guess.

What would that child, and their legacy, have meant to our world? We will never know.

We do know that every single person has the right to live.

Over 50 million babies have been killed since abortion became legal in the United States in 1973. Approximately 50 million unborn children lose their lives to abortion worldwide each year. <http://www.wrtl.org/>

abortion/abortionstatistics.aspx. Add to those numbers the lives ended by artificial contraception, those who were prevented from being created by artificial contraception, and all those lives who were prevented from being created because their mothers and fathers were aborted, and the number of lives, love, and legacies that were destroyed defies our comprehension. We do know that the human cost of abortion is unfathomable. Abortion is by far the most colossal humanitarian disaster in the history of mankind.

No matter what civil laws are decided by man, abortion is immoral and is a grave crime against humanity. Imagine how many children are never spoken of, as if their existence has been erased in secrecy. Abortion should never be legal, not anywhere.

My children decided to name the beloved family member we never met “Sydney.”

There were many, many benefits to the life-changing discussion our family had that morning. We talked about the importance of praying for Sydney’s parents. We talked about the other people who were also responsible for Sydney’s death, including Sydney’s grandparents, the staff at the abortion mill including administrators, receptionists, nurses, technicians, volunteers, the doctor who directly ended his/her life, and all those who use their God-given talents against humanity by working to keep abortion legal and by promoting the killing. We also discussed the importance of praying for and forgiving everyone involved.

It is impossible to know who has accepted healing and who has not regarding Sydney’s death, since no one speaks about him/her. I hope that Craig and Tammy have discovered the very effective programs that help parents heal, so they can be liberated from debilitating guilt, sorrow, and shame. I do hope that they have already gone to Confession, accepted God’s infinite mercy, allowed themselves to be forgiven by the ultimate Physician, Jesus Christ, and forgiven themselves. I hope that they now understand the difference between true compassion, which places itself at the service of others, and false compassion, which is driven by pride and selfish motivation, so that their lives are the happiest they can be.

Later in the day, my youngest child came to me in tears. She had just

come from her room where she had held a private prayer service for her cousin Sydney.

I am so glad that she values life and understands that although Sydney was killed as a baby, Sydney remains with us and is our advocate in heaven, from the very Presence of Almighty God.

Dear Sydney, we love you! Please pray with us for an end to abortion.

“The Lord does not want us to remain remorseful; He wants us to remain forgiven.” ~ True Love Leads to Life

GOD TOUCHED THAT MOTHER'S HEART WITH LOVE

A Grateful-to-God Pro-Lifer

About 30 years ago, God blessed my husband and me with a precious daughter. Although I really, really love each of my beloved sons, I was overjoyed with gladness and praise to God to have a baby girl. Little did I know that God would use my adorable ‘bundle of joy’ to save an unborn baby girl’s life.

For several years I had been selling home-delivered products. One day, one of my customers, “S,” who had multiple sclerosis, confided in me that she was pregnant. She told me her doctor, her non-Catholic pastor, and her parents each advised her to have an abortion because of her illness. Her husband said he would accept any decision she made.

I remember telling “S” that God would give her the strength she needed to take care of her baby, and reminded her that her two school-aged children would be a great help to her and her infant. Abortion is wrong and she would deeply regret that bad choice for the rest of her life. I told her how excited and happy I was to have recently had a baby, and she would be too!

I hugged her and told “S” I would pray for her. Within hours, one of my best friends, “R,” and I stormed heaven with prayers for God’s protection for the precious unborn baby, strength for the mother to give life

to her child, and for her healing. I believe that God inspired me to bring my precious infant, dressed in her prettiest dress, with me the next time I was with “S.” Several days later, as “S” and I were talking awhile, I asked “S” if she would like to hold my baby girl, who was especially sweet and smiley during that visit. “S” said yes.

I believe God touched that mother’s loving heart that day. It is so wonderful to hold a beautiful gift from God in your arms. “S” chose life and a few months later gave birth to a healthy and beautiful baby girl. Her husband, her other children, and especially God gave her the strength and help she needed to care for her priceless gift. Praise God!

GOD DOES NOT CREATE US FOR NOTHING

Michele Bondi Bottesi

It was the week before Christmas. The Catholic school my children attended was having a Christmas prayer service. All the students, their families, and friends were invited. More people attended such all-school events than the church could handle, and they were always very crowded. After the children were dropped off at the school, everyone else including parents and younger children, grandparents, and friends had to wait until shortly before 10:00 a.m. to be allowed in the church.

By the time the church doors were opened, many people had gathered outside the front doors and inside the church narthex by the chapel. School-aged children were escorted from the school just a short walk away by their teachers through the waiting crowds and into the church. Once all the students and staff sat down, very few empty seats remained in the church.

On that particular day, I had already parked in the busy lot and was walking my children over to the school when a friend drove by. She was going to help with the music during the prayer service and asked if I would watch her son, who went to a public elementary school and was present to attend the prayer service. I thought back to the special years when my youngest two children were very young and sat with

me during such occasions. I was so happy to be in the company of a small child once again, especially on this very special occasion honoring the birth of our Savior.

After I agreed to watch the boy, he and I were allowed to enter the church early, and secured two seats in the back row on the main floor. It was a beautiful prayer service; all the children participated, from the littlest in kindergarten to the oldest in eighth grade. The cute little second-graders reenacted the Nativity story, a special tradition each year in anticipation of receiving their First Holy Communion the following spring. The music was joyful, the praise abundant, and the prayer meaningful. What a festive, thankful, Christ-centered occasion.

My friend's son absolutely loved the music during the prayer service and happily waved his hands in the air. He was overflowing with joy in the special way that children often do, and it was a moment that I will always remember and hold dear. During that prayer service in honor of the birth of our Savior, something happened that was very significant.

At some point we offered one of our two seats to someone who was standing, and my friend's son ended up sitting on my lap. As I held him, *it felt as if I were holding my own child*. I have held many children throughout the years and value them all, but the only time I had that special feeling of holding my own child was when I was holding one of my own children. I have not even experienced that feeling when holding my nieces, whom I love very much. The moment was totally supernatural, it happened with good reason, and I absolutely knew it.

The little boy that I was so privileged to hold has Down syndrome.

Recent studies in the United States indicate that when Down syndrome is diagnosed prenatally, 84 to 91 percent of those babies are killed by abortion (*Down Syndrome and Abortion*, Susan W. Enouen, PE, posted on physiciansforlife.org).

Just who decided that these children's lives should be terminated? Certainly not God, Who in an act of love, willed each of them into being in the first place. He decided that their lives have immeasurable value and purpose.

“Why do people commit abortion? To avoid inconvenience, suffering, pain. The very heart of our Christian Faith tells us, God emptied himself so to speak to become man. Like Christ we have the privilege of embracing the cross, and by loving the cross we are loving the God who became man and died on the cross out of love for us. By sharing in the passion of Jesus Christ, through uniting our suffering with His we become ‘other redeemers.’” ~ Father John A. Hardon, S.J. ⁹

One of the Commandments God gave to all humanity is, “Thou shalt not kill.” He didn’t say do not kill, except when we feel that we should, or when a spouse, boyfriend, girlfriend, parent, family member, friend, doctor, nurse, health care professional, abortion provider, volunteer, acquaintance, co-worker, or politician tells us that we should. He said, “Thou shalt not kill.”

“One of the main reasons for the world-wide homicide of millions of innocent unborn children is because Catholics are not living up to practicing their faith.” ~ Father John A. Hardon, S.J. ¹⁰

The life purpose of every single person ever created includes loving, valuing, serving, protecting, and defending life. Interesting how God chose that sweet little boy to be “my child.” Special needs children are our children. They are of immeasurable value to us and to our eternal salvation, and their lives are worth celebrating and defending.

What a blessing this boy has been to his parents, family, community, and our world. What a blessing he was to me that day, and what a blessing he is now to you. The lives of special needs children are worth saving, for in loving them, we accept the love of God and love God in return.

May we trust God with our welfare and with our eternal salvation, with our own lives and with the lives of others. We must, for God commanded us, “Do to others as you would have them do to you” (Luke 6:31). He doesn’t create people so we can reject and destroy them. May we trust Him in all circumstances, and rely not on our own understanding. Rest assured, God knows what He is doing and He loves us, *every single one of us*. Every life is a tremendous gift, and God does not create us for nothing!

“Professed Catholics must become channels of extraordinary grace to the modern world.” ~ Father John A. Hardon, S.J. ¹¹

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MY EXPERIENCES AS THE SIBLING OF AN ABORTED BABY

Renee

My name is Renee, and I am the oldest of five. Sadly, I've never met the youngest, a little boy (brother number three) named Joseph Michael. He died by abortion when I was only 10, although I didn't find out until nearly 11 years later. My poor mom had to keep that secret for so long. I've known for just over six years, and am really struggling with it. I've come to the point where I realize that a lot of the issues I have are made much worse by what I went through regarding the abortion. While I have always been more of an internalizer, this is becoming harder, and I am starting to seek out healing. Easier said than done, I am discovering, as most post-abortion support groups only have programs for the parents.

It is sincerely my prayer that more awareness will be brought to the suffering of the siblings. My siblings and I have had to silently deal with the pain of hearing people speak ill of women choosing an abortion. We know firsthand that sometimes it is done in a desperate time, and to misguidedly spare the baby from a life of suffering.

My mom was widowed in June of 1994, at the age of 30. I was 10, and the youngest at the time (Baby number four) was only two. A few months later, she met a man and became pregnant unexpectedly. I know

very little about that time for her, as I was very young, and had no idea that my little brother was growing in her belly. But we were living with my grandparents, and I don't know how they would've handled the news. Also, maybe my mom didn't feel capable of caring for yet another baby, whom the doctor said may have health issues (from what I believe). While she knew it was wrong, she believed that the baby would be better off in heaven, free from suffering.

While I hate that my mom (and brother) went through that, I admire her greatly for all the strength she has shown. She now understands what some of these women are going through when they consider abortion, and has used her experiences to help them choose life. She also has used the pain she feels over my brother to help those mourning the loss of their own babies, aborted or miscarried.

I pray for the strength to one day be able to reach out to other siblings like myself. I have actually tried to avoid the pro-life movement at times, mostly for two reasons: one, it makes me think more of my brother and the horrible way he died, and two, I am very defensive of my mom and am afraid that some of these people will judge her harshly. I also don't want her to have to deal with any extra sadness or regrets. But as I said before, she is a very strong woman.

I have heard it said by quite a few people that my mom should keep the abortion secret. What about her reputation? In their view, it will make others decide to follow her and do the same. Or turn against her, and stop trusting and/or respecting her. Well, I can speak for myself, my siblings and at least one very dear friend, that the exact opposite is true!! I hate that she had to bear that by herself for so long, and am so grateful that she told us. It has made her a more compassionate, sympathetic, less judgmental person. It made me listen more when she was talking about pro-life things, or praying and showing sympathy for women who have had abortions, knowing that she's actually been in their position. She has come so far. I am also thankful she told us, because although we ended up going through unexpected mourning, we as siblings are now more aware of the horror of abortion. All these years I never knew we were personally touched by it.

As I said, finding out caused such shock and grief. I remember the night that she told us; we were all talking in the living room, because she said she had something important to discuss. I remember my heart started pounding more and more. We were shocked to discover that she had been pregnant after the fourth baby. Our dad had died, and there were only four of us children with her, so where was the last one? Did I have a sibling given up for adoption, whom I could possibly reconnect with (as went through my head at times while watching or reading about it), or did she miscarry? Abortion never crossed my mind, because we knew she was so against it.

But she admitted that that is what happened. I did not give in to the tears that threatened, as I have always been very guarded with my emotions. Very quickly the four of us went up to her, hugged her, comforted her, and reassured her that we loved her. We found out a few things, such as the father, and the date of the abortion. Apparently, the anniversary was only a few weeks away. In just a few weeks, on Valentine's Day to be exact, it would be 11 years since that horrible event.

Apparently she chose that night because going out then would not likely arouse suspicion.

Years later it brought me such pain to think that that night before she left, when I gave her a hug, I also hugged my little brother inside, but the next time I hugged her, it was just her alone. How sad she must have been. And how innocent and unaware I was.

That Valentine's Day after we learned about my brother was hard, but so refreshing in some ways. Between my dad's death and that day, I noticed that she had made an extra effort to make it a pleasant day for us, and thought she did it to soften the blow of not having our dad around. When I realized the painful significance of the day, I started trying to make it a special, peaceful day for her.

What stands out the most from that night are two sweet memories. The first is that Mom made us a yummy cake for dessert, and on it were six hearts, one big and five small. A mama surrounded by her babies. For the first time ever, Mom was able to admit that she was a mother of five.

She didn't have to ignore my brother that night! And we were comfortable with it too.

The other sweet memory associated with that night is that we decided to play the lottery, and being aware of a new heavenly intercessor, we asked Joey to pray for us, and we won \$10!! The most money we've ever won in the lottery! Thanks, Joey! Now multiply that by a small million please! ;)

For a while after finding out, I had such a deep sadness, which I could not identify at first. I felt like I did when I lost one of my nursing home friends, but nobody had recently died. What was up? Then I realized it was my brother. I was grieving the loss of a little sibling that up until then had not existed (that I was aware of). How strange. How could I possibly feel so strongly for someone I never met, or even knew about? As I mentioned before, I am not an emotional person, so these feelings were extra-unappreciated. I felt stupid for grieving 11 years later. He was long gone; I shouldn't feel anything. But that's not how it works. Over time, I felt that sadness less frequently, but still, six years later I feel twinges at times. I have also, at times, felt completely at peace with our situation, and at other times, have seriously forgotten about him. That, I believe, is often a defense mechanism.

Whether I am thinking about him or not, I noticed that I am more sensitive to some things than I was before. For example, I felt pain/jealousy seeing others becoming big brothers and sisters. I experienced that only three times, and never will again. I am also very sensitive to my youngest brother being complimented by Mom, and feeling like he is getting the bulk of the attention, because he is the last "baby" she'll have. Deep down, I know it is false, but it is still a frequent struggle.

Another struggle is forgiving and moving on. When I first found out about my brother, I can't remember much about how I felt about his father. As I've gotten older, though, I have felt so betrayed by him. We loved him like a stepfather for quite a few years. How dare he try to take care of us, and help raise us, when he didn't even keep his own flesh and blood alive. This was especially hard for me to come to terms with because I, too, was

conceived out of wedlock. But my dad did the right thing and married my mom (before I was born). It just feels strange. Why was I okay to keep but my brother wasn't? I have made great progress in this area, but still have need of more healing.

This is only a small bit of my experiences as a sibling of an aborted baby, but I am sharing this in the hopes that others can be comforted knowing that they are not alone. Or perhaps a sibling like me will be in denial, and reading my story, they will realize their need for healing and get it. My prayer is that we can feel at least some of the peace that our siblings do, as they await our arrival in heaven. What a nice meeting that will be, and while we had the misfortune of being separated on earth, we will have all eternity to catch up!

To any parents reading this, please give your kids the benefit of the doubt, and tell them about their lost sibling(s). It may strengthen your relationship as it did ours. You shouldn't have to keep your baby(ies) a secret. For those who are not directly affected, I thought I would give you a small idea what we are going through, in case you happen to connect with us. All who read this will be in my prayers.

God bless and peace be with you.

Renee is relatively new to the pro-life movement, and hopes to increase awareness of the pain of surviving siblings, with the hope that more resources become available to them for healing. For more information, visit: <http://www.experienceproject.com/groups/Lost-A-Sibling-To-Abortion/557745>. Renee's blog: survivingsibling.wordpress.com

“DON’T DO IT!”

Michele Bondi Bottesi

One afternoon when my children were small, they sat in the large waiting room of the offices of a group of physicians located in a very nice medical complex. After we had been waiting a while, I was delighted to see two friends, a married couple, come through the door. They saw me as they came in, and we exchanged greetings.

They are very lovely people and I was, as always, so happy to see them. The wife sat down next to me and as her husband signed in, she and I started talking.

Before very long, my friend absolutely stunned me by saying that they were there because her husband was going to get a vasectomy.

I was horrified and without hesitation, said to her very emphatically, “Don’t Do It!”

That plea caused my friend to become very nervous. I got the sense that she had already been uncomfortable with the decision. A brief discussion followed; I very ardently reminded her that sterilization is against the will of God, harms marriages, and could leave them permanently infertile, even if they had a change of heart later.

Our discussion seemed to reinforce what my friend was already feeling.

At least one of their minds was made up that afternoon, and the husband went ahead and was sterilized. I felt physically sick for the rest of the afternoon.

Only God and the couple know the exact reason(s) why they decided to sterilize their union. They were young, Catholic, had a large, beautiful home, a steady income, and two beautiful young children.

On our way home from the doctor's office that afternoon, I grieved for the couple, their marriage, the children they would most likely never have, their immediate family, their extended family, and even their friends—all the people who were affected that afternoon by their choice to surgically alter his body so they would never have any more children. One or two people made one choice, and so many other people in addition to them were adversely affected.

I also felt very sad for our most loving and generous Creator. He always wants what is best for us and has all the answers, and He had been excluded from their decision.

Sterilization destroys marriages, is a grave offense against the will of God, and affects the human family in ways we can only attempt to fathom. Regarding abuse of marital relations, Father John A. Hardon, S.J. reminds us, through the teaching of St. Augustine, that it is possible to abuse marital relations, and we must not “suppose that even marriage is an infallible means of self-control. Married people, too, can give in to their passions, no less than the unmarried—the latter by committing fornication [consensual sexual intercourse between two people not married to each other], the former by resorting to contraception.” ~ Father John A. Hardon, S.J.¹²

The use of artificial contraception and sterilization have become very acceptable behaviors. In fact, they are encouraged and celebrated. Since artificial contraception has caused an incalculable number of fertilized embryos to abort, and we can only guess at how many lives have been prematurely ended this way, its use *promotes* abortion because artificial contraception *causes* abortion.

Many people who claim to be against abortion in theory are actually open to the possibility that their child(ren) may be aborted when they choose to use artificial contraception.

“Sexually preoccupied people are selfish people. Whether married or

not, they either try to avoid having children all together, or limit the number of children to a minimum. Contraception is the hallmark of a sexually perverse society.” ~ Father John A. Hardon, S.J. ¹³

The reckless endorsement and practice of such self-centered behavior, which directly contradicts God’s command to “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth” (Genesis 1: 28), contributes to the abortion mentality and sustains the existence of the culture of death.

Only God knows how many children have died or have been prevented from being created because their parents refused to welcome such priceless gifts, and because doctors are willing to prescribe contraception, encourage its use, and perform sterilizations. They are not helping people, they are harming humanity! Only God knows the price humanity pays when couples choose to oppose His most perfect will.

With a very heavy heart, I asked the good Lord, “Why did You have me there in the waiting room *at the very moment my friends came in to be sterilized?* I am so sad, and would rather not have ever known.”

God has His reasons, and we must reverence His judgment. Perhaps the couple was given a vital opportunity to hear the truth and change their minds. Certainly, God allowed it to happen so the story would end up being read by you, all these years later.

“Professed Catholics must become channels of extraordinary grace to the modern world.” ~ Father John A. Hardon, S.J. ¹⁴

To learn more about the benefits of natural family planning, visit:
<http://www.ccli.org/>

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MY BIRTHDAY WISH

Michele Bondi Bottesi

My mother told this story to our family at the birthday party she hosted in honor of the gift of my life the day I turned 46.

Her obstetrician, who had a very large statue of the Virgin Mary in his office, walked into the room and proclaimed the news that my mother, who was 24 years old at the time, was pregnant again.

I was baby number three. My brother was almost three years old, my sister Belinda was about eight months old, and my mother was anemic and exhausted.

Belinda's birth less than a year before had been premature, and she had to remain in the hospital until she weighed five pounds. Our mother was discharged without her baby, who remained in the hospital for another two weeks.

As a result of their separation, she was not able to nurse her newborn daughter, and the loss of that precious opportunity to bond caused her great sorrow. However, because she was unable to breastfeed, her fertility returned quickly, and those very circumstances led to my being created.

The Irish-Catholic obstetrician picked up on my mother's anxiety about being pregnant again. He pointed to the five-foot statue of the Virgin Mary nearby, and said that it was her will.

He then asked her if my mother had observed the couple that had left his office before her visit; they had been unable to conceive.

When I was born, my mother asked the doctor about my weight; I was a healthy six-pound baby. My children listened intently as she recalled the doctor telling her that she had another little girl.

God love my parents for not viewing children as something to be planned according to their schedules. They understood that children are always planned by God. My brother, sister, and I were blessed to grow up with siblings close in age, and we were each others' friends and playmates.

How things have changed in one generation. Today, children are often viewed as a right, to be rejected or sought after at all costs, depending upon what we want at any given moment. Modern, faulty thinking tells us that children must be planned, or delayed for unjustifiable reasons, or frozen, or discarded in a variety of different ways.

Married couples use immoral artificial contraceptives, do not welcome children at all, or will accept one or two, maybe. Unfathomably, abortion is legal in the United States, and fifty million children have been killed in the name of freedom in this one country alone. Pharmaceutical companies and the abortion industry profit enormously when we buy their lies, and humanity is left to pay twice.

We have children if we want, when we want, and how we want, and then half of all marriages end in divorce because it pleases us to seek further happiness elsewhere, leaving our children without two full-time loving parents the way God intended.

The love of God should find its first expression within the family through humility, love, sacrifice, and service. How we insult our most loving and generous God with our ingratitude, arrogance, selfishness, and lack of charity and chastity!

How many people are even willing to acknowledge publicly that they include God in their family planning, and make it a point to be generously open to life? How many are persecuted by others for living it?

Yet when we include God and His laws in our planning, He, we, and

others are happiest. We are happiest when we seek to do God's will, because He always knows what is best for us. Our lives are the best they can possibly be only when we surrender our self-centered choices and accomplish God's will instead.

Thank you, Mom and Dad, for giving of yourselves so generously and lovingly. As a parent now myself, I know that truly living your faith nobly and heroically was not easy.

Thank you for not demanding that I be exactly what you had in mind, exactly when you wanted.

Thank you for not putting me on your wish list after a big house, a new car, careers, trips, acquiring more money, or other meaningless goals. Thank you for accepting me into your lives and for loving me in imitation of Christ.

"The absence of planning does not justify killing." ~ True Love Leads to Life

Because my parents were not materialistic and chose to love sacrificially, my three children had the opportunity to be created.

Because my parents had their focus on eternity, Joseph Karl Publishing exists today to defend human life and dignity, promote Catholic faith formation throughout the lifespan and around the world, inspire, encourage forgiveness and healing, and guide precious, immortal souls to Christ.

Because my parents chose life, my children and I are able to accomplish the work God has assigned to us, to let others know that they are loved and valued beyond measure and that their lives have great purpose.

True love leads to life, and many, many, many other beautiful things. Value and peacefully defend every person's right to life, from natural conception until natural death.

My birthday wish on the Feast of the Presentation of Our Lord Jesus Christ (when this story was written) is an end to legalized abortion and euthanasia in the United States and throughout the world. May every single person be so properly loved and valued that no one would ever even consider having an abortion.

"Nothing less than heroic patience in suffering, united with the Passion

of Christ...nothing less than heroic chastity in resisting the allurements of a world intoxicated with sexual immorality; nothing less than heroic charity in loving those who ignore us or oppose us or deride our loyalty to Christ as psychosis—can obtain the ocean of divine mercy that alone can restore the rights of God over the human life, which begins at conception and is destined to continue into eternity.” ~ Father John A. Hardon, S.J. ¹⁵



Little Michele

15. John A. Hardon, S.J., *The Divinely Ordained Protector of Human Life*. Copyright © 2000–2012 by www.therealpresence.org. All rights reserved worldwide. Used with permission.

CHAPTER 3

LOOKING TRUTH IN THE EYE

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*"Place your intelligence, your talents, your enthusiasm,
your compassion, and your fortitude
at the service of life."*

~ Blessed Pope John Paul II

DAMIAN AND THE MIRACULOUS DEVOTION

Father Luigi Gabris

Following my ordination to the Sacred Priesthood of Jesus Christ, I was assigned to a parish where God gave me wonderful friends. They include a young couple named Jan and Beba (Beadá). We remained close friends after I was assigned to another parish the following year.

At the time, Jan and Beba had two sons, Mario and Christian, who were 13 and 10 years old. The couple was obedient to God by practicing natural family planning and they were open to life. They were very happy when Beba became pregnant with the couple's third child, so many years after the birth of their second child. Immediately they shared the good news with me, and asked me to be the child's Godfather.

Serious complications began in the first month of the pregnancy. Beba was losing blood, and needed to go to her doctor many times. The physician was a highly skilled obstetrician and university professor who taught obstetrics and gynecology. He was the same doctor who had delivered the couple's two sons.

As time went on, the medical problems became more serious, and the doctor grew more concerned about the unborn baby. Beba was required

to take medication to save the child's life. The doctor recommended that she be admitted to the hospital, but she remained at home so she could care for her two sons.

The pregnancy had a transformative effect on the family. The boys became watchful, caring, cooperative, and looked after their mother. The entire family became beautifully integrated. This difficult pregnancy was a tremendous blessing for them, because it caused them to treat one another with greater compassion.

Jan and Beba were so happy to be having this baby. I visited them when the pregnancy was three months along, and by that time they knew the baby was a little boy. They had already named him Damian, and had already prepared his clothing in anticipation of his arrival. We sat on the floor and spoke openly about this high-risk pregnancy, and as they showed me Damian's clothes, it became clear that we needed to pray more.

Jan gave me a pair of the baby's tiny socks. They were white with red stripes. He said, "Luigi, keep them and pray for Beba and Damian, because this is a high-risk pregnancy. He is your Godchild, and we need your prayer support. Pray for your Godchild."

I kept the socks in the rectory, on my desk, so they would be close to me and always visible as a reminder to pray for the baby.

One day Jan and Beba called to tell me that Beba was losing blood again. They were so sorrowful. Whenever we spoke by phone, it was always a three-way conversation. The couple explained that the doctor had said that the placenta was very small, oxygen was not reaching the baby, his brain was most likely damaged, and there was a high probability that the child would be born handicapped due to a lack of oxygen.

The doctor recommended that Jan and Beba abort Damian because the loss of blood indicated that the placenta was separating from the uterus, indicating the baby would eventually miscarry.

The couple told the doctor, "We have faith, and it will change the situation."

I have been asked what I said to my friends at that moment. Their faith was strong, so they only needed someone who cared to listen.

After our conversation ended, I was very sad. I had been in my office in the rectory, and looked at Damian's little socks. It was a very powerful moment.

The first time I went to Jerusalem, having traveled there with Jan and Beba, I bought an icon of Our Lady of Perpetual Help in a shop close to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. That icon was hanging in my office and at that moment, when I was so sorrowful, God's light came to me. I took Damian's socks and put them on the icon and said to our Blessed Mother,



“I can’t hold my Godchild. You held your Child during many perilous moments in your life. Please take one more child. Please take Damian, keep him, and take good care of him.”

After that prayer, Beba did not lose any more blood.

It is also important to mention that Beba, along with her mother and sister, was faithful to the First Five Saturdays devotion throughout her pregnancy, through which the promise of a delivery without pain is granted.

As the pregnancy progressed, baby Damian grew, but the placenta remained small. We remained confident in God’s providence.

Baby Damian was born on time. Jan was there and witnessed his birth while assisting Beba. It was the first time he had been present at the birth of one of his children. Jan said that he was a totally changed man after that experience.

Jan reported that Beba’s delivery was really beautiful; it was quick, and she did not experience any pain. He shared his surprise that when Damian was delivered, he looked clean and pure, had no streaks of blood on his body, and he radiated with incredible beauty.

After the delivery, the doctor asked Jan if he could keep the placenta. Jan asked him why. The doctor explained that Damian’s survival was a miracle, because it is impossible for a child to survive having a placenta that small. He wanted to keep it to show his students the miracle. The doctor said to Damian’s parents, “You gave me a lesson of faith.”

Damian’s Baptism was followed by a big celebration, and Beba’s obstetrician was among the guests. The doctor met and spoke to many people who had prayed for the family, and he was profoundly affected by the miracle, as were so many others.

One year later, Jan and Beba had another baby. During that pregnancy, another pair of socks was placed on the icon of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, and many people prayed for baby Simon throughout the couple’s fourth pregnancy.

Damian is now five years old. He is healthy and bright and remains a tremendous gift to so many.

In time, other expectant couples heard the story, which inspired

them to pray and place socks on icons, statues, and pictures with various representations of Our Lady. I know of six children whose loved ones were granted the intercession of the Virgin Mary after they had prayed to her this way.

Please share this story with others, and encourage them to pray the First Saturdays devotion during their pregnancies or on behalf of others. Encourage them also to continue the devotion of placing the baby's socks on images and statues of our Blessed Mother. Say to her, "Blessed Mother, I can't hold this baby. You held your Child during many perilous moments in your life. Please take one child more. Please take this baby and take good care of him/her."

Or:

Novena to Our Lady of Perpetual Help¹⁶ to obtain some spiritual or temporal favor *Recite the Hail Mary nine times each day, and then say the following prayer:*

Our Lady of Perpetual Help, show that you are indeed our Mother, and obtain for me the favor I desire (specify the desired favor) and the grace to use it for the glory of God and the salvation of my soul.

Glorious St. Alphonsus, who by your confidence in the Blessed Virgin did obtain from her so many favors, and who, by your writings, have shown us what graces God bestows on us by the hands of Mary! Obtain for me the greatest confidence in our good Mother of Perpetual Help, and beg of her to grant me the favor I am asking of her power and maternal goodness.

Eternal Father, in the name of Jesus, and by the intercession of our Mother of Perpetual Help, and of St. Alphonsus, I pray You to hear me and to grant my request, if it be to Your greater glory and good of my soul. Amen.

16. *Novena to Our Lady of Perpetual Help*. © 2009 William J. Hirten Company.

HAPPY 13TH BIRTHDAY TO MY PRO-LIFE BABY!

Michele Bondi Bottesi

I eagerly anticipated having my own children since I was just a child myself, and was a very loving mother to my dolls. I was also eager to accept all the children God would one day send me to love in His place.

When expecting our first baby, we already had a boy's name and a girl's name picked out. After it was determined during the pregnancy that the child was a boy, my wonderful son Andre, we put our girl's name in reserve for the future.

Two years later our sweet little Nicholas joined us and the name for my precious girl had to wait a little longer for God to create her when the time was right according to His most perfect plan. So special was she, and so eagerly anticipated, that she was going to be named after our Blessed Mother. I just knew that she would be arriving one day, and when the doctor who looked at her ultrasound images proclaimed that he thought the baby *might* be a girl, I knew for certain that she was the daughter I had already loved for so long.

My sister Belinda suggested that we name her "Hope." How prophetic those words turned out to be.

Alyssa has the special distinction in our family of being our "pro-life baby." Her life will forever provide testimony to God's great love for each one of us, and to the immense wonders of His masterpieces of creation and planning.

On April 30, 1999, Alyssa Maria was born. One of the first people to lay eyes on her was a nurse, and as the doctor handed her my precious bundle of love I heard the first descriptor words ever spoken with regards to my daughter.

The smitten nurse gushed, “Oh, she’s *so* beautiful!”

Despite being the third child and only girl, she always seemed to be wearing blue instead of pink. When she was little, her short, golden hair would curl up on humid days, starting from the ends all the way up to her crown. Sometimes I would find perfect ringlets in her golden locks.

That tiny girl was so adorable in her small frilly dresses and lacy socks. Sometimes she also wore cute little hats, and when she was really small she wore a white bonnet. Oh, those tiny feet, the button nose, and those sweet cheeks that have been the recipients of so, so many kisses!

Alyssa really should have the word “love” in her name somewhere. She was always kissing her brothers and me, telling us she loved us, smiling or giggling, and wrote her mom countless love notes. She is now 13 years old and still so quick to love, share a smile, or do something thoughtful. She is good at math, likes to read, and enjoys playing with her plastic animals and with children in the neighborhood.

One year on Valentine’s Day, she came home from school and proceeded to cut countless hearts out of paper in secret. Then, she placed them all around the house, where I found them throughout the rest of the day. However, I did not find them all!

Some of those paper hearts are still scattered around the house. Last year, while attending a funeral Holy Mass, one fell out of my purse onto the church floor, and I gently retrieved it and placed it back in my purse while thinking fondly of her and of how it is possible that one so little can love so much.

I love it when Alyssa starts singing, usually when we are in the car on our way somewhere. Often she sings about God’s love while making up the words and the melody. Sometimes she sings about what is happening in our lives. God has a unique plan for her that has something to do with boys, I just know it, for she has been surrounded by boys her entire life. Almost

all of her brothers' friends have brothers but no sisters! How fascinating it was to watch nine boys playing basketball in the driveway while Alyssa joined in, as I contemplated what God has planned for her to accomplish down the road.

What a tremendous gift Alyssa has been to our family. She has shared the love of God with us all through the joys and trials of 13 years together. The moment she was born I was filled with such incredible joy because God had gifted us with her presence. I remember thinking that I had everything I could have possibly wanted, and at the same time hoped that she would one day have other siblings in addition to her brothers.

Although I was feeling tremendously blessed, great tragedy loomed just over the horizon. In fact, that tragedy had already begun. In a God moment where I was mercifully prepared for disaster, I had a feeling right there in the delivery room that something was significantly wrong. My feelings did not make sense at the time, in fact they were unthinkable, but they were accurate. My marriage was ending, I did not even know it, and Alyssa would be my last baby.

When our boys were young, my husband and I decided to build a new home. Before our house was completed, we discovered that we were expecting Alyssa. While we would have preferred that our home be finished before having another baby, the house was almost finished and we seemed to lack a sufficient reason to delay welcoming another child.

However, we were in our early 30s and it seemed like we still had plenty of time to have more children. Fortunately, we had learned about natural family planning during our engagement, had practiced it to delay starting our family until we both finished school, and at the time Alyssa was conceived, both of us were still open to life.

I remember thinking that our third baby was arriving a little too early—according to my plans, that is. God had a plan, too, and His was much better than mine! Shortly after we moved in, the marriage that was to be forever ended and our home went up for sale. So many of my hopes and dreams were shattered at the same time. Two years later the home we worked so hard to build was sold to someone who sought to take advantage of our

sorrowful situation. Many times my feelings of despair were great, but God in His unfathomable mercy chose that very time to send me a child who would become one of my greatest joys and consolations. She and her brothers constantly bring joy and meaning to my life. Praise God that I trusted in His Ways more than my own! With the benefit of hindsight I can clearly see God's Loving Hand not only in my pregnancy but also in the timing of this child. God knew that despite my hopes, my marriage was ending, and He sent me a wonderful parting gift: my beloved Alyssa!

Years later it was revealed to me that I had been tempted by the devil during a time of tremendous assault on our family to doubt God, His timing, and *the very existence of this child*. What seemed like a mistake in timing was no mistake at all. *Her life was clearly an act of Divine Intervention!* God knew that her arrival was then or never, because that would be the last opportunity for my husband and I to have a child. God knew that a time of tremendous suffering had already begun for the children, for my entire family, and for me, and returned to His faithful servants love for love through the gift of someone very extraordinary.

God knows what we do not, and that is why we must reverence His judgments. Raising a family as a single parent has been a tremendous challenge, but my three children bring me great joy and I am so glad that they were born. God has remained with us every step of our journey, loved and guided us through many tremendous difficulties, and has always provided for our needs.

Alyssa's life confirms that every single person ever created is uniquely special, immensely loved by God, and has great purpose. Imagine how you felt during the most loving moment you have ever experienced—multiply that feeling by the largest number you can think of, and you still will not even come close to how much God loves each one of us. No person should be deprived of his or her life, not for any reason.

Alyssa's life also reminds us that many things contribute to the abortion mentality and sustain a pro-death culture, including pride, dishonesty, selfishness, materialism, infidelity, divorce, greed, lack of charity, and worldliness.

“For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed” (Psalm 139: 13–16).

Reverence God’s judgment, for He is your family’s planner. Trust in him, and rejoice in the masterpieces of His creation.

“God alone has a right to determine who will be conceived and born.”
~ Father John A. Hardon, S.J.¹⁷



Michele and Alyssa on Election Day

17. John. A. Hardon, S.J., *The Fifth Commandment—Sanctity of Human Life*. Copyright © 2000–2012 by www.therealpresence.org. All rights reserved worldwide. Used with permission.

GOD'S SURPRISE GIFT

Ellen Gable Hrkach

For several days after my mom shared the news, I remained shocked and surprised but very, very happy. My 47-year-old mother was going to have a baby.

One thing was certain: I had never seen my mom so happy. She became a widow at age 44. Then she met and married my stepfather. Although my stepfather had four daughters from his first marriage and my mother had four children from her marriage to my father, neither imagined that there would be any children from their union.

The challenges became apparent as soon as she began to tell people. My mom's obstetrician/gynecologist (the same doctor who delivered me 22 years previous) scowled when my mom asked for an "official" pregnancy test, explaining that she had taken an "at home" test and it was positive.

"You're not thinking of having it, are you?"

"Of course I am."

"You can't have it! You have a one-in-ten risk of having a child with Down syndrome, not to mention all the abnormalities that come with increased maternal age."

"I want to have this baby."

According to my mom, the doctor continued pushing and pressuring her into having an abortion. However, my mom had always had a strong personality. She didn't back down nor did she acquiesce to his wishes.

Finally, she said, "I'm having this baby."

The doctor replied, "Then you'll have to find another doctor. I won't be delivering it."

When she arrived home, my mom was angry. She spent the next 10 minutes yelling and pacing the floor. She was frustrated with the irony of the words "pro-choice." She wasn't given any choice but to abort. She

eventually found a Catholic pro-life doctor to deliver her baby. Since it had been 20 years since her last pregnancy, there were some concerns and challenges. However, this doctor took very good care of her.

Of course, her previous doctor wasn't the only one who reacted negatively. Some friends and relatives thought my mother and stepfather were crazy to be happy about an "unplanned pregnancy."

"This is obviously an accident," one person commented. My mother's response: "This isn't an accident. It's a surprise. Those are two different things." Another person said, "It was obviously unplanned." My mom would shake her head and say, "Not unplanned, just a surprise."

The day came for my mom to deliver. It was a rainy Tuesday evening. My siblings and I waited outside the delivery room. Finally, we heard a baby crying. We were soon given the news that my mother had given birth to a baby girl. We were thrilled! We had a new baby sister to love, and my mom continued to call her "God's surprise gift."

"God's surprise gift," my youngest sister, is now 30 years old and a novice with the Dominican Sisters of St. Cecilia in Nashville. Before entering the convent, she worked for many years at a crisis pregnancy center and spent most Saturday mornings praying in front of an abortion clinic.

My mother passed away in 2007. However, our entire family remains grateful that she and my stepfather chose life for my sister. I can't imagine the world without her.

Ellen Gable Hrkach is a wife to James, mother to five sons, and award-winning author of three novels, *Emily's Hope* (www.emilyshope.com), *In Name Only* (www.innameonly.ca), and *Stealing Jenny* (www.stealingjenny.com), and one non-fiction book called *Come My Beloved: Inspiring Stories of Catholic Courtship* (www.comemybeloved.com). Her blog is at <http://ellengable.wordpress.com>. She is a reviewer for CatholicFiction.net and a regular columnist for CatholicMom.com and AmazingCatechists.com. She is a frequent contributor to Catholic Exchange, Family Foundations magazine, and co-creator of the Family Life cartoon. She and her husband are a certified NFP teaching couple for CCL and are active in marriage preparation in their diocese.

LOOK TRUTH IN THE EYE

Michele Bondi Bottesi

My children and I were getting into our vehicle, which was parked outside the garage. I do not remember where we were headed, only that I unexpectedly saw a woman walking up our long driveway toward us. The woman approached us, smiling.

She didn't appear to be a solicitor, and focusing on the hope that we would not be delayed long, I did not even venture a guess as to what the woman could possibly want.

When she arrived at where I was standing by the open door of my vehicle, my children had already taken their seats and sat there, watching us.

The very friendly woman introduced herself and said that she was running for local office. As soon as she stopped to take a breath, I asked her where she stands on abortion.

"I'm pro-life," she responded with a smile.

"Good!" I responded.

Then, the woman added a statement that took my family by great surprise. Guess what she said?

She said that particular issue had no bearing on the office she was running for.

"It absolutely does matter," I corrected her.

Legalized abortion is the unthinkable result of a self-centered society. Every one of us must make it a point to bring about the peaceful end of the greatest humanitarian disaster in the history of the human race.

Procured abortion is “the deliberate and direct killing, by whatever means it is carried out, of a human being in the initial phase of his or her existence, extending from conception to birth.” ~ Pope John Paul II ¹⁸

Being pro-life matters. It matters a great deal! No other issue matters as much. Not one. No one who believes that it should be legal to abort children should be given anyone’s vote. Not ever. If we support pro-abortion candidates and they win, then we are responsible for the legalized killing of innocent people.

“Human life is not only a precious possession of man but is sacred because it belongs to God....Abortion is not only an injustice against an unborn human being; it is the desecration of something holy. Those in the pro-life movement who are Christians believe they are defending not only the equity of a human person. They are defending the sanctity of human life and the majesty of God....Abortion [is] a criminal violation of the rights of God.” ~ Father. John A. Hardon, S.J. ¹⁹

Abortion is not only an offense against human dignity; it is also a crime against the Divinity. “In its own way, abortion is a form of deicide. It is an attack on God by trying to destroy what belongs to God.” ~ Father John A. Hardon, S.J. ²⁰

“Our task, as believers, is to gain all the graces we can for those engaged in the abortion trade and for their tragic victims. Our hope is that they will respond to the graces they are receiving.” ~ Father John A. Hardon, S.J. ²¹

In his encyclical, *The Gospel of Life*, Blessed John Paul II explained that in the consciences of many people today, the perception of the gravity of abortion has become progressively obscured. He went on to say that society’s acceptance of abortion, in behavior and/or in law, is “an extremely dangerous crisis of the moral sense, which is becoming more and more incapable of distinguishing between good and evil, even when the fundamental right to life is at stake. Given such a grave situation, we

need now more than ever to have the courage to look the truth in the eye and to *call things by their proper name*, without yielding to convenient compromises or to the temptation of self-deception.”²²

“God, the Creator of Life, is pro-life. Are you?” ~ True Love Leads to Life

18. Pope John Paul II, *The Gospel of Life* (New York: Random House, 1995), p. 104.

19. John A. Hardon, S.J., *The Catholic Church: The Divinely Ordained Protector of Human Life*. Copyright © 2000–2012 by www.therealpresence.org. All rights reserved worldwide. Used with permission.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.

22. Pope John Paul II, *The Gospel of Life* (New York: Random House, 1995), pp. 103–104.

THE LITTLE GUARDIAN, MY LITTLE MAN

Chère Bernhard

My sweet li'l Liam, the X-man,
Liam Xavier, the Guardian of the New House (Does this mean you'll be pope of the Catholic Church some day? I don't know but a lot of people thought so, even your Great-Grandma Sanborn, who wasn't even Catholic. Pretty funny, huh?). My little man! I have been so lucky to see you grow from the little 5 lb. 6 oz. 18½-inch bundle who looked like a Treasure Troll with a thick tuft of black hair, jaundiced skin, and deep dimples on both cheeks. You slept so well that first night, and then all hell broke loose! You cried all the time. No matter how much comfort we gave you, it wasn't enough. You thirsted for more until I couldn't sleep anymore and became a zombie. You ushered me into the joys of parenthood! And I love you for it—always will.

You also scared me half to death when you were only two months old and had stopped breathing. I worried about you when they told your daddy and I that you had a bleeding ulcer and were a “failure-to-thrive child” when you weren't growing as expected and couldn't hold down your food. We worried again when they told us you had cerebral palsy, when we noticed you walked only

on your toes on your left foot and had horrible coordination. And once again, you scared me half to death when I woke up in the middle of the night to hearing you “hiccup” for about five minutes straight. I checked in your room and found you unresponsive. We called the paramedics and they whisked you to the hospital with a febrile seizure and a temperature of 103. Three hours later you were waking up and joking with the nurses and your parents. You kept me on my toes and made life an adventure of serious proportions!

You were never a disappointment to me, except on one occasion when your first word was “cars” and not “Mama.” Ha, ha! I guess I shouldn’t take too much offense since you didn’t say “Dada” yet either. But little did your daddy and I know that cars would become your favorite word AND your favorite movie. I suspect as you get older, you’ll be very interested in cars.

I was always so proud to take you out with me during the day as you were growing up. People thought you were absolutely adorable and you talked so well for your age. Once you got going, no one—not even your talkative mommy—could stop you. Your father used to say that he would never get a word in edgewise, between the two of us. Little did he know you would even talk more than me one day, before you entered kindergarten.

I use to take you with me to my weekly meetings for Holy Trinity Apostolate and there everyone adored you and always prayed for you. I think they all secretly hope that you become a priest since they have seen so many good qualities in you that would do the Church and the world a great service. Whatever you decide as a vocation, just make sure you keep the Good Lord as your guide and the center of all that you do, even if you decide to marry. If you decide the latter, tell your daddy. He’ll have one of my rings for you to give to the love of your life, if you’d like to have a little piece of me with you on your wedding day.

I'm so glad God blessed me with you. He gave you an amazingly bright spirit, such a deep understanding of people's emotions, and an endless supply of love and concern for others. Use these qualities to support and respect your daddy and guide and protect your brother Max. I won't be there, so they will need your help. You are so strong and independent and I have great faith that you will succeed in this task that I ask of you. With practice using these traits with your daddy and Max, I know you'll be able to help and serve others too. Please, never pass up a chance to do so, for it may be the one opportunity you have to show the face of Christ to another person and be a living Bible for them, for the Word of God was made flesh and manifests Itself to you daily in the Eucharist.

On a more superficial level, know that every time you look in the mirror and see your dimples, remember that I use to squeeze that cheek and smother it with kisses. I fell in love with your dimples, so be cautious with your virtue in your ventures with girls for they will love them too. Your eyes that look back at you in the mirror brightened up my life with your laughter and charm. This will work on the girls too, but don't lead them on if they are not your type. It wouldn't be fair to them if you did. Your long, thick eyelashes shaded your sadness and your tears when you were hurt. All of your emotions can be read within your eyes; never try to shield them from others, because you'll never be able to get away with it. Instead, show and tell the truth that lies within your heart. People will respect you more for it, especially other parents. And that little pouty lip that you used on me too many times to make me feel guilty that I was denying you something...it could get a little puffer and get you into heaps of trouble if you use it on some father's young daughter to get what you want. **SO DON'T EVEN THINK ABOUT IT!**
YOU HEAR ME, YOUNG MAN?

Which brings me to my next point: I know you will get into some trouble along the way. We all do. Take responsibility for your actions. Get yourself to a confessional with a faithful priest ASAP and let God forgive you. Then, ask the Lord for the grace to forgive yourself. Satan will eat you alive if you don't forgive yourself. Sometimes the person we hate most is ourself and that will just never do if you want to grow closer to Christ and be able to forgive others when the time comes. Because hating your-self is equal to despising the Omnipresent One, God the Father who created you, made you in His image, and knew you before you were born. Without being able to love Him and yourself, you can love no other.

Remember the times when we cuddled on the couch and took naps. Occasionally, I would wake up and look down upon your head, rub your hair off your face, and kiss you gently. You would respond with the most precious sigh in your sleep. You may be full of energy but you always brought me great peace when you let me hold you. I know one day you'll be able to bring that same peace to others who are starving for it and it will heal them to their most inner depths.

The Good Lord also graced you with abundant charm. Charm is powerful and influential, so in the words of Voltaire (No, Spiderman's Uncle Ben was not the first to say it), "With great power comes great responsibility." With your charm, where you lead, others will gladly follow. I caution you not to lead them onto the path of unrighteousness but the less-traveled road to redemption. And don't do it for the rewards of heaven but only out of your love for the Holy Trinity.

Since the day you were born, people have thought you are a very special soul and they are right. Because of this, you will feel pressured to excel, and you may overtax yourself. Don't be discouraged—it happens to even the strongest of individuals. Let God,

the Captain of your ship, take the helm when you travel those waters for the first time and rest. When the storms of exhaustion have passed, God will let you take the wheel again.

Travel and discover new sights, sounds, people, and flavors. Learn about the history and mistakes of not only our nation but others as well. Teach others to abide in faith, hope, and charity. Serve God's Church as a defender and let Christ be your shield and the Truth, your sword. Be a peaceful advocate for the unborn so other tiny souls will have the same opportunities as you, for even your mommy came close to not having a chance at life when my mother's womb should've been my protection. If that decision would have been made, the repercussions would have been a tidal wave to wipe out many generations and you would not be here.

Remember that family aren't just those who share your genetics but also those who share your faith. Let neither shake your faith in God, but help them to strengthen their faith following the steps of Christ. Being Christ-like doesn't mean being wishy-washy, lovey-dovey, or passive. (Just read the account of Jesus in the Temple when he is so angered at their evil doings that He starts to overturn the tables.) It is the truest sacrificial love that is an assertively firm stance, assured in the Word that bows to no evil.

If you ever doubt any of this advice, I want you to know that this doesn't come from someone who was raised in the Church. It comes from someone who loved Christ so much with a searching spirit, born within her, that she couldn't deny the pull of the Eucharist any longer. She hungered to ease the pain of the Man she saw crucified on the cross at seven years old, the one time she ever walked into a Catholic Church, by allowing Him to take away her sins through her Baptism, Confirmation, and first Holy Communion at age 22. So as you see, my faith wasn't handed down to me. I had to go find it, grab it, and hold on tight.

It can be a wild ride, so hold on tight! It's your only lifeline.

With all my greatest admiration and God's eternal blessings for my 'li'l Liam, I love you dearly,

Your Mama,

Chère

Chère Bernhard is a non-typical servant of our Lord, her husband, her boys, and anyone else who says, "Could use a little help over here!" She has no grand ambitions but to do whatever God leads her to do, so that she may meet her heavenly babies when eternity beckons. Lately, that means helping her oldest overcome his cerebral palsy limitations, attending pro-life rallies with her infant, and defending the life of the innocent in the avenues of infertility-causing vaccines and routine infant circumcision against both sexes. Appreciating the simple talents God has given her, Chère enjoys sewing theatrical costumes (her oldest went as a Knight of the Holy Sepulchre for last year's Halloween), being an RCIA sponsor, shooting pool with her own cue stick (a billiards hall is one of the most intriguing places to be a witness to Christ), playing a variety of roles on stage and TV, being the handy-woman around the house, and throwing parties for her family and friends. Her biggest weakness is not accepting help when she needs it, but Christ is working on that through prayer and weakening her ego.

“JESUS, I TRUST IN YOU!”

Michele Bondi Bottesi

I sat at a small round table at one end of the pizzeria. My two teenage sons were seated across from me. With my back against the wall, I was in the position to see the goings-on in the dining area. Toward the middle of the restaurant, on the right, a large group of high school boys sat at a very long table. They appeared to be the same age as my oldest son.

Sometimes, I glanced beyond my oldest son at the young men seated at the long table. They were content, very well behaved, and were enjoying their social encounter as well as their meal. When my oldest son had finished eating, he picked up the wrapper from his straw and manipulated it between his fingers as the conversation with his family continued.

While taking in the happy scene, I wondered what the future would be like for all the young men, what they would become, how much promise their lives had, how much they were loved and valued by God, and how much of His love they had to enjoy and to share.

It was a beautiful moment.

More than 30 years prior, when I was a teenager, I formally asked the good Lord if He wanted me to become a nun. His response was very clear. He said, “No.”

Through the years I experienced a persistent, nagging doubt that God’s response was an indication that He had rejected me. How could Jesus refuse a loving request to become His bride?

What I didn't understand well at the time is that God creates every one of us with a purpose, and with talents and skills we are to develop throughout life while serving one another as His instruments of love. While I was correct in asking God what it was He wanted me to accomplish, for He had the answer, my vision was short-sighted because I did not consider what God wanted to accomplish through my life down the road.

I married within 10 years, and by the age of 34 had been blessed with three beautiful children.

Fourteen years after I was married, I was legally divorced and had been granted an annulment. Sometimes I was tempted to say to God, "You knew from all eternity that my marriage would end, and yet You denied me the opportunity to be Jesus' spouse. That union would have lasted forever."

Roughly 10 years later, the good Lord had something very special to tell me.

One morning while I was on my way to Holy Mass, He said that a priest would come from my family. Jesus had not rejected me all those years ago! Instead, God had chosen a particular mission for me. I was meant to be a mother so God could one day create a priest.

After I received this joyful revelation, the devil shared his great displeasure with me. He suggested oppressive doubts, and said over and over again, "You should have become a nun! That's what you were supposed to do. You should have been a bride of Christ instead! That's what you were meant to do. You should have become a nun! You should have become a nun. That's what you were supposed to do, not be a mother..."

At first I wondered where those thoughts were coming from, because by then I more fully understood God's plan for my life. I absolutely love being a mother and it is what I do best, because God has given me the skills, graces, and unfathomable love to accomplish my mission to its fullest expression. I keep in close contact with God through prayer, receive Jesus in Holy Communion every day that I am physically able to, and receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation often. I say the Rosary as often as I am able to, and recognize the constant presence of God in everyone's life. I aspire to greater sanctity and closer union with God.

Although I would have made a wonderful nun, I make an even better mother, for that is the mission God had chosen for me from all eternity.

The persistent, nagging thoughts that I had made the wrong decision, that God was displeased with my decision, that I never should have married, and that since I was neither married to Jesus nor to a man I was nothing—I was unlovable, without value, and not even worth loving—came from the devil. His plan to sabotage my efforts to be obedient, humble, and holy was relentless and brutal. Once it became known that a priest would come from my family, the devil became even angrier.

All my efforts were certainly not lost on my children. My unconditional “Fiat” to God taught them to conform their wills to God’s will, too.

So there at the restaurant, all those years later, I returned my gaze from the large group of boys to my oldest son. *What a fine young man, so Christ-like, so genuine, so caring, so other-worldly*, I thought. *Perhaps he is the one God created for that special purpose. Time will tell.*

The boys had no knowledge of what I had been thinking. Just when I concluded that thought, my oldest son took the white paper straw wrapper he had been manipulating in his hands and slid it across the table toward me. He had formed it into the shape of a cross.

Later, I said a special prayer to God. After so many years, I had been granted another piece to a remarkably wonderful puzzle, in response to having recited the prayer “Jesus, I trust in You!” countless times along the way.

“Almighty God, I joyfully accept Your having created me to be a mother, for it is through the Holy Apostolate of Motherhood that You will send the world a holy priest.”

Roughly one year later, Jesus visited me while I was on my way to church. Once again, He had something very special to say to me. He proposed right there in the car while I was driving! I was painfully exhausted, quite surprised at the sudden proposal, and asked Jesus, “Did You just proposition me?”

He immediately replied, “Proposed. I proposed.”

Jesus is so very delightful! We continued to converse throughout the evening, and a short time later, I said to Him, “Jesus, that was one very

long engagement!” A discussion followed, and I mentioned that I had always thought it was His plan that I remarry one day.

Jesus responded, “The choice is yours.”

Then, I playfully told Him that usually a man makes special arrangements for such an event, and wondered why He proposed when I was so tired and was suffering. He explained that in the spiritual realm things are very different. I was suffering and had taken on His likeness, which made me very beautiful, and made the moment He chose very special. And so I said, “Who waits to say ‘Yes’ after a wonderful Man has proposed? Yes, Jesus, of course, yes!”

Trust God with your life, and want what God wants. Reverence His judgment, because God loves you! He knows what is best for you, both now and in the future. He also knows what is best for countless others who are meant to be touched, forever and in a very special way, by Him through your personal apostolate.

Work hard at growing in sanctity, so that God’s love can reach its fullest expression in you and through you.

“I tell you that you have less to suffer in following the cross than in serving the world and its pleasures.” ~ St. John Vianney



My son, with Blessed Mother and her son

CHAPTER 4

GOD'S WILL BE DONE

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*“God, the Creator of Life, is pro-life.
Are you?”
~ True Love Leads to Life*

A YOUNG MOTHER'S BEST GIFT

Lynn Ann Gura

At 19 years old, the best blessing of my entire life was born into this world. I had carried him inside my body close to my heart for a little over eight months. On November 2, 1985, Bruce Robert was born, weighing 4 lbs., 11 oz. and measuring 19 inches long. I assumed all was well with my son because I was young, healthy, ate properly, had an easy first pregnancy, and the child within my womb had a good heart rate, the measurements were fine, and he was very active. However, I quickly realized something was wrong.

Bruce was taken to neonatal intensive care very shortly after birth. There was a neonatal specialist on staff at the hospital who noticed some things about Bruce that he had seen before. After the specialist explained his suspicions with Bruce's father and me, we gave him permission to run blood tests and scans of Bruce's heart to see if what he suspected was true. It was hard to believe anything could be wrong with Bruce. He was such a beautiful baby boy and I loved him with all my heart!

It took about seven days for all test results to come back with conclusive answers. It was the longest seven days waiting for those results. There were a lot of prayers for Bruce during this time from family and friends.

The news was crushing! Bruce was diagnosed with trisomy 18 or Edwards syndrome, a chromosomal disorder. (A more familiar disorder is trisomy 21 or Down syndrome.) It was explained that babies born with this disorder cannot thrive and most die in the first year, with only 10 percent living past a year. It was very rare for those 10 percent to make it into the teen years. There was nothing that could be done for Bruce to fix this problem. It was predicted that Bruce would die within the month. We could leave Bruce in the hospital or take him home. Of course, I never would leave my son in the hospital so I asked what needed to be done in order to take him home.

Preparations were made to learn how to feed Bruce through tube feeding (gavage feeding) through his mouth and how to care for his special needs. We lived away from my family in another state with Bruce's father. The marriage was not a strong marriage, and with Bruce's situation it made things even more strained. However, I was determined to bring home my son. I had one brother and sister-in-law who lived close by. The brother was on Bruce's father's side of the family. The sister-in-law always treated me very well and she loved Bruce. She very willingly learned how to feed him in order to give me some assistance and support. Bruce's father learned how to do the feeding too, but once we brought Bruce home, he only helped with the feeding once and it was a very frustrating situation for him, so afterwards he never fed him again.

Before leaving the hospital, Bruce was baptized and received the Anointing of the Sick from a Catholic priest who was the chaplain at the hospital. That was very important to me.

I am so grateful to God that I was able to care for my precious son at home, giving him the love and attention he needed! It was a happy time for me being a mommy. He was my joy! I believe his father loved him but it was just too hard for him to become close to his son. I remained steadfast in my commitment to giving the best care to my son for however long he remained alive and no matter what was happening around me.

Bruce continued to live and I had the privilege of celebrating his first birthday! He was a happy baby boy! His smiles and laughter were

contagious! He enjoyed cuddling, hearing music, dancing with mommy, and traveling around town as mommy's companion when running errands during the day. He enjoyed being at Holy Mass on the weekend! He loved life and he loved people! He could babble a lot of baby talk, he could roll around on the floor, he could sit up with support, he could take a little formula and a little baby food by mouth, but his instincts for eating and swallowing were just not strong. He was enrolled in physical therapy and I would do the exercises they taught me at home with him. It was great fun time when we played!

When Bruce was nine months old, we changed from the neonatal specialist to a pediatrician who cared for special needs children. Upon his suggestion, we agreed to have surgery for Bruce that would fix his umbilical hernia and put a gastrostomy tube in his stomach so he could be fed that way. Although it was scary because I didn't know how Bruce would do, he came through the surgery with no problem, and after two days he smiled at me again! What a relief that was to me! I was truly thankful for all the prayers offered up for Bruce during this time. I was glad to be able to tell everyone he was okay.

After Bruce's first birthday, we moved to another state and then shortly after that, another. Things never improved between his father and me. Bruce was thriving better—thanks to the gastrostomy tube, a lot of love, and a lot of prayers! However, the distance that his father kept from Bruce and the continued strain of our relationship caused me to make the decision to leave him. In September 1987, I took Bruce back to my home state of Michigan and back to family and friends who surrounded him and me with great love!

Bruce continued to gain weight and grow. It was never a normal growth rate, but he was getting bigger. He looked about one year old at the age of two, and he could do things at about a six-month or so level of development. There were times when he would get very sick, but he'd always bounce back. Did I have fears, tears, frustration, helplessness, and sadness while he was alive?...for sure! However, I relied heavily on our God, our Lord Jesus, and His holy Mother to get me through.

After almost two months of a great sickness that attacked Bruce's body and caused his system to shut down, the most precious gift of my entire life left me to return back to his real home of heaven on April 11, 1988. This was the most terrible blow for me of my entire life. I would have gladly traded places with Bruce so he could live! My heart truly broke and Bruce took a piece of it with him. After all this time, I still have sadness inside. It will never go away completely while I am still alive. I have adjusted to the loss of my beloved son and each year has gotten easier, but my deep love for him remains and I miss him. I continue to celebrate his birthday and his "feast day" (the day he died and went to heaven) each year by going to Holy Mass, visiting the cemetery, and looking through his photo albums.

God is good, all the time, even in times of great suffering....He is there for us, loving us and getting us through the trials. We must be like "gold tested in fire." I ask for Bruce's intercession every day. He is in the best place ever with God the Father, Jesus, our Lord, the Holy Spirit, the Blessed Mother, St. Joseph and all the other saints, and the angels! He is perfect—no traces of the cross he bore on earth in his short lifetime, and I feel confident I will be with him again one day.

“ARE YOU SERIOUSLY THINKING ABOUT HAVING THIS BABY?”

Father Benjamin Kosnac

And Mary said, “Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.”

~ Luke 1:38

In the late 1960s, my parents lived in Bratislava, Slovakia, which at that time was Czechoslovakia and a Communist country. Abortion was promoted by the government and provided as health care for free. My mom and dad already had three sons, my brothers who were born two years apart. After having three babies in a short time span and being devout Catholics, they practiced what was an early form of natural family planning. When they learned that God had blessed them with a fourth child, they welcomed the news with an open heart.

Since they already had three sons, my parents were eager to have a girl this time. They used to make regular pilgrimages to Marianka, near Bratislava. Pregnant with their fourth child, at the next pilgrimage they asked God to give them a daughter. However, God and Our Lady had a different plan. It was a boy. Again. They named him Benjamin.

I was that fourth baby, born on November 21, 1969, the Feast day of the Presentation of Blessed Virgin Mary and am now a Catholic priest and pastor of Ss. Cyril & Methodius Slovak Catholic Church in Sterling Heights, Michigan.

Within five years, my parents were blessed with a fifth child. During the third month of that pregnancy, my mother visited her doctor for a prenatal checkup. Instead of being given a maternity information booklet, as was the practice during her first four pregnancies, she was given an abortion consent form instead.

Bewildered, Mom asked if she had been given a new maternity booklet.

Her doctor responded, “Are you seriously thinking about having this baby? You already have four boys.”

My mom replied simply but clearly. “Absolutely YES! There will be no abortion. We don’t believe in it.”

The doctor shrugged her shoulders and accepted mom’s decision.

To the doctor’s credit, she presented flowers to my mother during her next prenatal checkup to apologize for suggesting the abortion, and to express her admiration that mom was willing to have more children.

During that fifth pregnancy, my parents went on the usual pilgrimage. This time, they did not ask God for a girl. They prayed instead for the well-being of the baby. Guess what was born? A girl! When their first daughter was born, my parents were so grateful to God for having granted their request, after they had welcomed the fourth son He had given them first.

They named my sister “Maria” in honor of our Blessed Mother.

After Maria was born, Mr. and Mrs. Kosnac were blessed with their sixth child, another girl named Veronika. Today, Maria is 36 and has three sons, Veronica is 34 and has two children, and my parents are the proud grandparents of 17 grandchildren.



GOD GAVE ME MY DOZEN

Judy Arwady

When I got married 51 years ago, I wanted lots of children. God gave us seven. I labored on and off with our first child for 72 hours. Our daughter died two days after she was born. She had a hole in her heart. I guess God was preparing me for something bigger, and He was.

I saw my other six children being born. When the second baby came along, she was very tiny and I was scared, but she was fine. We were very blessed. What a beautiful way God prepared for me; God knows all. At the time when I had four children, I always heard a baby crying. I asked my husband, “Do you hear a baby crying?” Of course he said, “You are hearing things.” I found out later that we were expecting our fifth child. Jesus had been preparing me.

Then I got pregnant again and had the beautiful twins. I was so blessed—I had wanted twins. We hadn’t had twins in our family for 80 years or so. My husband had said, “Four children, Judy. How are we going to afford them?” Of course he doesn’t remember, but I do and so does God. I wanted lots more: 12. My husband said, “What are you thinking? We aren’t raising chickens.” (Laugh.) He loves all our seven children.

My twins are priests now; I am sure they tell some of our family's stories. One of my priest sons mentioned in church that his mother didn't get rid of all her children. I always wanted a big family and God heard me. In church, the children call me Grandma Judy, and that makes me feel good. I love children.

My children gave me 12 grandchildren, and we lost one. God gave me my dozen, not children but grandchildren. They are beautiful gifts from Jesus. With each child you have, you love them more and more. What a great life God has given me!

INFERTILE SARAH

Father Luigi Gabris

This is the story of my first experience praying on behalf of couples who hoped to have a child. It took place during my first pilgrimage to Medjugorje. I went with a group from our church for 15 days. At the time, it took 23 hours by bus to get there, so we had plenty of time to talk to one another and share stories. One married couple, whom I had not known previously, asked me to pray for them. They both were approximately 30 years old and wanted to have a child.

So I began to pray for them and asked two friends who were also on the pilgrimage to pray for the couple as well. It is a beautiful intention to want a child. On the second day, my two friends prayed with me at the pension (guest house) for this newly married couple. I asked the Holy Spirit to reveal God's will for them, and randomly opened the Bible to Romans 9:9 where it is written, "For this is the word of promise, at this time will I come, and Sarah shall have a son."

So my friends and I went to the wife and I told her that one day, "God will give you a son." Only God knew when. After three years, they became tired of waiting and decided to try to conceive by in vitro fertilization. I prayed that they would not go against God's commandment because we are not God and must instead cooperate with Him, because He is the giver of life.

Three times the couple conceived through in vitro fertilization, and three times they miscarried. My friends then gave up trying and adopted a child. When the wife was 40 years old, God gave her a son. This couple no longer expected that God would give them a child, but God is faithful. We must keep our faith, obey God's laws, and not lose our patience. His timing is always perfect.



courtesy of Sandi Brady

Father Luigi Gabris

MIRACLE TO THE MAX

Chère Bernhard

My sweet little Maximilian,
If you're reading this, your mommy who has loved you since you were conceived is not with you on Earth. I can't even assure you that I'm watching you from heaven but I can assure you I did everything in my power and love for you to make sure you made it to be born of a family that will love you dearly, especially with a daddy who will love you, guide you, encourage you, and correct you when needed, and a brother who will be a life-long friend to you.

I'm writing this note about three days before your birth. I don't even know what to say to you. I just hope that I got the chance to witness your first breath, see your beautiful face, and hold you to my heart before I left this world. I'm crying a lot right now, still in disbelief that I even have to do this as a precaution. God only knows I don't want you to feel as if I abandoned you—if anything, I gave my life for you. I lost so many others, your brothers and sisters (six in all), before I had you and I could've never lived with myself if I lost you too as I saw you develop with perfect hands and feet, a sweet little pudgy nose, and cherub cheeks.

Those cheeks I saw at my ultrasound on July 19. You looked so beautiful to me. I thought right away that you looked a lot like your brother Liam and your Uncle Mark when he was a baby, but also a pretty good combination of your daddy and me.

When I learned I was pregnant with you, you were God's answer to my prayers to fill my empty arms. However, I didn't think He'd let me keep you just as He hadn't with the rest. As time progressed, the doctors kept assuring me that you were doing well and were right on target for growth. You were doing even better than Liam had when I was pregnant with him. I took aspirin and Lovenox to keep you and me from getting blood clots because of my anti-phospholipid syndrome, the same syndrome that took your brothers and sisters from your daddy and me.

When it came to wanting to name you, your daddy wanted Maximilian since he had liked the name for quite some time and he wanted to name you after St. Maximilian Kolbe. Maximilian means, "The Greatest." I got to pick your middle name and since we wanted to honor our Irish heritage as we did with your brother, Liam, I chose Quinn since it means "Counselor" in Gaelic. I hope you live up to your name for it was chosen especially for you and all the great things I thought you might be able to accomplish.

I had a dream while I was pregnant with you. Ask one of my dear friends about it; I posted it on Facebook. It was about my death; however, despite the dark topic, it was a wonderfully peaceful ending. In it, I got to see you, as an infant, from the stars being loved by so many on Earth, all of whom surrounded you in their protection. I couldn't have asked for a better way to go. And I was at peace, with no pain, no shackles from the world, and completely free to explore God's greatest creation, the universe, with you in it.

If I make it to heaven, I will greet you when it is your time with open arms and your siblings beside me gladly anticipating your

arrival. But would you do me a favor, huh? Don't make it too soon. I want you to live a nice long life into your old age with grandchildren and maybe even great-grandchildren. Take good care of your body. Stay active. Go on a few adventures—it's good for the soul and the heart. You don't have to do anything great in your life to impress me or make me proud of you. Just do everything you do, even the simplest of tasks, with the greatest of love, for Christ, yourself, and others, even the unloveable of society. And never ever doubt God's love for you. You survived incredible odds to be here. He wouldn't have given this life to you if He didn't have at least a small purpose for you in His divine will.

I'll give you some notes of advice on your daddy and your brother Liam too. Let's start with big brother Liam: Liam has a mild form of cerebral palsy, possibly from my condition when I was pregnant with him. He may need your help when you two get older, so please take care of one another. When we started telling him about you, he loved you from the get-go. He would kiss my belly, tell you "I love you," and hug my belly filled with you



Miracle Max

inside it. He had to say “Good morning” and “Good night” to you every day. So don’t be too hard on him when he tells you to do something or gives you some stern advice as you’re growing up. He only does it because he loves you dearly and always has. I did the same for your Uncle Mark as we were growing up and he hated my guts for it, but later on in life we became a lot closer because of it.

As for your daddy, ask him one day how we met several years before we ever dated, at a Holy Hour. He’ll enjoy sharing that story with you, because in that same church he asked me to marry him. There is a DVD of our wedding so you can see all of your relatives that joined in our special day. I’ve asked your daddy, in my letter to him, to give you and Liam one of my rings, either the engagement ring or the wedding band, if you boys decide to get married. He will make the decision of who gets which. That way you can have a piece of me with you on your special day.

Please make your daddy’s life easier by listening to him and following his instructions. He’s going to have a hard enough time at the beginning, so take it easy on him and don’t blame him for anything please. Remember he’s without a wife, just as you are without a mommy, so he might be feeling just as lonely as you are some days. He’s doing the best he can by you boys. Trust me when I say he’s one of the best dads I know. He will pray every day, so pray with him. He will go to church every Sunday, so go with him. He will love the Lord unceasingly, so do the same. By doing these things, you will imitate a great man and will learn to become one yourself.

And lastly, be sure to share this letter with your daddy and Liam. I’ve asked them to do the same with their letters with you so that way you all can see the bigger picture of how I have loved all of you and how you all need to depend on one another for that same kind of love to continue in our family.

I will carry you in my heart always. Hugs and kisses, honey!

Love,
Your Mama,
Chére

Chére Bernhard is a non-typical servant of our Lord, her husband, her boys, and anyone else who says, “Could use a little help over here!” She has no grand ambitions but to do whatever God leads her to do, so she may meet her heavenly babies when eternity beckons. Lately, that means helping her oldest overcome his cerebral palsy limitations, attending pro-life rallies with her infant, and defending the life of the innocent in the avenues of infertility-causing vaccines and routine infant circumcision against both sexes. Appreciating the simple talents God has given her, Chére enjoys sewing theatrical costumes (her oldest went as a Knight of the Holy Sepulchre for last year’s Halloween), being an RCIA sponsor, shooting pool with her own cue stick (a billiards hall is one of the most intriguing places to be a witness to Christ), playing a variety of roles on stage and TV, being the handy-woman around the house, and throwing parties for her family and friends. Her biggest weakness is not accepting help when she needs it, but Christ is working on that through prayer and weakening her ego.

DOMINIKA

Father Luigi Gabris

A very nice young married couple were members of my last parish. I met them for the first time at a party, and learned that they were not going to church. I asked them, “Why aren’t you going to church?” They responded that they had been unable to have a child, and because of their great disappointment, they had stopped going.

I asked if they knew what was preventing them from conceiving and the wife, Martina, said that it was determined that her health was the cause. The couple explained that they had gone to many specialists, and were told that she needed a minor procedure to remove blockages in her fallopian tubes.

Martina had the surgery and still did not conceive, so her husband’s health was suspected as the probable cause.

When the couple had been married for six years, they told me they made the decision to try artificial conception. They had already made the appointment to start the process in two months. I said to them, “Please give God a chance.”

My friends said it had been discovered that the husband had a very low sperm count. I responded, “That is not a problem for God.” For the second time, I told them, “Give God a chance. I will pray for you; God will find that one sperm, and you will have a child. Trust in God.”

The couple trusted in the Lord and cancelled the appointment to begin in vitro fertilization. I continued praying and said, “God, I am celibate, and since I have no children, give one child to them instead.” With great confidence I told my friends, “God will give you a child.”

Two months later, Martina was pregnant. The couple had a little girl and named her Dominika. “Dominica” in Latin means “belongs to the Lord.” I baptized her, the couple began going to church, and we remain good friends. This miracle greatly affected Dominika’s grandmother, and she started going to church as well.



Dominika

CHAPTER 5

STORIES FROM THE BATTLEFIELD

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“When we say that the Church teaches that the Eucharist is our most potent source of grace...let's understand what that means. It means that Christ confers His grace in the measure of a person's faith.”

~ Servant of God, Father John A. Hardon, S.J.²³

23. John A. Hardon, S.J., *There Is No Stopping Abortion without the Eucharist*. Copyright © 2000–2012 by www.therealpresence.org. All rights reserved worldwide. Used with permission.

BE A LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

Michele Bondi Bottesi

My children and I were introduced to the 40 Days for Life campaign several years ago by a lovely friend who is active in the pro-life movement. She sent me an e-mail with information about a campaign that was about to begin in a neighboring town. Volunteers were needed to sign up for days and times to pray at the abortion clinic in that city.

My children and I signed up to pray for an hour during one of the 40 days.

The week before our scheduled day, my daughter, who was in elementary school at the time, and I decided at the spur of the moment to go to the abortion clinic and pray after dropping my sons off at church for an altar boy meeting, since we would not be far from the clinic.

As we pulled into the parking lot of the clinic, we noticed one woman standing in the legal area between the parking lot and the road. She was standing alone, praying all by herself.

Praying at an abortion clinic is always a life-changing experience, not only for those who pray there, but also for the recipients of the prayers.

When we do not pray, so much good is never accomplished.

If you have never participated in a prayer vigil at an abortion clinic, you must! Be sure to invite family, friends, and especially children to pray with you.

We were so happy to see the woman praying at the abortion clinic that day, and she was so happy to see us! After we exchanged greetings, the woman told us that she had prayed to the Blessed Mother to send someone else, so she would not be alone.

The Blessed Mother answered her prayers!

Our prayers to end abortion matter a great deal, and in so many ways. Lives are saved, people are strengthened, hearts are changed, abortion clinics are closed, people are informed where they can get the help that they need, and those who are wounded by abortion are guided to the hope, healing, and mercy that can always be found in Jesus Christ.

The prayers of every single one of us are needed by so many other people. There are so many wonderful things we can do every day to save lives.

“There is no stopping abortion without an ocean of grace from Jesus Christ. No way will human means stop abortion....There is no stopping abortion except through the devoted faith of professed Catholics who are apostles of the Blessed Sacrament. Our frequency of assisting at Mass, our devotion in attending Mass, our frequency and fervor in receiving Holy Communion and on being completely detached from everything that could weaken our love for God.” ~ Father John A. Hardon, S.J.²⁴

During 40 Days for Life campaigns, volunteers receive e-mail updates each day and are invited to share their experiences with others. The following story came from one of those e-mails.

A man named Ryan was praying with a group at an abortion center in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, and described what happened after the center closed for the day. An employee exited the building, threw eight small plastic babies on the ground and said to the prayer volunteers, “I don’t know how long you people plan to be here, but this is how many we did today.”

The prayer group remained silent, watched the employee leave, and then prayed for the eight aborted babies and the abortion clinic staff. They distributed the plastic babies among the vigil participants to keep as reminders to pray for the unborn, especially the eight babies who had been aborted at the clinic that day.

“We all deal with trials at our vigils,” Ryan had said. “We have faith that God is using us to do His work. This trial and others are proof that God is at work in these clinics.”

24. John A. Hardon, S.J., *There Is No Stopping Abortion without the Eucharist*. Copyright © 2000–2012 by www.therealpresence.org. All rights reserved worldwide. Used with permission.

GOD KNEW THAT I WAS GOING TO NEED HER

Nancy Davis

On July 16, 2010, I attended a Mass for the Veneration of the Relics of Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta at the Cathedral of St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception in Peoria, Illinois. This stop of the relics in Peoria was a last-minute thing and only publicized via the website of the diocesan newspaper, *The Catholic Post*, just a couple days before the event. The only way I became aware that the relics would be passing through was because the information showed up on Facebook.

For some reason, I felt I compelled to go to this Mass. I didn't know why. For several years I had a special interest in Blessed Mother Teresa and had read many books about her, but wasn't sure why I seemed to have this overwhelming need to attend this Mass. It so happened that my work schedule allowed for me to attend, so I did. It was a very nice Mass; the Sisters of the Missionaries of Charity brought up the relics, and following Mass by the bishop, the people were invited to come forward to venerate the relics with a kiss, bow, or other sign.

As we came forth to venerate the relics, the Sisters of the Missionaries of Charity passed out medals of Blessed Mother Teresa. On the front was her face and on the back the words, "Pray for Us." I accepted the medal, but since I am very allergic to nickel, I am extremely limited in

what jewelry I can wear. I decided to put it on with my cross and see what would happen. I would know in a couple of hours if I could wear it, because by that time, if it has nickel in it, I will generally start itching and breaking out with a rash. Well, I put it on and nothing happened, so I left it on. No questions; I just left it on.

Fast-forward to August 9, 2010. I was in a home for disabled children in Mexico as part of my mission work twice a year. My daughter and I had come to clean the home, which houses about 25 disabled adults and children, many of them profoundly handicapped. In Mexico, the government does not provide any financial assistance to places such as this, so the facility is run solely on donations, which sometimes are sorely lacking.

I had been there one other time and it really needed cleaning, so that is what I thought we were going to be doing that day. God had other plans. When we arrived the pastor thanked us for coming and said, “What I really need today is help bathing the children.” I am a nurse, but in my heart, my first thought was, “I don’t know if I can do this!!!” In all my years I had never worked with this population of people and there was a certain element of fear. But my mouth said immediately, “Sure, Pastor, show us what to do.”

He introduced us to one of the higher-functioning residents who was in charge of the baths. At the time, I spoke basically no Spanish but figured out that she was saying that we had five baths to do. So we went into one of the rooms where beds lined the walls and there were developmentally disabled children restrained in beds or wheelchairs, and my helper picked Maria to go first.

Maria was about 13 years old, was in a wheelchair, had deformed little limbs, could not talk, and was in diapers. Let me set the scene in the bathroom, so you have a little visual as to what we were going to be doing. First of all, it was August and the temperature was in the 100s, and of course there was no air conditioning. In the bathroom there was a round metal tub of water on the floor, a mesh bath table, and one loofah on the floor. There were no washcloths or clean towels for each child. The tub of water was for everybody who got a bath that day.

The nurse in me was saying, “You can do this, this is business, take care of it,” but inside I wanted to cry and run away. My assistant and I went to work as my daughter cleaned wheelchairs. I was struggling. In all my years of service work, I had not been challenged as much as this. As we bathed the second or third child, I was overcome with this sudden sense of a presence of the Divine. I didn’t really know what was happening. Blessed Mother Teresa came into my mind and my heart, and I remembered that when she was asked how she cared for the dying of Calcutta, some of them hideously covered with maggots and horrendous wounds, she said that she looked into their eyes and saw the face of Jesus. She was caring for Jesus in disguise. That is how she did it.

One of her quotes is, “Feelings of repugnance are human, but if I see the face of Jesus in His distressing disguise, I will be holy.” As I looked deep into the eyes of the helpless child I was bathing, I touched my medal, and I knew why I was supposed to go to the Mass for the Veneration of Mother Teresa’s relics. God knew that I was going to need her. At that point in time, I experienced this amazing moment of grace. I looked into the face of this innocent and beautiful child of God and I saw Jesus in disguise. I instantly knew that I was right where God wanted me to be, doing just what he wanted me to be doing, and all was right with my world. It was a moment of joy that could only be from the Divine, one of those ah-hah moments.

All of a sudden I realized it was my privilege to bathe these children, whom the world would consider “throw-aways.” I had the opportunity to touch them with loving hands and a loving heart. What a blessing!!! We ended up doing seven baths that day and what started out to be a service to these children ended up being a tremendous gift to me. It was a day I will never forget. It was a day and a duty I had approached with trepidation, but God had a better plan.

When I returned to the United States that night at about 10:30 p.m., I checked my Facebook page. There was a message from a friend in a faith community that I belong to. She is someone that I know, who is my friend on Facebook, but not someone whom I had ever corresponded

with there before. I had not seen her for probably 1½ years or more. The message had been posted at 8:56 that morning and said, “Good morning, Nancy... you were on my mind all morning at Mass—maybe you need an extra prayer today? Anyway you got one. I hope you have a wonderful day.” How did she know? So not only was Blessed Mother Teresa with me, but God had enlisted the aid of spiritual friends to strengthen me for the journey I was to walk that day.

My life was forever changed that day. I have no doubt of the intercession of Blessed Mother Teresa in all of this. Her medal still remains with my cross around my neck to this day. Through her intercession, God graced me with eyes to see the beauty of life in all stages, and that no life is accidental, wasted, or without purpose. With eyes of clear vision I saw the blessing of these children, and God used them to teach me a lesson one could never learn in a book. He taught me about life, love, and the value of human life in all forms.

Is this all coincidence? Well, one could maybe see it that way I suppose, but the great pope, Blessed John Paul II, said on the first anniversary of the assassination attempt upon his life on May 13, 1982, that “In the designs of Providence, there are no mere coincidences.”

Nancy Davis is a mom, daughter, wife, nurse, and loves the adventure of the spiritual journey. Her “tribe” right now is the immigrant and alien. She does service work in Mexico twice a year, heads up the Midwest branch of Bridges of Promise, a not-for-profit organization to help the orphans of Tanzania, and volunteers with an immigrants’ families group. She is active in several ministries of her church, including choir, Eucharistic ministry, homebound Eucharistic ministry, and WATCH. She is an active member of the Eastern Area Cursillo Community.

ANOTHER ENCOUNTER AT THE CHAPEL WITHOUT WALLS

Jenny Pozniak

A young woman stopped her car and said, “I’ve been driving by for about a month and I had to stop to ask you—what exactly are you doing out here? Your sign really upsets me...I had an abortion about a month ago.”

I replied gently, “My sign says just what I’m doing out here—praying to end abortion.”

She said, “Are you judging me?”

I answered, “Absolutely not! I know from speaking to women who have stopped to talk to me, and from family members as well, that abortion hurts women and I don’t want any more women to go through that pain.”

She was really relieved and said she was glad she stopped. I reached in and held her hand and she said having an abortion was really difficult, but because of where she works, she just could not be a single mother. I let her talk and did not ask any questions; I just kept holding her hand. I told her God loves her because she is sorry that she had the abortion, that her baby is in heaven waiting to hug her when God calls her home, and that we all would continue to pray for her and women like her who are hurting after their abortions.

I told her I simply give out Baby Jesus prayer cards and handed one to her. I informed her about our website, which has various programs like Rachel's Vineyard that help provide healing when she is ready to talk more. She said again that she was really glad she decided to stop and talk with me, and I told her she had most definitely blessed my prayer vigil time by taking time out of her evening to talk and not to drive by and yell or give me the finger. She said she would never do that. We both felt just wonderful after talking!!!

If you, or anyone you know, is in need of post-abortion help and healing, please contact Rachel's Vineyard: www.rachelsvineyard.org

SOMETIMES YOU DON'T KNOW THE GOOD THAT YOU CAN DO

Sean McVeigh

When I was in my final year of college, I began to struggle with my vocational calling. I always thought God wanted me to be married. However, many people started telling me I should be a priest. In order to discern which path God wanted me to follow, marriage or the priesthood, I joined a Catholic religious order of Franciscans to see if the priesthood was my calling.

Shortly after I joined the religious order I began praying outside of abortion clinics every Saturday morning with my classmates. While we prayed for the women and unborn infants, I watched as people attempted to sidewalk counsel the women entering the abortion clinics. Every counselor seemed to have his or her own style of approaching and speaking with the women. In that respect, there was one pro-life gentleman who was not affiliated with us who just stood in front of the abortion clinic door with brochures in his hand yelling at the women, “Murderer!” While I believe he had good intentions in being there, I didn’t think his approach was helping the situation very much. There were other counselors who took a more delicate approach but still seemed to have trouble getting through to the women.

As I watched all of this take place week after week, I began to think I could do a good job at counseling. I thought that perhaps I could

even do better than the people I had been watching. As a result, I went through the training courses that were offered through my religious order, which was required by my order for anyone who wanted to become a sidewalk counselor.

After my training and preparations were complete, I was excited to have an opportunity to try to save lives. However, just one hour into my first day as an official sidewalk counselor, I realized that trying to convince a woman to keep her baby was far more difficult than I had anticipated it to be. I also didn't realize how emotionally draining it would be for someone with a sensitive personality type!

It seemed that no matter how hard I tried to be caring and loving, I couldn't even get many of the women to stop and talk to me. In many respects, it was like jumping in front of a freight train and trying to get it to stop.

On the ride home that day, I began to think that maybe I should just spend my time praying with the other religious brothers, rather than try to convince women to keep their child. I thought that perhaps someone else would be better at reaching the women than I was.

Later that week, the director in charge of the formation program for my religious order called us all into a meeting. He told us that a woman had just contacted our house. "She was planning to abort her baby last weekend. On her way to the clinic, she spoke with one of you. Although she went into the clinic afterward, she continued to think about what he said to her. It took a while, but she finally decided to get up and leave the clinic. By the time she came out we had already left, but the important thing is that she chose life for her baby!" Myself and the rest of my classmates all celebrated and rejoiced at the great news! The director then turned to me and said that I was the one she had talked to. I was surprised, overjoyed, and thankful.

Tears sometimes come to my eyes as I relive that moment in my mind. I feel so inspired that God would work through me to save a child's life as well as to preserve the emotional well-being of the mother. Throughout the following two years that I spent with the religious order before

finishing my vocational discernment, I continued to sidewalk counsel on a weekly basis. Although there may have been other lives that God saved through my efforts, I can't say for sure how many.

One of my reasons for sharing this story is to help you realize that we often don't know the good that God does through the efforts we make. After my first day of counseling, I thought I had miserably failed and didn't know if I should even try again. It turns out that God *did* save a life through my efforts that day, but I didn't find out until almost a week later. If you are ever going through life trying to do the right thing but feel as though your efforts are fruitless, try to remember this story. Perhaps there is a life out there that you have positively impacted without knowing or realizing it. Just keep in mind that God works through all that we do for the good of everyone involved. We just need to *rest in faith*, and *trust* that God will bring good out of all that we do for the betterment of His kingdom.

Sean McVeigh considers himself to be just an average guy who is doing all he can to serve God and the Church. As part of this, Sean founded McVeigh Ministries in an attempt to inspire Catholics to more fervently live their faith. Sean primarily does this through his writings and guest speaking services. For more information about Sean and his ministry, visit his website at www.CatholicGuestSpeaker.com.

HER TRUE LOVE FOR GOD LED TO LIFE

Sharon Rose Cecil

I cannot fully put into words sentiments about my friend Lea Ann. However, I will try to share some of them, partly to help others heal, help myself heal, and give others inspiration through what I witnessed by being her friend.

We met at St. Augustine Church in Covington, Kentucky, probably around 1987 or 1988. We both had little ones in the Sunday school program, which was a huge blessing to me and actually brought me back to the Catholic Church. Lea Ann had many ideas of ways to make the program fun and meaningful to the kids. One year, she had a quantity of wool boot liners that our little group of kids helped stuff with gifts and delivered to nursing home residents at Christmas along with some entertainment of Christmas carols.

She was always recycling and picking up things cheap that she thought “somebody” would surely need. That somebody was frequently me and my family. As my family grew, each time I was expecting another child I would frequently find boxes of baby and maternity clothes on my porch, along with anything else she could think of: a Little Tikes swing, car seat, toys, etc. As a matter of fact, I always found things “left” on my porch: Catholic magazines, household items, even little gifts for the kids.

When we joined the pro-life group at St. Augustine together, she was back into action with another purpose. We did sidewalk counseling together and shared what I called our sidewalk counseling purse. When it was our turn to pray and witness at the abortion clinic, we used that purse filled with current materials to hand out. She made sure it was stocked with handmade booties, etc.

Lea Ann was actually blessed to “save” one child from abortion by her presence and witness. I say one but we are never sure what the outcome is; it may have been more. Anytime she or I had an idea for the pro-life group, our cooperation and enthusiasm grew. She tried every way she knew to help people realize how important the abortion issue is and how we could help stop it.

She had neighbors she helped regularly and looked after them with meals, financial help, jobs, etc. She loved her children without measure and talked about them with pride all the time. I watched her grieve the loss of her parents and brother, but all I can remember about that time was her working in her yard and garage, fixing up furniture to sell—most likely so that she had more to help others with.

When I moved from Covington and could not take my dog with me right away, she kept him in her basement, took him for walks, and I’m sure gave him attention and love for me. She was constantly giving me things for the homeless outreach my family and I do. Even this Christmas, most of what was distributed came from her: gloves, scarves, long johns, soap, and more.

Everywhere I look in my home, I see something that she gave me. She was always trying to make my life easier in some way or more beautiful. She gave and gave and gave. At the funeral home, her daughter told me Lea Ann had two baby pictures of my daughter in her wallet. I knew how much we meant to her.

I was told her corneas were donated in the spirit of her “giving” life. I watched the video diary streaming during the visitation and saw glimpses of her past. She was an artist and teacher. She had such flair in so many areas. I could not go up to the casket—I could not say goodbye. Only now, with tears in my eyes, can I talk about this and share here somewhat of the joy and love I received from her. The loss is sure, but so is the impact she left on so many of us. I know she lives in Christ now.

Sharon Rose Cecil is a mother, grandmother, writer, and evangelizer of God’s love. Her multi-faceted lay apostolate draws people to parish life, focuses on the patron saint of each parish, conducts homeless outreach, and promotes the Rosary, especially to end abortion. Visit her blog at <http://savebabies-savesouls.blogspot.com>.

THE TRUTH MUST BE TOLD

Andre Bottesi

Stepping out of the car I felt the cold surround me, which made me wish I had brought better gloves. The pain from the cold was nothing compared to the pain in my heart. I grieved for the children who had died in the abortion clinic that I was standing in front of, and because of the pain the mothers, fathers, and families felt after the death of their young child. Some people say that it isn't a baby before it is born, but how can you say that?

“What do we mean when we say that human life is sacred? We mean it is sacred because God must personally and individually create each human soul at the moment of conception. The parents provide the body, God must individually, distinctively, personally create out of nothing the human spirit, which He infuses into the body.” ~ Father John A. Hardon, S. J.²⁵

The baby's heart beats inside its mother and it can feel pain before it is born. That baby is a human and has been one since it was conceived. When you want to plant an apple tree you put the seed in the ground and once it starts to grow and is springing up from the ground you don't just rip it apart and destroy it. Abortion does just that to a baby before it is born. It is wrong to kill and it always will be. There is no justification for killing such an innocent life.

“Why is life sacred? Because during our mortal stay on earth, we are meant to glorify God by knowing, loving and serving Him. The worst feature of abortion is that a child is prevented from serving God and thus merit to live with God in a heavenly eternity. Abortion is stealing from God the right God has of being glorified by His rational creature.” ~ Father John A. Hardon, S.J.²⁶

As I thought about that, we joined the others who came to pray and teach others that abortion is evil. The people who came were so nice and caring. They know the truth and so do I; awakening others to the truth and stopping this evil is of extreme importance to this world.

My mom talked to the others about what we were going to do while we were there. One of them handed me a sign and I walked to the corner of the easement by the road and held it up with great sorrow and also with great pride. I know the truth and the truth must be told.

I saw someone pull into the parking lot of the plaza; a man and a woman were in the car and I feared the worst. They did not go into the clinic but into the sub shop next door. I was relieved, but then sickened because the thought came to me that there were people eating subs right next to the slaughterhouse of children.

Cars passed by and I once again faced the street and showed the oncoming traffic my sign. Some people honked and waved in approval of what we were doing. Others, particularly teens and young adults, give us a thumbs down or cupped their hands over their mouths and booed at us. A few said horrible words as they passed by. They used their words to do damage to others while we used our words to try to save lives.

I feel bad for those young people who passed by and discouraged us. They don't know the truth, and they could be the next victims of abortion. Some are not as fortunate as I am to have learned the truth at an early age—that abortion is evil. We need to teach the youth of today about such things to protect them and everyone they could impact with their actions. We need to reach out and teach the truth, because if we don't, who will?

We, along with the others who were outside of the clinic with us, began to pray the Rosary. I was given the honor of leading one of the

decades. I felt foolish when I forgot a part of one of the prayers, but the others helped me remember and then I didn't feel so bad.

If you don't know a certain prayer or don't know how something is done, you have nothing to worry about. The people around you will help you and guide you in the right direction. When I first went to the clinic, I didn't know what to expect and I didn't know what to do. The others who were there showed me what to do, and after I began, I felt like I really knew what I was doing.

My experience praying in front of an abortion clinic was thought provoking and special to me. I sometimes feel that I am powerless to stop abortion. I feel that alone I will not make a difference. I remind myself that this is not true. When people don't vote in an election they most likely feel that their one vote will not make a difference. If everyone had this mindset, then who would be left to vote?

The same is true about being against abortion. Every person makes a difference in ending this tragedy that is devastating our country. Every prayer is important and every prayer matters. Every protester standing outside the abortion clinic has a great impact on ending abortion. You matter and so do every one of your prayers and contributions.

I may be just 16, and in the eyes of the government I am not an adult, but I can still make a difference in ending abortion. I will not sit down and watch television all day while my brothers and sisters are killed before they are born.

From conception until death, every person has the right to live. Whether you are one or one hundred years old, it makes no difference. Everyone has an equal right to life and everyone is equal in dignity. Life begins at conception and once God creates that life, it must be defended to its dying breath.

An unborn baby is not a blob of tissue. An embryo or a fetus is a real human person.

Andre J. Bottesi is an award-winning Catholic author at Joseph Karl Publishing and a producer at Apostolate Films. He is now in the 12th grade at Rochester High School and enjoys filmmaking, mini-figure modeling,

building things, playing with his pets, and hanging out with his friends. Andre lives with his family in Rochester Hills, Michigan and is an altar boy at Ss. Cyril & Methodius Slovak Catholic Church. Currently, he is writing his second book.

25. John A. Hardon, S.J., *What Has the 5th and 9th Commandment to Do with Abortion?*

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26. Ibid.

CHAPTER 6

CHILDREN ARE PRO-LIFE

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*“Children are pro-life!
Let's work with them and end abortion.”
~ True Love Leads to Life*

THE BABY, THE BOUQUETS, THE BURIAL, AND YOU

Michele Bondi Bottesi

“Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:3).

My children were outside playing after school when they discovered that a baby squirrel had fallen out of the tree next to our driveway. The little squirrel was lying dead on the ground, with one tiny hand positioned over his heart.

The children were taken aback by the sight.

They wondered aloud how old the baby animal was and how he had died. We all looked up into the tree, searching for clues and understanding. The children planned on showing their friends the newfound little squirrel for whom they felt so much affection. While awaiting the arrival of their friends, they brushed a few ants off the body and made plans for a dignified burial.

They named the baby “Chestnut.”

I was very moved by the children’s great respect for this small creature, their sadness because of its death, and the importance they placed on loving and honoring the tiny animal after it had died.

Children teach us many important things.

We must learn from their example.

Later that night, the children played across the street at a friend's house while I went to the dentist. It was 8:30 p.m. Upon my return, the children told me that they and their friends had gathered in the yard at dusk and had given Chestnut a proper burial. How sad I was to have missed it.

The next day after school, my 12-year-old daughter Alyssa had to show me where the ceremony was held and where the squirrel was buried.

As we stood over the baby's final resting place, Alyssa described their gathering the night before. The children buried the squirrel in a flowerbed, near the stump of a small tree that had died and was cut down last fall. The children wrote the names of everyone who had attended the burial on the stump.

They also made a headstone for Chestnut and wrote on a rock in permanent black marker: *R.I.P. Here lies Chestnut, 2 weeks.*

All the details were very important to the children. They were also vital to their grieving process and their emotional healing.

Alyssa added that each child had written his or her name on one of the rocks, which were then arranged in the shape of a heart around the little plot. At the angle from where I was standing, I hadn't realized until she pointed it out that the stones had been placed in the shape of a heart. The children had also gathered flowers from the yard and placed several bouquets on the grave.

Oh, how much we have to learn from children! It is incomprehensible that killing children is legal, anywhere.

Several factors influenced the children's holy respect for this creature they did not even know while he was alive.

First, the children are loved, valued, and respected in imitation of Christ. Since they know they are loved, valued, and respected, they are able to love, value, and respect others.

They have received developmentally appropriate faith formation, are encouraged to continue learning and growing in holiness throughout their lives, participate in Holy Mass and receive Holy Communion often, and go to Reconciliation regularly. To know God is to reverence all life, which He has created.

They have holy role models who have shown and taught them the importance of self-mastery/self-control, obedience, humility, serving others, and loving much as they grow in sanctity and strive to live in imitation of Christ.

They know the Ten Commandments and the New Commandment, and understand why God gave us rules to live by. They understand that we are happiest when we follow them, but most importantly that they are to be followed because we reverence God's judgment. They have been taught that God commanded us, 'Thou shalt not kill,' no matter what anyone else says or thinks. They know that every human life is created by God, begins at conception, and must be loved, valued, served, and defended until natural death. They know the difference between misguided compassion and true compassion, and they know help that kills (abortion) isn't help at all.

One of the most important ways to express God's love to our children is to teach them, in developmentally appropriate ways through word and deed, and *from infancy*, about the sanctity of life.

We must always promote God's pro-life plan for humanity by living in imitation of Christ.

It was an absolutely beautiful experience to witness the love of God expressed through the precious hearts of children who revered the tiny, helpless, newborn creature. How greatly their compassion, caring, and respect for the creature's dignity pleased our Creator.

The fact that abortion is legal anywhere is absolutely inconceivable, as is the reality that people are encouraged to end the lives of their children, that people profit from it, fuel their pride by it, promote it, spread the devil's lies through it, and that so many people loved and valued by God have been and continue to be regarded as worthless. Millions of lives have been prematurely ended through abortion, their physical remains discarded with common garbage, and their identities concealed in secrecy, regret, and shame. How evil.

"Abortion just doesn't make sense." ~ True Love Leads to Life

It is important to conclude this story with one more vital fact. We

must allow ourselves to grieve in order to heal properly following the death of anyone dear, anyone we knew only a short while, and even those we never even knew.

In order to properly grieve and heal emotionally, physically, and spiritually, it is vital for us to acknowledge every loss of life, to have support, express our sorrow, and mourn. When the loss of life is the result of abortion, obtaining God's forgiveness, accepting His mercy, and forgiving oneself and others who were involved are necessary. Only then can we continue on with life as healed people, just like the children in the story.

Several days later the children gathered again in the yard after school to play. At one point, they stopped playing and wandered over to Chestnut's grave and paid their respects. Occasionally, they still do.

THE WISDOM OF A LITTLE GIRL

Susan Schoenstein

It was just a normal workday. I got to the hospital a little early just to make the day go smoother. As I was getting a report, my head nurse said to me, “Susan, you have a special little patient.”

“What do you mean special?” I asked.

“Well, when I said little, I meant it. She is 11—almost 12.”

I looked at her with a half smile, in total disbelief. “You are kidding, aren’t you?”

“No I am dead serious. She was gang raped by two boys on the way home from school,” she said sadly.

“O my gosh!” I said, almost in a whisper. “What is her condition? I mean, is she stable?”

“Why don’t you go and see for yourself; she has her call light on.”

“Okay,” I said.

Oh my Lord help me, I prayed, as I walked the long hall to her room. What am I going to find? I have had some strange cases but this one is so young. Poor thing.

My mind was swimming, thinking of all the emotions this little girl must be going through. First, she must hate these boys and be so hurt that anyone would do such a thing to her or any other person for that matter.

Also that her little body was going through these changes without knowing why at such a young age.

As I recall, it was a pretty day with lots of sun and a clear, blue sky. But right then I was feeling dark and sad.

I opened the door to meet a little girl with not-quite-shoulder-length dark brown hair, clear eyes, and skin like a china doll. She was short, about 4 feet, 7 inches tall. She had a smile as big as the world. Her name was Wendy.

I said, "Hello, I am Susan, your nurse for today. How are you feeling?"

She put both hands on her large abdomen and said with a slight sigh, "Big and very heavy! Susan, did they tell you how I got this way?"

"Yes. I was told that you had been raped by two boys as you were going home from school."

"Yeah, that's right. I took the shortcut through the field. I did that every day."

"Did they catch the boys?" I asked.

"Yes. The boys went to my school."

"I bet you feel better about that."

She replied, "Yes, but I don't hate them. I have forgiven them."

She said she had forgiven these nasty people. Could I have done that even at my old age of 20? *That would be a lot to ask*, I thought.

"I should have listened to my mom, but I liked that walk and it was so much faster."

"I guess you'll be listening more to your mom from now on, hmmm?" I finished making her bed with fresh sheets as I said this.

"Yes, about some things I will listen."

I was surprised to hear her say this. I was certain that she would be listening to her mom about everything after this happened to her.

I had to pursue this. "Just some things? What do you mean some things?" I was still very startled by this comment from this sweet little girl with the huge belly.

"Well, she started, "my mom wanted me to get rid of the baby."

"You mean give the baby up for adoption?"

"No! She wanted me to get rid of it, as in an abortion."

Just then, my whole professional demeanor fell apart and the tears just surprised me and started running down my cheeks. I turned away from her so she would not see my display of sorrow. This poor little kid didn't even have the support of her own mother.

She's not even 12 until Monday. *She will even be here for her birthday*, I thought. No party for her this year. But she did not seem to care about that at all.

I finished helping her with her bed bath, mostly in silence because so many emotions were washing over my own mind.

Then Wendy said, "Do you know what I told my mom and our pastor when they told me that the best thing would be to terminate the products of conception?"

I said, "No what did you tell them?"

Wendy said, "You know what? IT WASN'T THE BABY'S FAULT! I will be having the baby in a few days and I will give it up to a very nice family who will love and care for it and raise it in a good family." She said this without sorrow but with a satisfaction I had to admire.

At that moment the door opened and her doctor came in to say that he wanted to talk to her about the C-section, as she was far too small to give birth naturally.

He said, "I will make a smile incision so you can wear a bikini this summer and it won't show."

She said, "Not me; I will never wear something like that."

This little girl was so modest and wise—way beyond her years.

In the many years since this page in my life has turned, I have often thought about Wendy and wondered what else God did in her life after this great test, which she passed with flying colors. I know many adults couldn't have done what she did. I wonder if I could have passed a test like this, but God has not given me this kind of test.

And when she delivered her child it was a healthy, beautiful baby girl.

What did this new life become? Her little birth mother gave her the very best she could.

She gave her baby LIFE!

Susan Schoenstein is a wife, mother, grandmother, nurse, Marian Catechist, missionary, and Catechism teacher. For almost 10 years, she worked closely with Servant of God, Fr. John A. Hardon, S.J. as his private secretary and as an editor. Currently Susan is a writer and editor at Joseph Karl Publishing and a producer at Apostolate Films.

A TEENAGER'S THOUGHTS ON LOSING A COUSIN TO ABORTION

Anonymous

I woke up one winter morning to the smell of a Saturday breakfast. On Saturdays Mom always cooks an awesome breakfast with ham, bacon, eggs, etc. I got dressed and went to my brother's room and jumped on him to wake him up, and went downstairs.

I walked up to my mom and said good morning in my tired, unenthusiastic tone. I hugged her and then went to the table and sat to wait for everyone else to come to the table. As they sat down and we prayed, Mom told us that we could start eating. We began our feast and not long after, Mom seemed upset. Then, she began to cry.

She told us that we had a cousin who was alive before any of us were born. The baby's life was short though, because it was aborted before it was born. I was too shocked to say anything. I could never have imagined that this could have happened, especially not in our family.

This made me mad and confused. Why would anyone kill his or her own child? Was it fear that made them choose to do that? Was it their guilt that caused them to make that decision? Those may have been their reasons, but there is no reason good enough to excuse killing an innocent life. I wish I could go back in time and save my cousin. I wish I could do something, anything, to change this. I know that my cousin is dead but I

can still make a difference. I can pray for my cousin and his/her parents. I can also speak out against abortion by going to abortion clinics and praying the Rosary there.

It may be too late to save my cousin, but I can save others from this horrible fate. Abortion used to be a thing that I saw as a horror that happened to others, but it never was something that happened to someone I know, which made it hard for me to understand. Now I know that abortion has personally affected my family and me, and along with countless others, we are all the victims of abortion. Our hearts long for this tragedy to end.

We are all fighting another war, but this war's battlefield is within our own country's borders. We are killing our own people. These are civil wars where one side can't defend itself. We need to protect the babies who have not been born yet. They cannot protect themselves, so we must defend them. We need to protect all life, not just the lives of famous people or those with prestige. Every life has value, every life has a purpose, and every life needs to be protected.

THE LICENSE PLATE AND THE LOGIC OF LITTLE PEOPLE

Michele Bondi Bottesi

One night, the discussion with my 12-year-old daughter focused on my impending license plate renewal. The plate reads ILUVGZS (“I love Jesus”). The plan was to change it and tailor the message to other motorists.

The idea was to come up with something like GODLVSU (“God loves you”).

“So, what should I put on the new license plate?” I asked Alyssa.

Immediately, without even hesitating to think about it, she replied, “***Babies are people.***”

I sure wish we could purchase pro-life license plates from the State of Michigan!

Teach your children, in developmentally appropriate ways and from infancy, about the sanctity of life, because it is God’s will that we value and protect His creation, from natural conception until natural death.

“If we do not reach people that abortion and euthanasia are wrong, others may convince them that murder is right.” ~ True Love Leads to Life

PROTECTING OUR YOUTH

Michele Bondi Bottesi

We were captivated, educated, and absolutely delighted to hear so much truth spoken with great love and respect for all of humanity.

One day toward the end of spring, I received an e-mail notification that said Pam Stenzel would be speaking on abstinence one evening at our local high school. Immediately I knew this was something that would be beneficial to my children, two sons in high school and a daughter in middle school. The purpose of the talk was to challenge, inspire, and educate young people so that they understand the values of personal responsibility, self-discipline, and character.

As a psychologist, mother, single parent, and defender of human life, I know very well the challenges of raising three children in a culture that does not value morality, chastity, and self-mastery as much as it values self-centeredness, materialism, and disobedience. Our society has been lured by the global marketing machine into ignorance of what is of real value to our mortal and eternal lives.

We tend to seek the roads most appealing to our fallen human nature, often the easiest roads possible, and we buy so many lies, both literally and figuratively. In addition, the devil continues to pursue the destruction of humanity through the population control movement, which seeks its own will, and to benefit materially and through the acquisition of power at all costs. It has very effectively manipulated us through its anti-life

propaganda, and we are choosing to help it fulfill its agenda to maintain a global culture of death.

The consequences for ourselves, our families, and others are eternal, and that is why we must do all we can to peacefully combat and resist the further spread of evil.

We will not acquire morality unless we practice morality, and the name of Pam's presentation, *Sex Has a Price Tag*, immediately set the tone for the evening. We are wise to value chastity, purity, modesty, loyalty, abstinence, and personal responsibility, because we as individuals, members of families, communities, nations, and the global community all benefit when they are encouraged and practiced. We value morality when we have a close and personal relationship with God. Following His Commandments is the very best choice each of us can possibly make.

The night of the event, we drove to the school not knowing what to expect. I had spoken to friends earlier and we pooled our knowledge, but even collectively were still not sure exactly what would be discussed and what ages the talk would be appropriate for.

I decided to take all of my children with me. As we walked from the parking lot to the school auditorium the evening of the event, I scanned the crowd of people who were making their way to the building. It consisted mostly of parents, but there were also a good number of young people of high school age. We did not see any other children my daughter's age, which is middle school. Still not knowing what to expect, I playfully said to Alyssa as we continued toward the school, "Walk taller!"

Wow, did Pam deliver a powerful message! As she said many times that night, she has heard so many young people tell her so many times throughout the years, "I wish someone had told me." Knowledge is empowering, and she sure empowered the audience. I laughed, took lots of notes, and several times was moved to tears by what Pam said. She truly cares about people, and challenged parents to love their children by parenting them properly and equipping them with the truth they need to hear.

What a rarity it is to go to a public place and hear so much truth spoken with such candor and care. We loved every minute of Pam's talk. So did every

other parent I spoke with after her presentation. If only her wise words were spoken in every middle school and high school and in every home. If only.

Instead, we are allowing people into our schools who teach our children immorality, glorify it, and then show them how to go about it.

Our society is in the midst of a colossal, unprecedented moral crisis. Repercussions from the immoral behavior of people of all ages are being felt around the entire world, and our spiritual, emotional, and physical welfare is being affected. We have a moral obligation to teach our children right from wrong, and it is also our responsibility as parents, grandparents, and educators to be living witnesses of holiness to our children and to others.

As Pam stated so poignantly, it is the parents' job to parent their children, and the current generation of parents is in large measure failing to teach their children how to behave morally and responsibly when the topic is human reproduction.

A serious problem is differentiating the truth from the many very clever lies marketed to us by companies that make a lot of money selling us products that promise us results without responsibility. From the pharmaceutical companies to contraceptive manufacturers and providers to the abortion industry that sells murder, we are being conned into believing that irresponsible behavior leads to happiness and if we literally buy their lies, we can behave any way we choose and no one will get hurt. Parents are focusing on many things that are of no consequence to their family's eternal salvation. People are being harmed, some of the consequences are permanent, businesses profit financially from our ignorance, and the devil seeks to claim precious, immortal souls for all eternity.

As Pam said, "If you have sex outside of marriage, you will pay." Several times she reinforced the fact that as far as relationships go, ultimately "you get what you are." She also reminded us that "you can't take back an abortion," informed us that "abortion doesn't fix anything, it destroys people; contraception doesn't always avoid pregnancy, and it doesn't prevent disease."

She immediately pointed out that when it comes to sex, most people focus exclusively on the possibility of a pregnancy, and the serious risk

of acquiring a sexually transmitted disease is often not even considered (often because people incorrectly believe that prophylactics can prevent them). These diseases make people sick, they cause infertility, some are incurable, and others are deadly. Yes, sex outside of the marriage covenant comes with a very heavy price tag, and so many people, young and not-so-young, have never learned the information they need to make the right choices. The devil prefers it when we remain ignorant, and our ignorance helps the culture of death flourish.

Sex Has a Price Tag should be shown in every middle school, high school, and college, regularly.

Pam's phenomenal ministry protecting youth began when she realized after counseling young girls with crisis pregnancies that many were totally unaware of the risks and consequences involved with sexual activity. She began speaking worldwide to promote the abstinence advantage to young people. Currently she speaks to hundreds of thousands of teens in person each year and has reached millions more through her videos.

From her official website, www.pamstenzel.com: *For years, Pam was on the "front lines" as Director of Alpha Women's Center, a counseling center for women undergoing crisis pregnancies. Her experiences taught her that before teen pregnancy and STD rates could decline, attitudes of teens toward sex first had to change. Desiring to bring about that change, Pam started speaking nationally full-time and is in great demand both in the U.S.A. and in other countries such as Mexico, Australia, Ireland, and Canada.*

Pam's personal history is a pro-life story in itself. Also from her website: *In 1964 a 15-year-old girl was raped, became pregnant, and decided to carry her unborn child to term. Five months after the baby girl was born, in an act of courage and love the young mother provided her child a better environment by giving her to an adoptive family. That child was Pam Stenzel. She is the oldest of eight children (seven adopted, one biological), and her extended family includes 38 adopted children in all.*

God bless Pam Stenzel for her dedication to reviving and preserving the character and integrity of today's youth, and for caring for our young people as well as their parents in imitation of Christ.

Here is what my three children had to say after hearing Pam's presentation, *Sex Has a Price Tag*:

The Talk of the Day

Alyssa Bottesi, at age 12

The talk I heard was about abstinence. Teens in our times need to know that they have to keep sexual behavior inside marriage. I liked this talk a lot; Mrs. Stenzel made us laugh some times; a person in sixth grade is not too young to hear what she has to say. I think we have to know what we should do; if we do not know what the right thing is, that means we may do the wrong thing. People need to know abortion is wrong or they may be convinced to kill their kids by abortion, and those kids could be the next pope or a saint. Every life matters! Go to this talk with your kids.

Everyone Should Hear What She Has to Say

Nick Bottesi, at age 14

Pam Stenzel taught me about the importance of avoiding sexually transmitted diseases. She also told us to be careful with our actions. She handed out pamphlets that teach about the benefits of waiting until marriage to have sex. She discussed behavior that is right and behavior that is wrong. Mrs. Stenzel also told us how important it is to not be an easy victim. I recommend her presentation to everyone. Mrs. Stenzel has a website where people can get recordings of her best speeches. Everyone should hear what she has to say.

Pam Stenzel, Protector of Youth

Andre J. Bottesi, at age 16

I recently attended an abstinence talk by the brilliant speaker Pam Stenzel. Mrs. Stenzel was very enthusiastic, comical at times, and informative. The talk inspired me to live a life that pleases

God and makes me happiest. Throughout the talk she mentioned surprising facts and stories of people she met with in the past. She has traveled all around the world and teaches people about the benefits of abstinence.

I was very fortunate to have attended her talk. Everyone should hear her presentation, but even if you can't—because she might not be visiting your city—go to her website. Her website has many helpful things on it, including an enlightening online course that I am starting. So please look at her work; she is very experienced and knowledgeable. Remember that the information is for your benefit, and abstaining from sex until marriage is what is best for you.

If you get a chance to see Pam in person, go, and bring everyone you can with you. If you can bring her to your community, do it, and be sure to invite everyone. Pam delivers a message that everyone must hear and no one should miss.



Andre, Nick, and Alyssa sending the manuscript of this book to the designer

WHOSE SIDE ARE YOU ON?

Nick Bottesi

One day this past spring, a guest speaker came into my ninth-grade gym class to talk to us about the facts of life. Basically, she said you can have sex whenever you want as long as you have protection and know about sexually transmitted diseases, and how to “be safe.” I found it strange how she just came into the classroom, did not say “Hi” or “Hello” or “My name is...” She just started talking about sex.

She told us all about the different methods of artificial birth control, and encouraged their use. Her talk made me feel awkward and from the comments I heard during and after her presentation, many others felt awkward, too.

In my opinion, nobody wanted to hear this talk and nobody liked this talk, but we had to listen. I only listened to so much because she was annoying and had weird demonstrations. For instance, she made a sperm sock by rolling up a sock, and then she gave it a tail. I wanted to tell her what I thought, but I didn’t want to get suspended.

On the second day of her talk, we learned more about STDs. She needed some volunteers for a skit, and for no apparent reason she chose me. I played Batman and had to explain to the audience how I had sex with Catwoman, then she left me, and I never trusted another girl again. After the skit she showed us some messed-up pictures of what STDs look like.

Everybody was kind of grossed out by her entire talk. Nobody agreed with her, either; after she was finished speaking, I heard students say things

contrary to what she taught, such as, “You probably shouldn’t have sex until you’re older.” After a horrible talk and those gruesome pictures, I felt like I needed to throw up. I wish I hadn’t signed the papers to hear the talk.

However, there is hope! One year before, I had gone to listen to a talk about sex, but that one was different. The speaker was Pam Stenzel. She is pro-life, advocated abstinence until marriage, valued purity, and handed out pamphlets that had dignified, useful information that helps young people. She talked about how sex is holy and it should be kept holy, within marriage. I agree with her and her message. She told the truth about sex outside of marriage, artificial contraception, and abortion. Not only that, she came across as much happier than the other speaker and seemed more enthusiastic, like she wanted to be there.

I have been to two different talks about sex. One I hated, and one I enjoyed. The comparison is that one lady seemed sad, was rude, her message lacked morality, and it seemed like she wished she didn’t have to be there. On the other hand, the pro-life abstinence speaker was nice, had manners, was interesting, told the truth, and seemed like she wanted to be there. Whose message do you think is pleasing to God? Whose side are you on? Because I know which side I’m on.

“He (Jesus) promises the meek and gentle extraordinary power over the hearts of others.” That includes having power from on high to melt the hardest hearts, convince unbelievers, have Christ’s teachings accepted, merit repentance, convert sinners, lead others in the apostolate, and have supernatural influence. ~ Father John A. Hardon, S.J. ²⁷

Nick Bottesi is an award-winning Catholic author and editor at Joseph Karl Publishing. He is in the 10th grade at Rochester High School and enjoys collectible card games, video games, cooking, skateboarding, drawing, and playing with his pet ferrets Cupcake and Lily. Nick lives with his family in Rochester Hills, Michigan, and is an altar boy at Ss. Cyril & Methodius Slovak Catholic Church.

27. John A. Hardon, S.J., *Meekness*. Copyright © 2000–2012 by www.therealpresence.org. All rights reserved worldwide. Used with permission.

CHAPTER 7

CHANGES OF HEART AND GOD'S MERCY

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*“God’s goodness is so patient
that it does not stop at the ingratitude,
the resistance, or even the crimes of His creatures,
but His grace always pursues them.”*

~ Father Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen, O.C.D. ²⁸

28. Father Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen, O.C.D., *Divine Intimacy* (Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publishers, Inc., 1996), p. 698.

MOMENTS OF GRACE

Michele Bondi Bottesi

The very first time my children and I participated in a prayer vigil at an abortion clinic was the direct result of a friend's having sent a group e-mail invitation to participate in one. That was one very pivotal e-mail! At the time that message was sent, almighty God had already summoned us to do more to peacefully defend human life from natural conception until natural death.

This summons from God is one that every one of us must hear, because valuing and defending life is an important part of every personal apostolate. Sometimes, several summonses are necessary. Have you responded to yours yet? Do not delay!

"Nothing less than heroic patience in suffering...nothing less than heroic chastity in resisting the allurements of a world intoxicated with sexual immorality; nothing less than heroic charity in loving those who ignore us or oppose us or deride our loyalty to Christ as psychosis—can obtain the ocean of divine mercy that alone can restore the rights of God over the human life which begins at conception and is destined to continue into eternity." Father John A. Hardon, S.J. ²⁹

I responded to that life-changing e-mail and received confirmation of the day and time our group was to meet. My children and I were shocked

to learn that the abortuary is located in a strip mall, in the heart of a middle-class neighborhood half an hour's drive from our home.

We were even more shocked, and absolutely horrified, when we arrived at the site on the designated day and discovered that the abortion clinic is next door to a sandwich shop and a nail salon. We pulled into the parking lot and there it was: a killing center of children, as acceptable as any of the businesses next to it. I said to my children in utter disbelief, "When did this happen?"

How did abortion become so acceptable that people can eat sandwiches and get their nails polished while unborn children are violently and legally killed, right next door?

"Behind every abortion is the devil." ~ Father John A. Hardon, S.J. ³⁰

What a counterstrike against the forces of darkness to be there, with children praying right on the front lines of the battle between good and evil. The children led everyone as we prayed the Rosary together, and the experience of seeing and hearing our young people praying for their unborn peers with such fervor and devotion was incredibly powerful. It was efficacious, too.

"If we do not teach people that abortion is wrong, others may convince them that murder is right." ~ True Love Leads to Life

In between various prayers, the children spoke with the adults maturely, and pointed out the great deception of abortion. They began with the name of the abortion clinic, which had the words care and woman in it!

"Help that kills isn't help at all." ~ True Love Leads to Life

The children understood that the devil markets abortion to us as if it were a good thing, and they had been properly taught that abortion is a sin.

Unfortunately, many people in a crisis believe the lies the abortion industry aggressively markets to us through deceptive and expensive marketing campaigns. It is fueled by the misguided compassion of people seeking to do good, and counts on the ignorance and fear of people in crisis situations. The abortion industry sells killing to us with its pitch to take the "easy" way out. Do not expect to hear truth spoken in an abortion clinic, where the staff and volunteers find killing human beings—unborn

babies—perfectly acceptable. The truth is that abortion does not help women. In fact, abortion does not help anyone. Abortion kills people.

The good news? God's grace abounds, and "No prayer is ever lost."
~ St. John Vianney

Countless lives have been saved by those who pray for an end to abortion, whether they pray in front of clinics where abortions are performed, in church, from home, or from anywhere. Sidewalk counselors have mercifully directed those in need to pregnancy help centers. Prayers for the victims of the abortion industry are changing lives and leading so many to find the help, forgiveness, and healing they need from the Source of compassion and mercy, Jesus Christ.

The graces gained by the faithful have led to miraculous changes of heart.

"We merit grace by cooperating with the graces we receive. This practice of virtue benefits not only the person who performs a good work, but also obtains grace for others....Where can [abortionists] obtain this grace? From God, of course. But in His ordinary providence, God uses persons who are in His friendship to merit for sinners—here the agents of abortion—the spiritual light and strength to return to the God from whom they have strayed." ~ Father John A. Hardon, S.J.³¹

Abby Johnson is a perfect example that "God's love knows no bounds," in the words of Venerable Fulton J. Sheen. Abby is the former director of a Planned Parenthood abortion center in Texas. She quit her job following a moment of Divine revelation the first and only time she directly participated in an abortion. At that moment, by the power of almighty God, she saw abortion through His eyes, and for her that changed everything.

From Abby's book, *Unplanned*: "I had completely personalized my relationship with the clinic. I was the clinic, and the clinic was me. I took both our successes and our failures personally, and my self-respect was closely tied to how well the clinic performed."³²

"The organization—and what I saw as our shared mission to help women in crisis—had become of paramount concern to me. I was willing to risk anything to do what I thought was best for our clients."³³

“God is a great choreographer, isn’t He? As I take a hard look now at the fateful day of the ultrasound-guided abortion—that horrible, crushing, startling, eye-opening day—I see how perfectly He had positioned me so that when My eyes were pried open by His fingers, I’d have the clearest possible view. And I don’t just mean the view of that precious unborn child violently sacrificed on the table that day. I mean the view of the Planned Parenthood trap into which I’d fallen.”³⁴

She saw the ultrasound-guided abortion within days of being mandated to increase the abortion revenue at her clinic, a directive from the very organization that recruited her with the lie that one of their goals was to make abortion rare.

“Now that the scales had begun to fall from my eyes, the guilt of countless abortions, including my own two, came crashing down on my shoulders.”³⁵

“I’d scheduled countless babies for their deaths. I’d presented confused, anxious, and panicked women with their options—parent, abort, or adopt—as if we were discussing menu options. And when they chose to abort, I’d laid out their options again—surgical or medication—with their safety and comfort in mind, and all the while a tiny baby, tucked securely inside a womb, had been in the same room with us, with no one to speak on his or her behalf.”³⁶

“How could I have missed seeing this for what it is?”³⁷

Abby is one of many courageous women and men who have accepted their pro-life summons and are now accomplishing great good. She shared the following story during a 40 Days for Life campaign. Once, the staff at Planned Parenthood joked about sending a “welcome gift” to the pro-life group Coalition for Life when it moved in next door. “They wanted to send cookies shaped like babies. And that was one of the milder examples of what passed for humor behind the walls of an abortion facility.”

“Our task, as believers, is to gain all the graces we can for those engaged in the abortion trade and for their tragic victims. Our hope is that they will respond to the graces they are receiving.” ~ Father John A. Hardon, S.J.³⁸

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 32. Abby Johnson, *Unplanned* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Momentum, 2011), p. 106.
 33. *Ibid*, p. 107.
 34. *Ibid*, p. 123.
 35. *Ibid*.
 36. *Ibid*, p. 124.
 37. *Ibid*, p. 125.
 38. John A. Hardon, S.J., *The Catholic Church: The Divinely Ordained Protector of Human Life*. Copyright © 2000–2012 by www.therealpresence.org. All rights reserved worldwide. Used with permission.

A HEARTBROKEN MAN

Ellen Gable Hrkach

It was a cold November Saturday morning. My sister and I prayed with a group of others on the sidewalk in front of the abortion clinic. The group included a noticeably pregnant woman, two young mothers from a parish “Moms and Tots” group, as well as several older women, a priest, and one college-aged man.

The “escort,” a tall imposing man dressed as a security guard, stared at us without smiling, ready to accompany “patients” entering the clinic.

We recited the Holy Rosary and the Divine Mercy Chaplet for all those inside: for the doctors, nurses, receptionist, helpers, the escort, and perhaps most importantly, for the young girls and women coming to the clinic to terminate their pregnancies.

As we prayed, we watched a succession of cars drive in: older women accompanying girls, women traveling alone, as well as a few teenaged couples.

A young attractive African-American couple in their early 20s arrived on foot. The man was tall and thin, the girl of average size. The man’s shoulders were slumped. The girl was pulling him into the clinic and he was resisting. He stopped and stood on the grass in front of the clinic and glanced toward our group. The young woman sighed, then hurried into the building.

The African-American man remained still and silent, now staring at our group. The older woman beside me called out to the man. He began walking toward us, so the college-aged man and the priest from our group met him on the grass, the escort’s eyes suspiciously watching.

Soon, the tall man began sharing his pain. His wife was pregnant and she wanted to have an abortion. He begged her not to kill their child. His wife refused to listen, refused to allow him a voice. He told her he couldn't go in with her.

A few moments later, his wife emerged from the clinic and yanked her husband away from our group. He resisted at first, as she tried to pull his lanky body toward the clinic. I couldn't hear what was being said, but he shook his head. His wife then leaned close and whispered something in his ear. His shoulders dropped, his head lowered and he sighed. Finally, he allowed her to pull him inside.

Our group watched the scene, all the time praying for this couple. We remained at the clinic for another hour or so but the couple never came back out.

I have always wondered what happened to them. I hold onto the hope that perhaps he was able to convince her not to go through with the abortion. His body language, however, suggests that he went along with her wish to kill their child.

I continue to pray for this couple, for God's mercy and healing.

Although we frequently hear of men pressuring their girlfriends or wives to have an abortion, we shouldn't forget the men who have to live with the devastating consequences of a woman's right to "choose."

Ellen Gable Hrkach is a wife to James, mother to five sons, award-winning author of three novels, *Emily's Hope* (www.emilyshope.com), *In Name Only* (www.innameonly.ca), and *Stealing Jenny* (www.stealingjenny.com), and one non-fiction book called *Come My Beloved: Inspiring Stories of Catholic Courtship* (www.comemybeloved.com). Her blog is at <http://ellengable.wordpress.com>. She is a reviewer for CatholicFiction.net and a regular columnist for CatholicMom.com and AmazingCatechists.com. She is a frequent contributor to Catholic Exchange, Family Foundations magazine, and co-creator of the Family Life cartoon. She and her husband are a certified NFP teaching couple for CCL and are active in marriage preparation in their diocese.

GOD WORKS IN MYSTERIOUS WAYS

Judith Evans

It just could be that a baby in Southern California is going to be America's best president, or maybe be the one to discover the proven cure for cancer—who knows?

I'd better begin at the beginning though.

A pregnant mom in California called me on the phone one day because she had seen the story of my abortions in a brochure. When she heard the ENTIRE story on the phone, she said that she and her husband had been thinking of aborting the baby, because they already had all the children they wanted!

I went to my knees, let me tell you! I don't want anyone to go through what I have.

The next day she called back and said she and her husband had decided they would not abort that baby, but would keep it and love it, just like they did the ones they had!

How GOOD God is! One of my hopes and dreams had been that one day I'd hear from someone who would tell me that they decided to let their baby live, because of my situation, and what I have gone through since killing my babies.

God had plans for my two babies, and He has plans for the baby that couple had decided to keep after all!

It just showed me, once again, that God indeed works in mysterious ways, his wonders to perform. Who knows, that baby may grow up and save many, many, lives one day!

Judith Evans participates in community pro-life activities (Kansans for Life: www.kfl.org), founded the first pro-life organization in her county, and helped to dedicate a memorial stone set up in memory of the many aborted babies in the area. She also conducts post-abortion healing and education classes, which culminate in a memorial service, in which post-abortive women usually give their deceased babies names, say “good-bye” to them, and are reminded that they’ll see those babies one day. Sometimes the Lord will give the mothers a “knowing” of the genders of their babies, unless He has already done so. Such a class provided at least a partial “closure” for Judith and many others.

“YOU MUST FORGIVE HIM”

Anonymous

The child support payments had stopped coming, again—the checking account overdrafted three times, and the friend of the court said that by law, they had to wait until the payments were in arrears for two months before they could take any action.

It was Holy Week.

The children were picked up for visitation after school. Their father stated that he was refusing to pay the children’s medical bills, again. Historically, the reasons given included: the children weren’t “really” sick, they should be seeing any *other* doctor, the doctor wasn’t really a doctor, the doctor’s office (or emergency room) was too close to where the family lived, which in his mind was too helpful when they were in need.

The rationale provided that day: The doctor wasn’t a real doctor. Then in the very next sentence the excuse changed. Another doctor within the same specialty should have been chosen instead (anyone the family did not prefer; the farther away from their house, the better).

After the children left, their mother went to church to pray. As soon as she got to the church, the Lord said to her, “*You must forgive Him.*”

Then He said, “*It’s only money.*”

God concluded by promising that He would provide for the children’s medical bills.

“Pray, hope, and don’t worry.” ~ St. Pio of Pietrelcina

The mother prayed at the church on her knees for three hours while meditating on Christ’s Passion, in reparation for her pride and in reparation for the man’s pride, too.

The very next week, when the wealthy father arrived to pick up his children, he handed the mother a check for a small portion of the children’s medical bills that he saw fit to pay. The woman accepted the check in imitation of Christ, and with a heart full of God’s love and mercy said to the man, *“I forgive you.”*

God’s grace, abundantly flowing from the Blessed Sacrament and the Sacrament of Confession, had made it possible for the woman to love the man anyway, and to forgive his malice, which came straight from the devil.

Almighty God shows us how to love and forgive, in imitation of Christ, those who are the most hateful and hardhearted. The devil shows us how to hate those who, in imitation of Christ, are the most kind and loving.

Who have you chosen to be your teacher, God or Satan?

“It is we who must choose between good and evil.” ~ Blessed Pope John Paul II

We must choose well, for our choice will decide where we spend eternity.

“Even half an eternity is a long time.” ~ Gene X. Kortsha

God wants us to be united with Him in love, forever, in heaven. The devil wants us to be united with him in hate, forever, in hell.

Go to Holy Mass as often as you possibly can, receive the Blessed Sacrament worthily, go to Confession often, and receive the graces you need to live, love, serve, forgive, and patiently bear suffering in imitation of Christ.

And when experiencing difficulties, have courage.

On our own, we can do nothing. “With God, all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26).

Unify your every action with the perfect will of God. “It is an illusion

to believe in a life without difficulties. These are usually all the greater and the more frequent as our undertakings are more generous." ~ Father Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen, O.C.D.³⁹

Let nothing disturb you,
Let nothing frighten you,
All things are passing away;
God never changes.
Patience obtains all things
Whoever has God lacks nothing;
God alone suffices.

~ Saint Teresa of Avila

39. Father Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen, O.C.D., *Divine Intimacy* (Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publishers, Inc., 1996), p. 377.

THE TWO DOORS

Michele Bondi Bottesi

This experience occurred about a year and a half ago, shortly after the Lord had summoned my family to our new parish. The Lord had been gently encouraging me to complete the transition, because we continued receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation at another parish. God understood that I was still hesitant to make the change, even though I knew I was not making spiritual progress where we had been going.

One Saturday afternoon, the good Lord orchestrated the events to play out in such a way that we ended up at our new parish for the Sacrament of Christ's Peace before the Tridentine Holy Mass that night, and that completed the transition to our new parish.

One of the first times we went to confession there, I stepped from the chapel into the confessional and found it quite odd that the door was very difficult to close. It was more than odd, even. It felt significant that the door was so difficult to close. I had to push the door really hard in order to close it.

After making my Confession, I prayed in the chapel while my daughter went in and made her Confession. When she was finished, she knelt down by my side, looked up at me, and surprised me when she whispered that *the confessional door had been very hard to shut*. I agreed, and then we went into the church to celebrate the Tridentine Holy Mass. I didn't

think any more of it and wouldn't have, either, except for what happened that night.

Our adversary presented himself as a dark and very frightening animal. He appeared incredibly strong, and was absolutely furious. He tried with all his might to attack me. The wind was blowing, and things were swirling through the air, making the scene incredibly noisy and chaotic. I was frightened beyond description.

I knew that I needed God's help, but I was so afraid, I could not even think of what to say. I began shouting above the incredible noise, *and pleaded to God—as well as the Blessed Mother and St. Joseph to intercede for me—and for Jesus to cover the entire situation with His Precious Blood*. I was amazed, because although the words were coming from me, I was too scared out of my wits to think of anything to say. The words spilling out were the right words!

The beast became even angrier, and shouted with such malice, "That holy Face!"

Then, *he retreated*.

Suddenly, I had the power to fight back against the demon. Somehow, that hateful creature ended up behind a door and to save myself, I had to shut that door. I rushed to it and pushed with all my might as the demon fought to keep it open. After a bitter struggle, I finally forced that door shut *and was no longer at the unmercy of the devil*.

The next morning upon waking, I felt very peaceful and prayerful. While praying, the Lord brought up what had happened during the night in the battle to overcome evil: I had to fight hard to get the devil behind the door. Then I was reminded of the confessional door that had been so hard to shut, and understood at that moment that those two doors are one and the same.

“I WILL UNLEASH A MASSIVE FLOOD OF GRACES”

Michele Bondi Bottesi

Discover or rediscover the Sacrament of Christ’s Peace. Father Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen, O.C.D. reminds us in his phenomenal book, *Divine Intimacy*, that without God’s grace, all human strength is mere weakness.⁴⁰

Fall in love with the Sacrament of Reconciliation! How important is this sacrament for our souls and for the souls of others? The very last time I went, the devil harassed me so badly while I waited for my turn that by the time I was finished confessing, I felt like throwing up. NEVER give in to the many ways the devil tries to stop us from going to Confession. He knows the tremendous, immeasurable value it has for our souls!

The following story is true, and retold here for the benefit of precious, immortal souls.

“I Love Going to Confession!”

When I first began going to Confession more often with my family, encouraged by the loving promptings of our merciful Lord to receive His graces in greater abundance, the resistance from the devil was immediately felt. Thoughts came to me several hours before my family was to

leave for the church that one Saturday each month. At first I did not recognize their source, but I want you to know that receiving Holy Communion daily has gained for me the ability to recognize when it is the devil who is speaking.

At first the suggestions from the devil included:

“You’re so busy. Don’t go. God will understand.”

“It doesn’t matter whether you go or not.”

“You try so hard to be good. You don’t have to go today. Go later.”

“You don’t feel too well right now. You’d better stay home.”

“God knows how many challenges you face. You don’t need another one. Stay home and rest.”

Another strategy:

“People think you are crazy.”

“Don’t go; see what people think of you?”

Can you see through the deception? The devil tries to appear compassionate when his goal is to keep us from going to the Sacrament of Confession. When that doesn’t work, he will fight nasty.

He tries to use our weaknesses against us. He even tries to use our strengths against us, to keep us from the sources of grace we need to fight the spiritual battle, which mind you is very real, to keep us from becoming holier, to keep us from being fine role models to our family, friends, and others, to stop us from pointing others toward the sacraments, to get us to sin so we become distant from God, and to sabotage our efforts to grow closer to our most loving Creator. No one is immune from the evil influences of the devil, but God provides all the grace we need to win the battles.

At one point, the Lord encouraged me to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation at a parish He identified by name. Both the Lord and I knew that even though I had been receiving the sacrament more often, no spiritual progress was being made where I had been going to Confession. I obeyed the Lord, and in a short time the spiritual progress had been tremendous.

That made the devil even angrier. If he knew when I was going to

Confession because he heard me tell someone, the assaults the day and night before would be bitter, especially during the night. Often they were the most intense around the time of a special feast day, such as Pentecost and Divine Mercy Sunday, although not all our adversary's behavior is predictable. However, it is very helpful, for the angrier the devil gets, the more good is being accomplished and the more progress is being made.

And so the assaults have become a type of spiritual gauge.

I began to greatly love going to Confession, and learned so much more about this astonishing sacrament that my examinations of conscience became love letters written out in advance following prayer to the Holy Spirit for enlightenment.

"If you excuse yourself in Confession, you shut up sin within your soul, and shut out pardon." ~ St. Augustine

In essence, the Author of Love extends His love to His beloved, who then returns this love to its very Source. It is all so very loving, the whole process of recognizing God's love and mercy, recognizing oneself as being unworthy and yet loved and valued beyond measure nevertheless, apologizing to God for having offended Him who is all goodness and compassion, asking for His forgiveness, receiving it, pleasing the One who is constantly courting us, and growing in closer union with the King of all kings!

"Believe me...no one can be truly happy in this world unless he is at peace with God." ~ Saint John Bosco

God is so in love with us.

One Monday morning I pulled into the parking lot of the church, and had planned on going to Confession on Wednesday, but the devil assaulted me so viciously right there in the church parking lot that I headed right for the chapel and prayed until Confessions began. Then, I rushed in!

Once, in the evening the night before I was to go to Confession, the assaults began especially early. So many thoughts flooded my mind, encouragements from the devil to not go to Confession the next morning. They were very clever and sinister. They were almost overpowering. They played upon my emotions, and were extremely

convincing. God's grace won another victory for my soul, I resisted, and the next morning went to Confession, after having heard the pleadings of the devil all the way to the church, "Don't go! Don't go! DON'T GO! Leave that parish. LEAVE THAT PARISH!"

That is why we must avail ourselves of the sacraments, honestly, worthily, and often. We need God's grace to resist the cunning of the devil. We need to beg for God to give this grace to others, especially those who do not understand this yet.

Real progress was being made in the confessional. It was absolutely stunning and delightful. This truth was reinforced by the devil, who at one point wanted to knock in the teeth belonging to the mouth that professed my sins and asked for mercy and pardon for herself and for others.

Discover or rediscover the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and do not delay.

“I Will Unleash a Massive Flood of Graces”

Not long after, my soul encountered trial after trial, blocks of time when I was unable to go to Holy Mass and Confession. The demon's assaults were increasing, and unrelenting. My soul was sorrowful from being unable to receive the sacraments, and during my next Confession, before once again returning to participate in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, this is what I said:

Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. My last Confession was three weeks ago.

My Dearly Beloved King,

I am so happy to be here, so grateful for this precious opportunity to reconcile my poor self with You, to thank You for everything, to apologize for my sins, and to ask for pardon for myself, and for all my brothers and sisters in need of Your saving grace.

You never fail to respond to the soul that asks to be enlightened by Your Divine Majesty, and I thank You for showing me how much work remains to be done in my soul. Thank You for Your persistence in working with me, for without You, I am nothing.

I apologize for my selfish and self-serving nature, for the times I have been impatient, prideful, arrogant, stubborn, so uncharitable, for seeking comfort in too many sweet drinks that are not healthy, for my great difficulty concentrating during my prayers, for the times that I have not revered You as I should have, for the time over the weekend when I spoke cavalierly with someone about Your most perfect plans, for the many unkind things I have said, for the times that I have been judgmental, unforgiving, and resentful.

I am sorry, my Lord and Ruler of my life, for the time I swore the other day in reference to a difficult, hateful person in front of my children and set a very bad example, and offended You with that language and lack of respect for my great dignity as Your daughter. I apologize for speaking the other day in a way to someone who is very mean in front of my children that was ironic but also at least a little spiteful while I enjoyed the moment. Please give me the grace to never lower myself in response to others' bad behavior, and to never be the reason for anyone else's sin. I understand You are allowing me many opportunities to practice self-mastery because I still have such a long way to go to acquire it; please keep working with me, and together let's get there.

I apologize for the time three weeks ago when I made something a bigger deal than it was in a public place, and even though my argument was justified because we had been cheated, I failed to remain humble, and for that I was wrong and I am sorry. As You said afterwards, You will make it up to me, and I know You always do, and thank You for allowing that whole chain of events to occur so that You could show Your daughter many important things that will bring me into closer union with You.

Let there be no distance between us, my sweet and gentle Jesus!

I apologize for the things that I said, did, or didn't do that set a bad example for my children, my friends, for strangers, and for those who dislike me because they have neglected their friendship with You. Keep me close to You, dear Lord, and please allow me to receive the sacraments often.

I need You.

Just after that, another three-week trial began. I was once again unable to go to Holy Mass and to Reconciliation, and the devil's harassment was very intense, especially at night. However, this time my soul was flooded with the most beautiful consolation, day after day, week after week.

It was very clear that the Lord was up to something, but He kept it a mystery. I knew without a doubt that I was to patiently wait, and so I waited, very grateful to be receiving such wonderful Divine consolation. Every so often I would ask Jesus fondly, "When do You want me to go to Confession?" Each time He said I was to wait.

My soul was not troubled at all, because with His grace, it was trusting.

Then one morning as I was preparing to leave for another glorious and triumphant return to the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, almighty God came to me and told me that the next time I went to Confession, He was going to send forth a massive flood of graces. God had been up to something, and that was His incredible surprise.

I was overcome by emotion because of the Lord's great love, mercy, and compassion, and because He had presented such a generous offer to His most unworthy servant in return for my obedience.

Then I wondered what I should say under such phenomenal circumstances.

While praying before Holy Mass that day, I asked the Lord what He wanted me to say during my next Confession, and He told me. My words were to be based upon the Novena to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which is to be prayed with great confidence. Also, He no longer required that I wait before going.

And so I went to Confession the very next day prior to Holy Mass, after having prayed to our Blessed Mother for her intercession, so that God's will would be accomplished.

I also petitioned God directly for His intercession by repeating over and over again, "Lord, Your grace is sufficient."

So at the Lord's request, this is what I said:

Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. My last Confession was four weeks ago.

My Almighty Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, I am here today in obedience to Your will, because I love You.

You have said, "Ask and you shall receive; seek and you shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you," behold me prostrate at Thy feet. Animated with a lively faith and confidence in these promises dictated by Your Sacred Heart and pronounced by Your adorable lips, I come to ask for Your forgiveness and pardon for every sin I have ever committed against Your love and goodness over the course of my entire life.

I apologize for my stubborn nature, my lack of charity, for the unkind things that I have said, for the many times I have been impatient, hard-hearted, mean, bitter, angry, uncharitable, oblivious to the needs of my neighbor, self-absorbed, prideful, egotistical, self-indulgent, imprudent, judgmental, unmerciful, vengeful, slow to forgive, and spiteful.

The worst of my faults are sure indications of my lack of self-mastery, and I ask you to please help me to be more prudent when I speak, more tolerant when I think, more moderate in my emotions, and more careful when it comes to indulging in sweet foods and drinks that are very unhealthy.

Your Mouth, which speaks words that are so kind, loving, and merciful, the same beautiful mouth that received so many vicious blows to satisfy Divine Justice for the many sins I have committed through my speech, bleeds still for the sins I continue to commit through my choice of words. May Your mouth, torn open and bleeding because of me, be a constant reminder to imitate You in all that I say.

This lack of self-mastery makes me vulnerable to the attacks from the devil. Please continue helping me, most patient and persistent Lord, so that with Your grace, I may grow in self-mastery and always choose behavior that is most pleasing to You and accomplishes Your most perfect will.

Please forgive me for the times that my lack of self-mastery has set a bad example for others, especially for my children, and/or has led others to sin in any way.

I ask this of You, sweet and gentle Jesus, for Your most Sacred Heart

is an inexhaustible source of all graces and merits. Pour forth your graces from this Treasury of mercy, for I am here as You have requested, knocking at the door of the Heart through which God comes to us and through which we go to God.

To You, O Heart of Jesus, humanity has recourse. In You we find consolation when afflicted, protection when persecuted, strength when overwhelmed with trials, and light in doubt and darkness.

I firmly believe that You will grant to us the graces You have promised and for which we stand in such great need, and in such large measure, even if it requires great miracles. You have just to will it, and although I am most unworthy to even ask You for Your favors, You are the God of Mercy, and my petition to beg for these graces comes at Your request because of Your unfathomable love for each one of us. Do not refuse the response of Your unworthy but very grateful daughter who loves You!

I am here to plead for my brothers and sisters in need of your mercy, healing, and forgiveness, including atheists, Communists, terrorists, Masons, Satanists, and those who profit from abortion, pornography, and the sale of illegal drugs. I plead for the massive conversion of sinners, for all those who are living in sin, commit adultery, use artificial contraception, for sterilized couples, those who have destroyed or are considering dividing marriages and families, live in adultery, have had or participated in one or more abortions, and for those who abuse and/or use others.

Pour forth your grace upon those who are bound and chained by addictions, persecute Your Church and Your people, have left the church, have alienated themselves from the sacraments, those who do not know You, are in need of healing, upon families and friendships that are divided, the abandoned, lonely, hardhearted, forgotten, mistreated, those who mourn, are sick, caregivers, families, married couples, homosexuals, single people, parents, single parents, grandparents, priests, and all those consecrated to the religious life.

Please convert all those who are pro-abortion, including abortion administrators, politicians, health care workers, volunteers, voters, parents, grandparents, and teachers. Please change the hearts and minds

of people in every nation that need changing, most notably in the United States, which is now reaping what it has been sowing.

Please strengthen the faithful who dedicate their lives to Your service, and encourage them with abundant graces.

Cast upon us all a look of pity, and may Your compassionate Heart find in our miseries and weaknesses a pressing motive for granting these petitions. May every human heart honor and love You as we should.

Please accept this act of perfect submission to the decrees of Your adorable Heart, which I sincerely desire may be fulfilled in me and by me and by all Your people forever and ever.

My beloved Jesus, Thy Kingdom come. Eucharistic Heart of Jesus, increase in us faith, hope, and charity. Heart of Jesus, burning with love for all of humanity, inflame our hearts with love of You. O Divine Heart of Jesus, convert sinners, save the dying, free the holy souls in Purgatory.

Thank You for Your great love and mercy; I give myself entirely to you, and promise to love and honor You, all the days of my life.

God will not refuse to forgive anyone who is truly sorry for his or her sins. He then uses these souls to accomplish tremendous good. When we approach Him, humble and wounded, we resemble Jesus. "Conformity to Jesus Crucified has more value and importance than all mystical graces!" ~ Father Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen, O.C.D.⁴¹

If Almighty God came to you right now and told you that the next time you went to Confession, He was going to unleash a massive flood of graces, how would you prepare for such an event? What would you say in the confessional? Are you prepared to receive such a message?

"O God, Your high, eternal will desires only our sanctification; therefore, a soul who desires to sanctify itself, strips itself of its own will and clothes itself with yours." ~ St. Catherine of Siena

40. Father Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen, O.C.D., *Divine Intimacy* (Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publishers, Inc., 1996), p. 864.

41. Ibid.

CHAPTER 8

RESTORING A CULTURE OF LIFE

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*“We are only channels of grace to others in the measure
that we are possessed of God’s grace ourselves.”* ⁴²

~ Servant of God, Fr. John A. Hardon, S.J.

“MOST PEOPLE SAY ‘No’”

Michele Bondi Bottesi

Before Lent 2011 began, I asked our most loving God to make that Lent the best one of my life.

Just after Ash Wednesday, my lungs felt like they were filled with fluid. At times, especially in the morning, it felt like I was drowning. A cough developed as well, but it was non-productive and added to the misery. Several weeks went by, and once in a while there was a good day, which led me to believe that I was recovering.

One afternoon I took a turn for the worst, and knew a trip to the doctor was very necessary. By the time I tucked my children in and kissed them goodnight, I could barely breathe. Struggling to breathe while trying not to panic had me very worried and I was unable to sleep. So I contacted the physician on call that night to get professional advice. He was concerned that I might have pneumonia, told me to go to the emergency room right away, and said to be prepared to remain in the hospital for a few days.

I woke up my three sleeping children and had them get dressed. I called my mother, a one-woman German army of love who immediately packed an overnight bag and began the 40-minute drive to the hospital to look after my children and me. The children and I got into our vehicle and headed out into the night.

Being so late at night, it was very peaceful and very quiet. There were no cars on the road, and it felt like we were in a different world, one so different from the very active, busy world we exist in during the day. We arrived at the hospital just minutes later, parked, and the four of us entered the large, automatic emergency room doors. An ambulance was parked just outside the doors, and aside from the sound of the doors sliding open, everything was very still.

We walked through the corridors toward a tall counter. A woman sat on the other side of it and greeted us. I told her I was having great difficulty breathing, and immediately she said that they were very busy and I would have to wait for a bed to become available. She seemed very unconcerned with the fact that I couldn't breathe. Aside from her first greeting, her interaction with me was very impersonal. She proceeded to ask me questions very matter-of-factly as I stood on the other side of the counter, flanked by three very sleepy children on a school night, trying very hard to breathe, concentrate, and remain standing.

I found it very odd that she never asked me if there was anything I needed right away, or if I needed to sit down. In fact, if she had taken just one good look at me, she wouldn't have had to ask me anything. We were in the emergency room, after all. When she was done gathering information (the computer screen received her attention instead of me), she pointed the four of us in the direction of a sitting area not visible from where we were standing, and told us to go wait there.

It was very quiet for such a busy night in the ER. My children and I found the sitting room where we all were glad to have located some chairs. We sat down and waited.

After a while, a woman came in and led us all to a room where she gave me a very worn and very small hospital gown to change into. It was shocking that she handed me such a tiny garment and seemed oblivious to the blatant lack of compassion and respect for my dignity as a human person.

After I had changed into the very small gown, she said that we were going to move to another area, but I refused to follow her into the public corridor dressed that way. At my insistence, and without expression, she

gave me another gown that I used to properly cover myself. My children and I then followed her through the hallway to an area with an empty bed and not enough chairs. The children went to go find chairs for themselves, and brought them in so everyone could sit down.

While waiting for a doctor to arrive, I tried to remain calm and not panic because it was so difficult to breathe. I remarked to my children that although everyone had been *nice* to us, their interactions had been impersonal. They agreed. My mother arrived and beat the medical staff to my bedside. She was the only adult who seemed concerned about my condition.

Eventually a woman came in with a rolling cart. She asked me more questions and typed the answers into a computer. She was very nice and asked about my religious preference. Upon learning that I am Catholic, she asked, "If you are admitted to the hospital, would you like to have your pastor visit?" All of a sudden, hope was restored!

I was alarmed by the hospital staff's lack of compassion, as was my mother, and had already decided not to remain at the hospital any longer than absolutely necessary. One thing was certain: I was very sick. If I did have to be admitted to that hospital, a visit from my pastor would have been greatly appreciated.

As I factored Father's busy schedule into the equation, and before I was able to answer the question, the woman said, "Most people say 'No'."

I was shocked and replied, "What?"

"Most people say 'No,'" she repeated.

I couldn't believe it.

You see, although the people in the hospital were nice, their quality of care was seriously compromised because Christ was missing. Not one of the employees brought Christ to me. When a visit from my pastor was mentioned, I knew that if he came he would bring Jesus to me, and just the mere thought of it filled me with great joy. He would be Christ to me, the very One I needed most of all while I was suffering.

I told the woman it was incomprehensible that anyone would actually turn down such a magnificent offer!

Then I explained that even if Father was not able to visit, the fact that I attend Holy Mass every day that I was physically able to brought me great comfort there in the hospital when I was suffering and in great need of compassion. Then she was the one who was surprised! We discussed the benefits of participating in Holy Mass every day.

She left after having acquired the information required by the hospital. I was to meet her one final time early that morning before leaving.

More than an hour after arriving, I flagged down a man as he walked by. I thought he was an orderly, if they still call them that. I mentioned my great difficulty breathing, and asked him for some oxygen. He was kind enough, and we were surprised to learn that he was actually an emergency room physician. He got out the oxygen tubes and positioned them on my face. After he left, my mother adjusted them properly.

I told my mother that no matter what we were told that night, a visit to my doctor was necessary because I lacked confidence in the care at that hospital. Two people told me conflicting things about pneumonia, and I lacked the medical knowledge, information about their credentials, and ability to concentrate to determine who was right. One thing was certain: I knew I was very sick, and my mother and I seemed like we were the only ones who were really concerned. If only people were as good at showing compassion as they are at gathering information to fill out so much paperwork! We considered having my mother take the children home so they could go to sleep, but she would not leave my side and the way things were going, I needed her there to advocate for me.

After several chest X-rays, a different doctor came in and ruled out pneumonia. I didn't know what she diagnosed until the next day when I read the words *viral bronchitis* on the paperwork. The second doctor had someone else give me a breathing treatment, and just like that I was being discharged with an inhaler in my hand. I was certain that they had not given me the correct diagnosis, and that I was still seriously in need of medical intervention.

We were led to a room where the woman who had asked me about a visit from my pastor was seated at a desk. I sat across from her, feeling

absolutely terrible. She typed more information into a computer. Truly, the gathering of information was much more efficient, and extensive, than the quality of care given to the patient. The woman asked me how I was going to pay the bill, and as I handed her a check to pay for one of the most bizarre and unhelpful experiences of my life, she handed me a pen in a box and thanked me for coming!

I thanked God that I was leaving.

My daughter rode back to our house in my mother's car, and my sons drove home with me. It was three o'clock in the morning, and we had not prepared for an overnight guest. My sons headed off to sleep in their rooms, while my mother, daughter, and I all climbed in to my king-sized bed. Of course Christ was there too, because my caring mother had brought His love to us.

It would be two visits to my doctor, 10 trips to the pharmacy, a second infection from my mouth to my windpipe, burning lungs, a persistent cough, more medicine than I have ever taken in my entire life, hundreds and hundreds of dollars in medical expenses, the most physical misery I had ever experienced, and another five weeks before there was any improvement.

In granting my request, God bestowed upon me an incredibly sacrificial and spiritually beneficial Lenten season. The experience was also a very powerful personal reminder of how vital it is to live, love, and serve in imitation of Christ. Did you know that you can bring Christ to people? You can, and you must. Every one of us must. Living in imitation of Christ truly makes all the difference.

I experienced this phenomenon in the most profound way two years ago. The good Lord instructed me one morning to take my children to a specific parish for Holy Mass on weekends. The summons came as a complete surprise to me, and it involved leaving the parish we had been members of for 10 years. Nevertheless, I did as God requested, called the parish we had been sent to, and made an appointment to meet with the pastor.

As we walked into his office the day of our meeting, I was still processing God's unexpected summons, determining the details involved in

our transition, and trying to make sense of it all. I had not planned on leaving our parish and did not want to. I remember saying to Father that I had no idea why we had been sent there, and had no idea how it all was going to work out. The most important thing is that we were obedient to God's request. The night of the meeting, which began in Fr. Ben's office, I saw Jesus standing right by his side. The two of them made a very loving welcoming committee.

Jesus was there because Father brought Him to us by living and loving in imitation of Christ.

"Every tear, disappointment and grieved heart is a blank check. If we write our name on it, it is worthless. If we sign it with Christ's Name, it is infinite in its value. In prosperity, Christ gives you His gifts; in suffering with faith, He gives you Himself". ~ Fulton J. Sheen ⁴³

Once we have experienced a loving encounter with Jesus and compare it to not having Him around, we become more keenly aware of the importance of bringing Christ to others. This awareness becomes more acute as the soul makes an attempt to live this way itself and strives for greater union with God.

Allow God to work in you and through you according to His most perfect will, and be sure to bring Jesus to other people by living and loving in imitation of Christ and following His commandments. Once we choose to do that, our hearts conform to His and we take God's pro-life side, because we value life on His terms and not on our own.

Then said Jesus to his disciples, "If any man want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (Matthew 16:24).

42. John A. Hardon, S. J., *There Is No Stopping Abortion without the Eucharist*. Copyright © 2000–2012 by www.therealpresence.org. All rights reserved worldwide. Used with permission.

43. Fulton J. Sheen, *Our Grounds for Hope* (Totowa, NJ: Catholic Book Publishing Company, 2000), p. 14.

THE MARRIAGE AND THE MISSING GUEST

Michele Bondi Bottesi

The more one seeks to deepen one's union with God, the more one becomes like Him. The more time one spends with God, the more one becomes faith-minded, and also church-minded. My family frequently shares precious moments when our authentic Catholic practices have become so infused with our everyday lives that they have become inseparable and second nature. That is just how it should be!

Often we have the impulse to genuflect before sitting down or before leaving our seats, even in restaurants and movie theaters. We pray before meals and sometimes, instead of saying grace, another prayer presents itself instead. Our family responds with laughter and incredible delight.

Does this happen to you as well?

Faith is a delightful gift from our most loving Creator, who remains with us, always. That having been said—though we may find ourselves being church-minded while not in church—nothing equals our presence and participation during the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, receiving the most sacred Body and Blood of our Savior Jesus Christ worthily. No other activity is the same, no other place is the same, no other action is the same.

As Catholics, we recognize God's constant presence; this awareness should impact the decisions we make and the way we conduct ourselves.

Our faith isn't something that we practice or witness for just one hour while at Holy Mass on Sundays (or twice a year at Christmas and Easter). Our faith is to be experienced and expressed as a way of life, and joyfully integrated into our very existence as we constantly seek to accomplish the will of God.

We must live our faith, be thankful for it, witness it to others, and grow in it, moment by moment, hour by hour, every single day, week by week, month by month, year by year, throughout all the circumstances of our lives.

Catholicism is a 24/7 religion. Know, love, and serve Him, all the days of your life.

Last year I ran into a Catholic friend whose son was going to be married. I joyfully asked her, "When is the wedding?" The couple was going to get married very soon.

"Do you want to know where they are getting married?" asked my friend. I nodded, smiling. "St. John in the Virgin Islands," she responded, no longer smiling.

"Oh, how did they pick that particular church?" I asked her, once again very church-minded.

She went on to explain that they were going to get married on the beach in Saint John, United States Virgin Islands.

The couple, like so many others, had chosen to begin and celebrate their marriage without loved ones unable to make the trip, excluded by choice of location, to marry where they want, when they want, around who they want. Often, precious children are excluded from the celebration because the event is so expensive and so formal. More unfathomable than even that is the choice couples make to exclude their Creator, the Love of Our Lives, their SAVIOR. He should be the very first One invited!

Catholics who choose to celebrate and begin their marriage covenant outside the context of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, or at least a Catholic wedding ceremony, send the message to everyone they know—on one of the most significant days of their lives—that Holy Mass IS WORTH MISSING. One Holy Mass is of infinite value to mankind!

How unfathomable that any couple would choose to forfeit so much as they make one of the most important commitments of their lives.

To think that some couples disregard our real Treasure, then go on to celebrate the exercise of their free will with a reception and perhaps a honeymoon, and exclude the very One who gave them everything!

God is the missing guest.

It has gotten so bad that many people do not even know why they should care.

Here's why we should care, from the Catechism of the Catholic Church, regarding the Vocation to Chastity and The Integrity of the Person, in particular: "...either man governs his passions and finds peace, or he lets himself be dominated by them and becomes unhappy. Man's dignity therefore requires him to act out of conscious and free choice, as moved and drawn in a personal way from within, and not by blind impulses in himself or by mere external constraint. Man gains such dignity when, ridding himself of all slavery to the passions, he presses forward to his goal by freely choosing what is good and, by his diligence and skill, effectively secures for himself the means suited to this end." ~ CCC 2339⁴⁴

Roughly half of all marriages end in divorce. Common sense dictates that couples should want to give their marriages the very best opportunity for success. The single most important thing couples can do is invite God into their marriage and consult with Him on all things, including family planning.

May we stop limiting God in our lives, include Him in everything, follow His rules, and understand why He gave them to us in the first place. May we actively work at increasing self-mastery and grow in obedience, humility, selflessness, charity, and chastity.

We can only wonder what God experiences when He is excluded from so many lives, and from so many marriages. How can we even think of excluding the One Who made us, the One Who loves us, the One Who offered His Son to be brutally tortured and crucified on a cross in atonement for our sins?

Our culture has, in large measure, lost sight of how disgraceful, shameful, and ungrateful behavior profoundly harms people. In fact, such destructive behavior is often celebrated. However, there is no true celebration without God as our guest.

Love has come to mean so many things in our culture, but what is authentic love, really? Authentic love comes from God. Authentic love is selfless, and places itself at the service of others while always seeking their greater good. Authentic love is obedient to God's commandments.

They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them (John 14:21).

Jesus, be Thou always our saving Guest!

For more information on inviting God into your marriage by having it convalidated in the Catholic Church, talk to a holy Catholic priest.

SOMETHING MEN SHOULD KNOW

Sean McVeigh

Thunderclaps filled the air and lightning struck relentlessly all around our house. It was the worst lightning storm I had ever experienced since moving to our current house about seven years ago. While the storm pounded outside, a storm brewed inside our house as my wife had already been having labor pains with our first child for over 24 hours. The only problem was that her contractions had not yet grown close enough for the hospital to admit her for delivering our baby. As I sat there timing the contractions, I maintained a hope that God would somehow quiet the violent storm by the time I had to drive my wife to the hospital.

Unfortunately for my wife, it was three in the morning before we left for the hospital. Fortunately for me, however, there happened to be a break in the storm by that time. I thanked God repeatedly as we drove through the soft drizzle on our way to the hospital.

Once we arrived at the hospital and were admitted, we headed to the maternity ward. Since this was our first child, I honestly had no idea what to expect. Being that it was now 3:30 in the morning, I imagined our son would be born around eight in the morning. As a result, I called my parents so that they could get ready and head toward the hospital, which was located about three hours away from where they live.

To my surprise, my wife continued to have contractions all day and

the baby was not born until after 10 that night! Even though we were all exhausted, and I was suffering from a horrendous case of Lyme disease, which I had contracted from getting bit by a deer tick the previous week, everything changed the moment our son was born. I think all of us forgot about the pain and fatigue we felt at that moment. However, that is not why I am telling you about this experience.

I am telling you about the day my son was born because something I did not expect or imagined occurred a few minutes after his birth. Leading up to the moment I am referring to, the nurses had taken our son over to a small table located under a heat lamp on the other side of the room. As they cleaned him up and put a diaper on him, he continuously cried uncontrollably. Being a first-time father, I really had no idea what I should do, but I instinctively went over to him to try to help. As I approached his side, I held my finger out and said, “It’s okay little buddy.” He instantly grabbed hold of my finger and immediately stopped crying. He also became incredibly calm and didn’t make another noise. I was shocked by the effect I had in this situation!

One of the reasons this experience surprised me so much is that I didn’t know my son would be able to recognize me at all. I especially didn’t think he would recognize my voice, because I imagined it must have sounded very muffled when he was in the womb. However, it seemed to me that he not only recognized my voice, but it seemed he also knew without question that I was his father. While I expected him to naturally have a strong bond with my wife, I didn’t expect him to immediately have a strong bond with me as well.

The importance of a father in a child’s life became even clearer to me over the following weeks. There were times when my wife had been holding our baby for a long time and he seemed to become inconsolable. On more than one occasion, I went over and picked him up from within my wife’s arms to try to help out. Usually, the moment I did this our son stopped crying. It sometimes seemed as though he was just acting fussy as his way of trying to communicate to us that he wanted to spend a little time with his father at that moment.

In a certain sense, I began to realize that children do not just want to spend time with their fathers as well as their mothers. The actually *need* it. I think children need *both* of their parents to more easily maintain a balanced emotional life.

The last statement I made reminds me of a time I was getting on an airplane coming home from a preaching mission. There was a young boy around the age of eight screaming and crying because he didn't want to leave his father. His parents had been divorced and he had flown to see his dad but now had to go back home to his mother. The boy didn't want to leave his daddy because of how much he missed seeing him.

My reason for sharing these details with you is to help create a greater awareness. I would like *all* men to realize how important they are in their children's lives. I think this detail is sometimes not emphasized enough within the pro-life moment and in life in general. So often in the pro-life movement we focus on the unborn babies and the women. While this is vital to the movement, I think all men need to better understand the bond their children naturally have with them. Perhaps this awareness would motivate them to take more initiative in their role as father.

Before concluding, I will share a couple more experiences I have had with my own son that affirm the idea that children truly need to spend time with their father as well as their mother, and that it is very important for fathers to intentionally make time for their children.

For instance, after our son was a few weeks old, I had to go away for a couple of days. I talked to my wife periodically while I was away, and she kept telling me how restless our child had been. This continued up until the exact moment I walked in the door upon returning from my trip. As soon as our son heard my voice, he immediately quieted himself. He then became even calmer when I held him in my arms. As a result, I realized I needed to try even harder to adjust my schedule so as to be home as often as possible.

The last story I will share to affirm everything I have been saying is one that took place earlier today. I took some time off from work to build an addition on our house to make more room for our new child. As I hung

the drywall in the addition today, I could hear him fussing all day long. My loving, patient wife did all she could to calm him down but seemed unable to do so. No matter what she tried, he just wouldn't calm down.

When I finished hanging all the drywall, I came into the living room to see my wife and son. The first thing my wife said when I entered the room was that nothing was working to calm him down. All of her normal tricks that had always worked in the past seemed useless. After listening to her, I picked up our child and started talking to him. He immediately calmed down and completely stopped crying. He remained calm in my arms and then fell asleep within five minutes.

For all of you men out there, I want to reemphasize your role as a father, whether you are currently a father or will become one in the future. While it is somewhat obvious that a woman has a natural bond with her children, you also need to realize that there is a natural bond that your child has with you. You may not personally feel it, but it is there! I urge you to intentionally etch out quality time that you can spend with your wife and kids every day if possible! I also encourage you to share this message with as many fathers as possible, because many of them simply do not realize or comprehend all of this. As a result, there are many men in the world who do not set enough time aside to spend with their wife and children.

Sean McVeigh considers himself to be just an average guy who is doing all he can to serve God and the Church. As part of this, Sean founded McVeigh Ministries in an attempt to inspire Catholics to more fervently live their faith. Sean primarily does this through his writings and guest speaking services. For more information about Sean and his ministry, visit his website at www.CatholicGuestSpeaker.com.

“THESE ARE THE REMEDIES YOU MUST USE”

Michele Bondi Bottesi

This story from the biographical memoirs of St. John Bosco (Vol. VII, pages 143–145) may forever change the importance you place on praying the Rosary. It sure did for Father Bosco and his boys, and for so many others who have heard the story since he first told it. Please share it with others.

For 60 years, St. John Bosco had many vision-like dreams that foretold the extraordinary mission God had for him, and also guided him as it came to fruition. Fr. Bosco shared the dreams with his boys. Sometimes the youths faced tremendous challenges, and in other dreams the state of their souls were revealed. The remarkable dreams/visions continue to provide us in the modern era with important lessons and insights as we grow in sanctity and fulfill our purposes in life.

One particular dream had two parts, the Snake and the Rosary, and the Anvil and the Hammer. In it, St. John Bosco “received yet another proof of the devil’s unceasing, devastating attacks against souls and of the need to repel him constantly and free his victims.” ⁴⁵

The Snake and the Rosary

In the first part of the dream, Fr. Bosco and his boys were at his brother’s house in Italy. As the boys played, a stranger came up to him and asked the priest to accompany him. They arrived at a meadow alongside the playground, where the stranger pointed to a huge and ugly snake that was coiled in the grass. The snake was over 20 feet long.

Fr. Bosco was afraid and wanted to flee, but the stranger restrained him and said, “Get closer and take a good look.” He balked of course, but the stranger told him not to be afraid. He told Fr. Bosco to stay where he was and went to get a rope.

The strange man asked Fr. Bosco to take one end of the rope and grip it tightly in both of his hands. The stranger held the other end, and together they dangled it over the snake. Fr. Bosco replied, “You must be crazy; the snake will leap up and tear us to pieces.”

The stranger assured him all would be well, and again Fr. Bosco attempted to flee. However, the stranger assured him that there was nothing to fear because the snake would not harm him. His argument was so convincing, that Fr. Bosco remained and agreed to do as he said.

The stranger then went to the other side of the “monster.” They stretched the rope and snapped it across the back of the snake. It immediately sprang up and struck at the rope, but in doing so ensnared itself as if in a noose.

The stranger yelled to Fr. Bosco to hold on and not let go, then ran to a pear tree nearby and tied his end of the rope to it. Next he went to Fr. Bosco and tied his end of the rope to the iron grating of a window in a house.

Fr. Bosco watched as the snake struggled with rage to free itself. Instead, it tore itself to pieces and scattered its flesh all over the area. Eventually it slashed itself against the rope until it was just a skeleton.

Then the most incredible thing happened. The stranger untied the rope and coiled it up, and as he placed it in a box, told Fr. Bosco to watch carefully. He closed the box, and by that time, the boys from the Oratory had gathered around him. They all watched as the stranger opened the box. The rope was shaped into the words *Ave Maria*, or “Hail Mary.”

Fr. Bosco asked the stranger how that happened. He explained that the snake is a symbol of the devil, and the rope represents the Rosary, *a succession of Hail Marys with which we can strike, conquer, and destroy all of hell’s demons.*

Fr. Bosco concluded that first part of the dream by telling his boys that he would leave the second part of the dream for the next night. That dream, named The Anvil and the Hammer, is described in the next story.

The Anvil and the Hammer⁴⁶

The many significant dreams St. John Bosco had throughout his lifetime began when he was a child and continued for 60 years. God spoke to him and through him then, and is speaking to us now through those dreams. Some of them are parables, others are prophetic, and others are instructional. They involved nations, the Salesian congregation, missions, the Oratory, and the Oratory boys.

St. John Bosco usually had a guide and interpreter in the dreams. Sometimes he was able to see the state of the Oratory boys' consciences, which he considered to be an extraordinary grace that was granted for the benefit of their eternal salvation.

He shared his dreams with the children, and residents eagerly anticipated news of a new one. The dreams contained clear and exact revelations, and the Oratory boys witnessed many of the events come to pass. Fr. Bosco was said to have narrated his dreams humbly, always with the spiritual benefit of his listeners his primary concern. The sharing of the dreams led to a greater horror for sin, better and more frequent Confessions, and more frequent Communion. He referred to the dreams as "The Devil's Bankruptcy."⁴⁷

In the second part of the dream involving the snake and the Rosary, Fr. Bosco turned around as he was talking to the stranger about the symbolism of the snake and the rope. After the snake had torn itself to pieces, the flesh of the snake was scattered on the ground, and Fr. Bosco saw boys picking up pieces of snake meat and eating them. As soon as they swallowed some of the snake, they crumpled to the ground, their bodies swelled, and then they turned as hard as stone.

To Fr. Bosco's horror, more and more boys kept eating the meat!

Fr. Bosco shouted at them and tried to physically restrain them from eating the meat, but he was unable to stop them. Each time a boy fell to the ground, another precious boy took his place. Fr. Bosco called to some clerics to come help him stop the boys from eating the snake meat, but some of them began to eat it too! They fell to the ground like the others.

Fr. Bosco recalled that he was nearly out of his mind at seeing so

many of his boys lying in that terrible state. He asked the stranger why the boys ate the meat when they knew it would kill them.

“Because ‘the sensual man does not perceive the things that are of God.’ That’s why!” was his reply.⁴⁸

Fr. Bosco asked if there were some way to save the boys.

“Yes,” he was told. “There is a way to save them. Anvil and hammer.”

Anvil and hammer, to put the boys back in shape. The stranger explained that the anvil and hammer are symbols for Holy Communion and Confession. He was clear: “These are the remedies you must use.”

So Fr. Bosco “went to work” and found that the prescribed treatment was very effective. Although most of the boys who ate the snake meat were restored to life and recovered, there were a few that did not.

Why? Because they made bad Confessions.

At the end of the story, a historian explained that the boys’ disobedience, collapsing, swelling up, and the hardening of their bodies signified pride, obstinacy, and love of sin.

Furthermore, “The prayers and sacrifices of the just must first ask that God’s grace warm hardened hearts and soften them, so that the Sacraments of Penance and Holy Eucharist may exercise their divine efficacy... thus, the hammer’s blows and the anvil’s support bring about the cure of an ulcer-ridden but now docile heart. As the sparks fly, the heart is reconditioned.”⁴⁹

45. From *The Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco*, compiled and edited by Fr. J. Bacchiarello, S.D.B., *Forty Dreams of St. John Bosco* (Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publishers, 1996), p. 108.

46. Ibid, p. xii.

47. Ibid, p. 112.

48. Ibid, pp. 112–113.

49. Ibid.

GOD CAN'T GIVE WHEN WE INSIST ON TAKING FIRST

Michele Bondi Bottesi

A subject that receives little attention in our time is the mistake so many people make of following the economy-of-man model, instead of focusing on God's model, the Economy of Salvation.

So many people, sometimes even well-intentioned people, make the moral error of doing or saying anything to make a buck or promote themselves or their work. It only cheapens their work and burdens other people.

Some even justify this behavior by saying they do it for God. But look at their work and it is loaded with "I, I, I, me, me, me." Such work fails to produce precious fruit. Instead, it produces the illusion of success and fuels self-pride.

Catholics must be especially vigilant, for we represent the Eucharist.

Modern marketing has become incredibly selfish and vulgar. Instead of using talents to serve, so many are using their talents to take, mislead, take advantage, and demand from others. The soliciting is absolutely out of control, and too often the tactics are immoral.

The goal of every apostolate should be to guide souls to Christ by serving others. It must be clear that it is God Who is working through us.

How is this accomplished? This is accomplished by living in imitation of Christ.

We must remember to include this behavior in our daily examinations of conscience, especially the ones we make before we go to Confession.

Catholic organizations and non-profits must be especially vigilant, and churches should not become marketplaces. The selling and soliciting have become excessive; people must be able to go to church and find peace, not be assaulted with more selling and soliciting. We must serve more and ask for less.

Who can you even think of that relies on Divine Providence anymore? God can't give when we insist on taking first.

Once, a woman was leaving morning Holy Mass during the week and as she took her first steps out of the church into the vestibule, a wealthy woman came right up to her and asked her to donate to some nuns who were going to visit Italy, were learning Italian, and needed money. The woman was sick, and her own work for the Lord was in the red. Not having the funds to go to Italy herself, she just didn't go there. She didn't demand that other people, whether they have the funds or not, send her there. She certainly didn't accost people in church. Instead, she focused on giving. The wealthy woman ignored the needs of her sister in Christ; she should have served her, but sought to take from her instead. The woman did offer to help the cause, but her help was immediately rejected because it wasn't in the form of money.

It has become standard for people to want something and expect/demand that others provide it. This behavior is so disrespectful and it is not Christ-like.

Just who do we think that we are?

Once, the same woman was walking through the parking lot toward the church to attend Holy Mass just as a mother was leaving the church. As soon as she spotted the woman in the parking lot, she shouted at her, in a panic, and instructed her to go into the church and buy something from the young people raising money for their upcoming trip to go help people in another country. Oh, the irony! The woman had already generously donated to their cause, diverting much-needed funds from her own work, but that consideration never factored into the mother's demands.

The mother's behavior embarrassed the woman, and was an assault on her dignity as a human person. There was a certain amount of money left to raise, and that was the bottom line. The dignity of other people had nothing to do with it, and that is a grave moral error that so many well-intentioned people make. They think that as long as they are going to do something good for God, it doesn't matter how it is accomplished.

People have become nothing more than a means to an end. Such thinking contributes to the abortion mentality, because it is devoid of any respect for the great dignity of the human person.

This behavior is very common, and it is not holy.

The woman going into the church to attend Holy Mass and find some peace from a very self-absorbed world didn't ask that mother to fund her children's trip anywhere. If they don't have the money, they don't go.

Just who do we think that we are?

Among the most tragic cases are some non-profit organizations, especially well-intended pro-life organizations, whose very well-thought-out solicitations can sometimes be excessive, intrusive, and manipulative. We cannot commit evil with the hopes that good will come out of it.

Sadly, this has become acceptable behavior in our society. The devil tries to convince us that the more we use people, the more business savvy we are, and the more good we can do. We are even told by the demon that the Lord will bless such efforts! Eventually, we can become so self-interested and demanding that we will even kill people for personal gain.

We are constantly, constantly bombarded with requests for money. It is an assault on our dignity as human persons. Jesus Christ never, ever behaved this way. We cannot behave this way and be living in imitation of Christ at the same time. It just isn't possible. Do you think that you have not adopted the abortion mentality? Take a good look at your behavior and ask yourself, "How are my actions supporting the culture of death?"

"The virtue contrary to selfish pride is the Christian virtue of humble charity. Along with selfish pride is unchastity as the co-cause of the worldwide murder of over 65 million unborn children every year." ~ Father John A. Hardon, S.J. ⁵⁰

“Unless the practice of charity and chastity is restored not only is there no stopping of abortion, this crime will only increase in intensity, and the number of innocent victims beyond all human calculation.” ~ Father John A. Hardon, S.J.⁵¹

50. John A. Hardon, S.J., *There Is No Stopping Abortion without the Eucharist*. Copyright © 2000–2012 by www.therealpresence.org. All rights reserved worldwide. Used with permission.

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“PLEASE HELP YOURSELF”

Michele Bondi Bottesi

We arrived at the funeral home to begin the wake of a beloved family member who had passed into eternity. Our first stop was a room to the left, a small lounge where family members could take a break from receiving guests during the public viewing. There was a pop machine in the room; soda was the only food or drink available for purchase.

There were several tables set up in the room—round ones in the middle, and long rectangular ones along two of the walls. Place cards with the names of different families had been placed on some of the tables.

As we walked into the room, I noticed a long, rectangular table just to the right of the door. The place card had an Italian family's name on it. It was loaded with food including multiple fruit trays, a tray of multicolored sandwich wraps, and various vegetable plates. Cases of water bottles were stashed underneath. The table was such a beautiful sight.

My first thought when I saw the table with the big place card that seemed to say “Hands off” was that if I had the foresight to have brought all that food, I would have put the words “Please help yourself” on the sign. I would have allowed everyone who was mourning the loss of a loved one to help themselves to food and drink to sustain them during the long hours ahead.

Unfortunately, we were too physically and emotionally spent to have thought of it. While there was plenty of food awaiting everyone at a family member's home nearby, having it at the funeral home would have been the most ideal place.

A very significant series of events had begun with that table full of food, perhaps as a test and also perhaps to teach a vital lesson.

My family and I walked over to the table in the middle of the room that had our family's name on it, and put what we had out for everyone to share: two bottles of juice and several boxes of snacks we poured into paper bowls.

Every once in a while throughout the afternoon, my family took a break from receiving friends and went into the lounge for a drink or to have a snack. Soon, the meager rations we brought were gone.

At one point, as we sat at the table designated for our family, a woman began insulting our family, our deceased loved one, and wondered aloud why we had not brought any food. She had just returned from having gone out to get herself something to eat at a restaurant, and despite being aware of there being no food, had not offered to bring anything back for anyone.

The woman called us cheap, mocked our deceased loved one's appearance, and insulted grieving family members.

It was as if the devil himself had arrived on the scene to spread malice and encourage division. He is easily identifiable: always so mean, spiteful, unhelpful, hateful, and uncharitable.

I wondered why the woman who spoke so unkindly didn't offer to be of any help. Her insults were absolutely shocking. I felt so sad, and also very angry, to hear such horrible insults directed at so many good people during a wake.

A woman was sitting nearby, and she overheard the conversation. She was the one who had brought the food on the rectangular table. She had such great compassion that she came over and offered us all that she had brought to eat and drink. Not only that, she and her family members kept inviting us throughout the rest of the afternoon to help ourselves to all they had.

We were overjoyed to fill our plates with the food from their table. I offered her daughter some money in gratitude, but neither child nor mother would take any.

And that's not all. The family also had another table, a round table on the left side of the room, and that table was covered with wonderful desserts! During another one of our breaks in that lounge, a man got up from the table that had all the desserts on it and approached us. He was holding a tray of those wonderful desserts in his hands, and had come over not only to offer us some, but to serve them to us.

It was as if Jesus Christ Himself was there, caring for us with such compassion through that kind family.

Just like we are every day of our lives, that afternoon we stood on the battlefield, right there in the lounge of the funeral home. Some days the battle is more vicious. The battle of good versus evil played out that day at a time when one would expect people to behave with dignity, gentleness, compassion, and kindness. But we can expect that when great good is being accomplished for God's glory, the spiritual battle is most fierce—for the devil is very clever and does all he can, any way he can, to get us to stop loving one another.

Right there in the funeral home, that wonderful Italian family was Christ to us. They saw a need, took action, sought to unify, served us by offering all they had, and didn't ask, demand, or accept anything in return.

By the grace of God, the next morning my family had a talk before walking into the church for our loved one's funeral Holy Mass. We had been deeply hurt by the very harsh words spoken in the lounge the day before. We understood that it was very important and very necessary for us to forgive the person who had been so insulting.

As soon as we saw her in the church we all embraced her, overjoyed to have won this victory over evil by choosing to love no matter what, and the grieving woman was clearly sorry for what had taken place the day before.

Why is this story included in a pro-life book? Because we contribute either to the culture of life or to the culture of death, depending on what

we do and say. The Fifth Commandment forbids us from killing, and we can kill by our words and/or our deeds.

“Christ could not have been more firm in insisting that we can expect God to be as kind and merciful and forgiving to us as we are kind and merciful and forgiving to others. ‘The amount you measure out,’ He warned us, ‘is the amount you will be given’ (Matthew 7:2).” ~ Father John A. Hardon, S.J.⁵²

52. John A. Hardon, S.J., *Basic Catholic Catechism Course Workbook* (Bardstown, KY: Eternal Life, with permission of Inter Mirifica, 1998), p. 56.

CONCLUSION

“DON’T WAIT”

Michele Bondi Bottesi

It was almost Christmas 2011, and my 48-year-old sister Belinda was near death. She had recently returned home following an unexpectedly long stay at the hospital. She had been admitted on a Friday for a blood transfusion because her white blood cell counts were low, and had already been informed that cancer had spread throughout her body and that she was dying.

While she was in the hospital, one medical condition after another presented itself, and she was placed in isolation. At one point she went into renal failure, and we were all informed that her condition was hopeless and that she had at most two days left to live.

However, God alone has the right to decide who lives and who dies, and when. Six weeks later, Belinda was discharged from the hospital.

It was a triumphant day of sorts when our mother and I accompanied her home on that last leg of her journey. The three of us sat in the living room and chatted about the events of the last several weeks.

Two things stand out in my mind about that conversation.

Belinda had spent years compiling our family genealogy, and thanks to the computer age, she was able to maintain contact via e-mail and Skype with our beloved relatives around the world. I asked her about her

experience in the hospital when she was on the brink of death. Belinda explained that it didn't feel like she was dying, perhaps because as she said, "Nobody came for me." She shook her head, and seemed almost disappointed that all our relatives who had preceded us in death and whose personal stories she knew so well had not presented themselves.

Then, she said it again. "Nobody came for me."

They knew it wasn't her designated time yet.

Another thing Belinda mentioned was that money and material things, which only had value to her when used to help others, were now of no concern to her at all. All that mattered was that her soul was ready to meet the Lord.

We spoke briefly about what is of true and eternal value, something we had discussed so many times before.

Belinda's health deteriorated rapidly after that day.

The day before she passed into eternal life, I had gone to Holy Mass in the morning and then brought Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament to her. At that point she was no longer able to see or speak. However, the day before she sat up in bed and said she wanted to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation. And when she received the Eucharist that next day, she clearly knew our Savior was there with her, and she seemed to really savor His Real Presence on her tongue.

That morning, my mother and brother and I were there with Belinda until I was left alone with her while Mom and Joe left to run some errands.

A kind woman from hospice had recently made a very helpful recommendation. It broke Belinda's heart to be leaving us, and our family had spoken of the moment that was coming when we would most likely need to give Belinda our permission to go to God. What I had not thought of was how important it was for her to be assured that our mother would be all right.

And so I was left that day with Belinda all to myself as she lay in her bed dying, and realized that the opportunity I knew was coming had arrived. If there was anything I needed to say to her, this was the moment, and it would be my last opportunity.

I considered very carefully what I should say. She was able to hear, but not able to answer back. The moment belonged not only to me; it belonged to her, too. Throughout her illness, the thought of separating from us caused Belinda a great deal of anguish, because she wanted to stick around and make sure everyone was taken care of. I did not want to cause her more grief.

The reason this story is significant is that it is important that we not wait until such a moment arrives, or assume that we will even be granted this one final opportunity, to say or do anything that should have been expressed earlier. Love now, while you are able to. Respect the great dignity of every person, no matter what the circumstances are.

As Belinda had said on the day she was released from the hospital and returned home to die, only love mattered to her, and it is only love that should matter to us.

My main thought was to respect my sister's great dignity as I walked up the stairs toward her room. During my ascent I became overcome with emotion, and ended up detouring to the room next to hers where I silently cried. I did not remain there long, because there was a very precious opportunity waiting next door.

And so I walked into her room and said hello so she knew who was there. Not wanting to hover over her, I brought my laptop computer, set it on the floor toward the foot of her bed where there was room, and sat down in front of it. I told her I was there to keep her company while Mom and Joe ran some errands, and while matter-of-factly working at the computer, spoke to her intermittently as if we were having one of our usual conversations.

By the grace of God I was able to tell her without losing my composure not to worry about our mother, who was going to turn 70 years old in three days. "We'll take good care of her," I said.

Nothing else I expressed in the hour or so we were together a final time comes to my mind now except for one final thing I felt was important to tell her. Fortunately, every other good thing had already been said and done.

“You know,” I said with conviction, and for her sake with all the joy I could muster under the circumstances, “we have had a really wonderful life.”

Don’t wait to love the people God has placed in your life for good reason. Don’t wait to give God full jurisdiction over your life. Don’t wait to unify your will to His. Don’t wait to ask for His forgiveness, forgive yourself, forgive anyone else, or extend an olive branch.

Don’t wait to have a deeply personal, meaningful, and deeply unified relationship with Jesus. Don’t wait to honor Him and receive Him during the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, and don’t wait to receive the Sacrament of Christ’s Peace (Reconciliation). Don’t wait to be open to and value God’s gift of life with an open and generous heart.

Don’t wait to say the loving words you should be saying, and don’t wait to accomplish what He wants you to accomplish as His instrument of love.

Don’t wait to get involved in the pro-life movement; God has prepared a very special place just for you within it. True love leads to life, and so many other wonderful things!

If you are unsure how to begin, one way is to develop a devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Speaking to St. Margaret Mary, Jesus called His Sacred Heart the “source of all healing and sanctifying grace.” Jesus asks us to give Him our hearts, and live a life of union that is glorious for God, sweet and fruitful for our souls, and powerful for us to obtain graces for others. In the Sacred Heart of Jesus, “Our prayers will be sanctified, our atonement rendered acceptable, our love purified, our thanksgiving enhanced, our good works ennobled, our faults supplied for.”⁵³

53. *Devotion to the Sacred Heart* (Charlotte, NC: Tan Books, 2010; Originally published at Clyde, MO, under the title *True Veneration of the Sacred Heart*, 8th Edition, November, 1949), pp. 59–60.

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Almighty God, I thank You for the opportunity to serve You in this work commissioned through the Sacred Heart of Jesus. May it be pleasing in Your sight, and beneficial to mankind.

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God is at work in you!

Lastly, I extend eternal thanks to my Blessed Mother, Father John A. Hardon, S.J., and to my sister Belinda, now our advocate in heaven, who wrote this beautiful poem in honor of the five children in our family. She called them her “five diamonds.”

My Diamonds *

Recently I looked up to see
The stars shining beautifully.
In the darkness of the clear night,
The silent lamps of hope burned bright.

A sense of peace enveloped me,
I dreamed of possibilities.
And sense of time eluded me,
I thought about eternity.

Last night perhaps you saw stars, too.
My diamonds, too, I thought of you.

*Dedicated to my five nieces and nephews, my five diamonds.

—**Belinda Bondi**

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The personal stories in *God Moments III: True Love Leads to Life* take you straight to the heart of the right-to-life movement, allowing you to experience real life-and-death situations seen through the eyes of God, children, and the men and women on both sides of the abortion debate. Learn the many ways people choose to support the culture of death, oftentimes with very good intentions and completely unaware of the consequences. Step onto the battlefield during the most colossal humanitarian disaster in the history of mankind and ask yourself, "Whose side am I on?"

The third book in the award-winning *God Moments* series integrates Catholic Church teaching on the sanctity of life to cultivate an unconditional respect for the great dignity of the human person, and will encourage you to trust in the Lord's judgment and reverence His most perfect timing.

True love leads to life, and so many other wonderful things! Do not wait to get involved in the pro-life movement; God has prepared a very special place within it just for you!

"God, the Creator of Life, is pro-life. Are you?"
~ True Love Leads To Life



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Michele Bondi Bottesi, M.A., is a mother, psychologist, award-winning Catholic publisher and author at Joseph Karl Publishing, and producer at Apostolate Films, which were founded to defend human life and dignity, promote ongoing Catholic faith formation throughout the lifespan and around the world, inspire the faithful, encourage forgiveness and healing, and guide precious, immortal souls to Christ.

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