

IMPRINT

A PUBLICATION OF THE SISTERS OF LIFE / SPRING ISSUE

God chose to need you.



For all eternity, God had a special mission uniquely designed for you—a mission only you can fulfill.



HE CALLS YOU: “Almighty God could have designed the world in such a fashion that He would have no need of any of us. But in His great love and His great mercy, He designed the world so that He would need us. We would have to be His arms, His legs, His eyes in this world...to be his beating heart in this world, beating with love, and compassion and tenderness and mercy for others.”

- John Cardinal O’Connor, Founder of the Sisters of Life

Reflecting upon the 25th Anniversary of the founding of the Sisters of Life, I am filled with an enormous sense of gratitude and awe at the wonder of God’s amazing grace. What a gift to experience that God desires us to be His co-workers, to participate with Him in preparing the way for His grace, life and mercy to enter into the world.

Our choices matter. Every time we say “yes” to Jesus Christ, whether in decisions with eternal consequences or seemingly small ones, a beautiful chain of life is unleashed. Cardinal O’Connor acted on a small, interior voice, and took the risk of founding a new religious community. His fidelity to the Spirit of God has changed the lives and destinies of multitudes he will only meet in heaven. We are privileged to daily witness the miracles God works in the lives of those who open their hearts to His grace such as a young pregnant woman stepping out of fear and isolation to be embraced by the love of Christ embodied in those who believe in her; or in an older woman burdened from what seems like a lifetime of shame and regret coming back to life through an encounter with the merciful love of Jesus; or a University student who calls because she has a burning desire to give her life to the Lord and is discerning a religious vocation; or a businessman who wants to participate in building a culture of life by providing jobs for the women we serve. Each “yes” opens a pathway for God’s grace.

We thank the Lord and we thank you: our co-workers, volunteers, friends and benefactors who partner with us in this great mission on behalf of Life. Let us look forward to another 25 years of grace, together choosing to respond to our Lord’s design, and through every action -- small and big -- becoming “his beating heart in this world, beating with love and compassion, tenderness and mercy for others.”

In Christ our Life,

M. Agnes
Mother Agnes Mary, Superior General of the Sisters of Life



“God has created me to do Him some definite service. He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission -- I may never know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next. Somehow I am necessary for His purposes. I have a part in this great work; I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for naught. I shall do good; I shall do His work...Therefore, I will trust Him. Whatever, wherever I am, I can never be thrown away. If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve Him; in perplexity, my perplexity may serve Him. If I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve Him... He does nothing in vain... He knows what He is about. He may take away my friends. He may throw me among strangers. He may make me feel desolate, make my spirits sink, hide the future from me-- still, He knows what He is about.”

[Blessed John Henry Newman]

He whispers to us in

Ordinary Moments

by Sr. Marie Veritas, SV

Let's face it: we all want to know that we matter, and that what we do matters. Yet we are so often fooled into thinking that who we are and what we do is inconsequential, or that we are too broken or ordinary for God to work with. Don't believe the lie.

Every person is created to do something great with his or her love. Now, greatness isn't measured by how prestigious our job is, how we dress, how much money we make, who our friends are, or where we live. Greatness is measured by how deeply we let Love live in us and radiate through us. The basic difference between a life of greatness and a life of mediocrity? A "yes," hinging on a willingness to step out, to be vulnerable, to encounter the other, to be made new, all for the sake of Love.

It's nothing show-stopping, usually. Most of the time, God calls us amidst "the pots and pans" of our daily life. He whispers to us in the ordinary moments. Yet, if we say "yes" to the little things He asks, our small "yes" can end up blooming into our life's mission. We discover that the "little" things are actually not that little, because in Christ, "nothing again would be casual or small." We don't need to try to chase greatness; it comes with simply being faithful to His call in the moment, and letting Him do great things in and through us.

Gifts and Gaps

Now sure, we all have gifts and gaps. That's part of the deal. My gifts help to fill someone else's gaps, and vice versa. It's that very dynamic that allows me to be "a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons." Jesus wants to use every inch of who we are, what we've done or haven't done, our victories and failures, joys and sorrows, to unify us with Himself and others, bringing us to the ultimate purpose of our mission: our joy and His glory. Being faithful to His call to us will allow others to encounter Him. Our "yes" makes the "yes" of others possible.

Your mission is unique and unrepeatable. No one can do it for you, because no one can ever replace you. In a sense, our mission and identity are inseparable. Nothing else is going to fully satisfy our hearts except the special way in which God has asked us to give ourselves in love. Created in God's self-giving image, we can only truly find ourselves by making a gift of ourselves.

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God's call challenges us to live in the certainty that we can never be thrown away, no matter what. When we stumble into times of darkness, which test our belief in God and even our identity itself, will we trust that whatever God allows, He allows ultimately for our good? Will we trust that "He knows what he is about"? Will we believe that this is simply a deepening of our mission, however mysterious it may be to us?

Trusting in Jesus' intimate, wild, personal love for us grounds us in the reality that we do matter, and that we will always matter, in good times and bad. Like the prophet Simeon who held the Infant Jesus in his arms in the temple, our waiting may serve Him. Like the wealthy Joseph of Arimathea who buried the body of Jesus, our prosperity may serve him. Like the paralyzed man lowered through the roof to be cured by Jesus, our sickness may serve him.



There will never come a time when we will cease to be important to the Heart of God.

He wants you

No matter where we are in life, we can make a difference. St. Catherine of Siena once said: "If you are what you should be, you will set the world on fire." The God who is madly in love with us has a plan for our lives. As Jesus called the first disciples, Jesus calls us now. He calls in the daily humdrum and in the exceptional circumstances, in the midst of both success and suffering, in the silence and in the busyness of the world, in the face of injustice and in the embrace of love. His call is simple and radical. He asks us, as Pope Francis tells us, to go to the peripheries, to step out of our comfort zones, to reach out to those who are on the fringes. He calls us to follow Him.

In the depths of each of our hearts, we are faced with a choice. Do I believe? Will I go? Will I say yes? Am I going to live like His tender love for me is really true?

We each have a call. We each have a mission. God's call invites our response. Give God permission.



THE GOD OF

by Sr. Mariae Agnus Dei, SV

THE STORY

[The girl from Nazareth]

Imagine. All creation held its breath. The angels were silent and still, gazing with intent upon the young girl. Every creature hushed in anticipation, awaiting her response. The world's salvation hung on the reply of a poor, unmarried girl of the insignificant town of Nazareth. Mary had no status, no power, and risked in her consent to the Lord being stoned to death as it was done in that day to women found pregnant out of wedlock. And yet, emptied of herself she was free to be a capacity entirely for God. Through her yes to the Lord, the greatest event of all time occurred. God became man. The Father's Love took flesh. Jesus Christ entered into human history, and so too, God's dreams for our salvation.

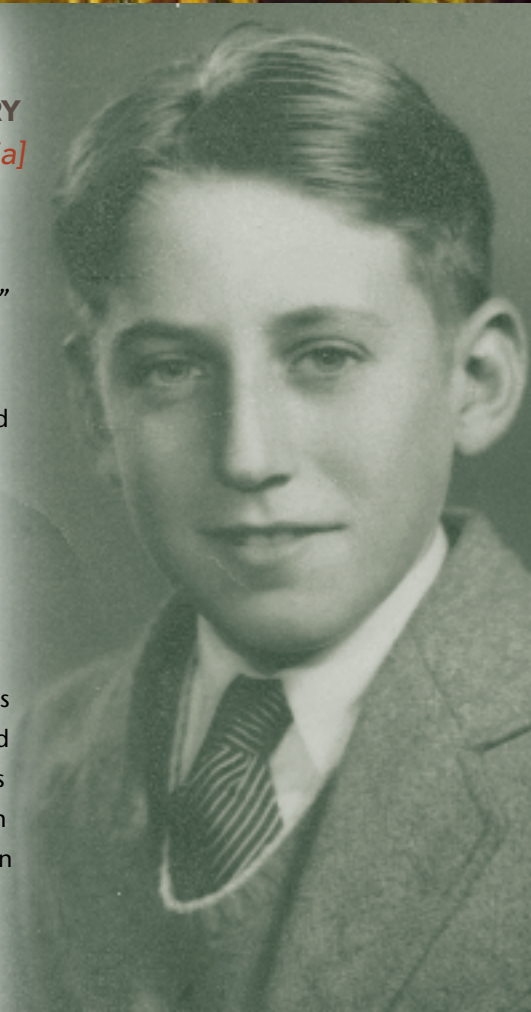


To most, this would appear a strange way of going about the world's salvation. And yet, if you trace salvation history, God's way of redeeming the world has been true ever since – through humble hearts, willing to trust in Him more than themselves, and echo Our Lady's yes, especially as it calls them to stand in what would appear to the world as only poverty and weakness. This was the great yes of Jesus to the Father as He redeemed the world through the vulnerability and suffering of His Passion. This was the yes of the motley crew of fisherman that formed Christ's first disciples, and laid the foundation of the Church. And this too was the yes of our founder, John Cardinal O'Connor, who though he stood in the last chapter of his own life still held a heart for God's dreams – one of a timely grace for the world, a charism of life.

JOHN O'CONNOR'S STORY

[The boy from Philadelphia]

Cardinal O'Connor often described himself as a "boy from a little row house in Philadelphia." His dream was to be a simple parish priest and work with children with disabilities. He loved hot-dogs and cinnamon rolls, enjoyed playing with the neighborhood kids growing up, and shocked everyone in his family when he announced his desire to enter the seminary. At the time, seminary was strict – "no one was encouraged to believe they would survive." He persevered, and was ordained a priest of Jesus Christ in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia on December 15th, 1945.





After the outbreak of the Korean War, his strong sense of duty and patriotism compelled him to respond to the call for Navy Chaplains, thinking his stay would be but a few years. Twenty-seven years later, after rising to the highest rank possible for a chaplain (Rear Admiral), his requests to return home to his archdiocese were finally granted. His return to his beloved state of Pennsylvania however, was short lived. After serving as the bishop of Scranton for just six months, he was called by Rome to become the shep-

herd of a parish he never dreamed of – the great archdiocese of New York.

Something new stirring in his heart

Bishop O'Connor took New York by storm. He made the pulpit unique in the history of the Catholic Church in the U.S., proclaiming with tremendous effectiveness, the Gospel closest to his heart – the Gospel of Life. However, after years of laboring for the cause of life, and watching so many around him do the same, he wondered why the efforts to change the culture were not having greater effect, and took the question, as he did all things, to prayer.



He came upon the Gospel story in Mark 9, and through a profound moment of grace, received the great dreams of God's Heart into his own. He reflected on this moment of "Pentecost" years later with the Sisters saying, "Jesus gave his disciples power to work miracles, to teach, to preach in His name. But someone had been brought to them that was possessed by demons – and the apostles were unable to drive them out. Our Lord said to them, 'this kind of demon is only cast out by prayer and fasting.' It finally occurred to me that what the pro-life movement needed was a group of women committed primarily to prayer and fasting on behalf of all human life...giving of themselves that others might live. This is precisely what Christ did. He taught marvelously; He preached eloquently; He worked spectacular miracles. But He did not make possible the salvation of the world until He laid down His own life."

Cardinal O'Connor's eyes opened to the reality that at the root of the culture of death was a deep crisis of faith. And it was only through lives steeped in prayer, offered in love, and laid down in imitation of Christ the Redeemer, that the great demon at work undermining the sacred dignity of human life would be cast out.

This wasn't just any grace. God had planted within his heart the seeds of a charisma – a wellspring of grace towards the protection of the sacredness of human life. All that was needed to communicate it now, was a community of religious women -- 'The Sisters of Life.'

once upon a time...



THE INSPIRATION at 70

At the time of this inspiration, Cardinal O'Connor was seventy years old - a nice age for most, to settle in, not start something new. He was also the Cardinal Archbishop of New York. He had enough responsibilities without the added challenge of deciphering the foundation of a new religious community. And yet, God knew he had in Cardinal O'Connor a heart that could hold this special dream. Why? Before anything else, his heart was a heart of a priest, one whose hero was Jesus Christ, and who wanted nothing more than to imitate His self-giving love and service. His was a soul formed in deep compassion, as he heard decades of confessions and conversations of sailors and military families afflicted by war, loss, and suffering. His was a mind that though seasoned by the world's wisdom, came to know the only true wisdom was God's, and through daily contemplation, sought to let it guide him. He was a leader, who though he sat with some of the greatest world powers, learned that the greatest power of all was love, and a life steeped in Christ its only safeguard. He was the senior ranking chaplain of the U.S. Navy responsible for over eight hundred chaplains and all their religious programs on ships, submarines, and bases throughout the world. And in this way, he knew intimately his own weakness, and the truth that whatever the task before him, it could only be met effectively by depending entirely upon God. He was a man, who held titles of Admiral, Bishop, and Cardinal, and yet, would say again and again, the only title he sought after, and cherished most, was father.



THE FOUNDING *of the Sisters of Life*

And so, like Abraham, in the golden years of his life, Cardinal O'Connor stepped out in faith to follow the unlikely inspiration of founding a women's religious community. Full of unanswered questions and unsure of the way, he shared God's dream with the world and put an ad in his column of Catholic New York. It read, "Help Wanted: Sisters of Life." Other papers throughout the country began to pick up the 'ad' and reprint it in their own publications. And as the days and months passed, Cardinal O'Connor's wonder grew, as he began to receive letters in reply. From women, whose hearts, like his, were stirred by a dream greater than themselves.

Cardinal O'Connor set a date for a retreat. Eleven women arrived from all over the country. And though a man of quick wit and Irish humor, the women knew he wasn't joking when he began the retreat by very honestly telling them,

"I want to invite you to consider joining a non-existent religious community that I may or may not attempt to found." He continued, "I am but a simple priest...if it is of the Holy Spirit, it will work. If it isn't, it won't."

Four years after the foundation of the community he reflected with the Sisters about these first days, reasserting, "I did not know what I was doing. What did I know about founding a community of religious women? I was depending on the Holy Spirit. But the one thing I told the Sisters then and I have tried to be faithful to ever since: that though I tell you I do not know what I am doing, I ask for your trust. I ask that we muddle through together to do the will of God, as God wants it to be done, and because He wants it to be done."





Cardinal O'Connor and Mother Agnes Mary

To the Cardinal's surprise, and much to their own, eight women left their jobs, said good-bye to their families and friends, and entered the 'non-existent community' of the Sisters of Life on June 1st, 1991, ready to "muddle through" with him in pure faith. Like the Cardinal, they couldn't see one step in front of them. And yet forward in trust they went – among them an editor, a nutritionist, a professor -- all without a day of experience in religious life. And though there were more questions than answers, they clung to the mystery of grace filling their hearts, leaned on the strength of God, and together strived to realize God's dream for the world of a charism, and a community, of life.



Days have passed into months, which have now passed into twenty-five years. One convent has now grown to ten. And the fledgling community of eight, now numbers almost one hundred. It is a marvel to see the wonders God has wrought throughout these years and the miracles of His Providence that continue to guide the community in bringing the charism of life to the culture. And as for the Sisters, gratitude alone fills their hearts, for the grace of following in the steps of a Cardinal whose yes to God's dreams paved a way for their own – to answer God's call to love, that others might have life.

Nov. 2, 1989
In his weekly column for Catholic New York, Cardinal O'Connor speculated on the need for a religious institute of women devoted exclusively to the protection and enhancement of human life. His "Help Wanted: Sisters of Life" column was widely reported in both secular and religious news sources.

June 1, 1991
Cardinal O'Connor, founded the Sisters of Life. Eight women entered the newly formed community which was under the direction of Sr. Rita Mairelenes and Sr. Carole Marie of the Parish Visitors of Mary Immaculate on the grounds of their Mother-house in Monroe, NY.

January 27, 1992
The Sisters of Life move into their 1st convent, St. Frances de Chantal, in the Bronx. This becomes the house of formation for new members.

August 22, 1992
Sr. Mary Assumpta Long, O.P. of the Dominican Sisters of St. Cecilia of Nashville and in October, Sr. Yvonne Mary Loucks, R.S.M., of the Alma Mercy Sisters, arrives to assist in the formation of the new community.

Alice and Pierre Claver Marie born at Sacred Heart Convent



2015 *St. Mary Magdalene convent was opened in Denver, Colorado. The new mission is initially one of full time evangelization, specifically to college students attending area Universities. College-age women are among the most likely to pursue abortion in the case of an unexpected pregnancy, and the presence of the Sisters on campus is hoped to give women a viable option for life in a time of crisis.*

2013 *The first House of Studies, at St. Catherine Laboure convent near Washington, D.C. was opened, as part of the communities program of ongoing formation and education for professed Sisters.*

2012 *With the assistance of Cardinal Dolan, Annunciation Motherhouse, in Suffern, NY was acquired as a place for the community to call "home."*

1992-Present

Priests from Saint Joseph's Seminary have come to teach classes on theology and philosophy and assist as confessors and spiritual directors.

1992-1995

Postulants and novices serve weekly with the Little Sisters of the Poor at their residence for the elderly in the Bronx. They also assisted at Rosary Hill Home, operated by the Hawthorne Dominicans.

August 6, 1993

On the Feast of the Transfiguration, Sr. Agnes Mary professed her first vows of poverty, chastity, obedience and a fourth vow to protect and enhance the sanctity of human life, to His Eminence John Cardinal O'Connor.

August 22, 1993

On the Queenship of Mary, Mother Agnes Mary, S.V. was appointed by Cardinal O'Connor as the first superior of the Sisters of Life.

1994

Our Lady of New York convent in the Bronx, was opened. Soon pregnant women were living with the Sisters and they were hosting retreats.

1996

The Hope and Healing Mission was established as a mission of retreats and accompaniment for those who are suffering after abortion.

1998

Sacred Heart of Jesus convent on the west side of Manhattan was opened to receive pregnant women as live-in guests.

August 6th, 1998

Mother Agnes was the first Sister of Life to profess Perpetual Vows.

May 3, 2000 *Entrance into Eternal Life of John Cardinal O'Connor.*

2001 *St. Paul the Apostle convent in Yonkers, NY opened.*

March 25, 2004

At a glorious Mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral, Edward Cardinal Egan officially established the Sisters of Life as a Religious Institute of diocesan right within the Church. On this momentous occasion, the Charism of Life, a gift of the Holy Spirit, given to Cardinal O'Connor years before was confirmed by the Church as an authentic, and unique, religious charism in and for the Church.

2004

The Sisters of Life partner with the Knights of Columbus to open Villa Maria Guadalupe, an international pro-life retreat center in Stamford, CT.

2011 *Partnering with the Knights of Columbus, the Love and Life Site was the largest English speaking venue at World Youth Day in Madrid Spain, with over 90,000 people visited the site.*

2008 *Partnering with the Knights of Columbus, the Love and Life Site hosted thousands of young pilgrims at World Youth Day in Sydney, Australia.*

2007 *The first international foundation became a reality when a convent in Toronto opened, bringing our charism and mission to Canada.*

2006 *the Visitation Convent on the East side of Manhattan is opened to assist women who are pregnant and vulnerable to abortion.*



(back) Sr. Talitha Guadalupe and Sr. Maria Laetitia, Claudia and Esther, Sr. Magnificat Rose, Simone and João,



4 PIONEERS / *When He multiplies through our trust*



1

Dr. Elvira Parravicini: *“Reality is calling me”*

Dr. Elvira Parravicini was at a crossroads. A neonatologist at NY-Presbyterian/Columbia University, she had decided to stop attending the prenatal diagnostic meetings, where abortion was being recommended regularly. A fellow physician stopped her one day: “Elvira, why are you no longer coming to our meetings? They are so good... we learn so much...” In that pivotal moment, Dr. Parravicini experienced Reality calling her, through the voice of her colleague. She decided to try it again, for the sake of her infant patients. At her first meeting back, a case came up where two women had adverse prenatal diagnoses, but did not want to abort their children. The question was raised: “Who is going to take care of these babies?” Without knowing exactly what she was doing, but deeply moved to respond, Dr. Parravicini raised her hand. “I can,” she said. “We can do comfort care.” That impulse was the beginning of what has developed into the hospital’s first Neonatal Comfort Care Program. Dr. Parravicini and her team offer prenatal counseling, a birthing plan, compassionate and loving care, pain management, and maximum time for bonding to families of babies who are terminally ill or who have a very short life expectancy after birth. Their presence and love has touched hundreds of families.

Our Sisters at the Visitation Mission have found that it is not unusual for medical professionals to not only recommend but to pressure women into having an abortion. That pressure increases and intensifies if there is any slight chance of genetic abnormality. We thank God for wonderful life-affirming physicians like Dr. Parravicini who extend excellent care and a loving welcome to all those who desire to embrace and celebrate the life of their child, regardless of potential health challenges. This type of care enables mothers and fathers to cherish every minute that they have with their child here on earth and to love them into eternity.



Anna Halpine: *Courage to speak*

Anna Halpine didn't plan to change the world. As a 21-year-old music student, Anna simply decided to attend a lecture at the United Nations. During the conference, a group of young adults suddenly stood up and demanded, on behalf of the world's youth, abortion as a human right, sexual rights for children, and the removal of parental rights. Anna felt a burning call to respond. The next day, she and her friends distributed a pink flier defending human life, love, and the inviolable dignity of the human person, assuring that the youth who demanded the contrary did not represent the majority of youth in the world. The delegates gratefully received her message, asking her to both establish a permanent presence in the UN and an outreach to youth globally. In response, Anna began the World Youth Alliance (WYA), which promotes and defends the dignity of the human person at every stage, through international policy and human rights, social and economic development, global health, and education. Today, WYA has over 90,000 international members, and over one million young people who have signed the WYA charter. Anna is currently the chief executive officer of WYA, and the CEO of Fertility Education and Medical Management (FEMM), a new healthcare initiative for women.

2



Jean Vanier: *An encounter that changed everything*

Jean Vanier had it all. Born to a well-to-do diplomat father, Jean entered the Royal Navy College, served in both the British and Canadian navies, and made his mark in Academia. Despite his accomplishments, he was unsatisfied, and left a promising career to search for meaning and to grow in his faith. While visiting a psychiatric hospital in the south of France, Jean met two gentlemen with disabilities, Raphael Simi and Philippe Seux. Deeply moved by their sufferings, he felt called to buy a little house and to invite Raphael and Philippe to live with him as his new friends - not in an institution, but in a real home. Jean recalled: "Essentially, they wanted a friend. They were not very interested in my knowledge or my ability to do things, but rather they needed my heart and my being." Within a couple years, after trial and error, additional homes were created, and Jean sent out a plea for other people to help him. Young men and women responded to his invitation to engage in this new, profound community living, which Jean named L'Arche. There are currently 147 L'Arche Communities over five continents, with more than 5000 members.

3





Photo credit: Karlie Brown

4

Curtis Martin: Thirst for more

Curtis Martin had done the college “thing.” Caught up into the partying scene, he had drifted away from his Catholic faith in university. One day, unhappy with his life, he decided to flip through a Bible and was struck by the Lord’s words: “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord’, and not do as I command you?” Drawn to the person of Jesus, and hanging out with friends whom he later discovered were devoutly Christian, his encounter with Christ in Scripture and in witness soon found him returning to the Church. Years later, Curtis and his wife Michaelann, moved by Pope John Paul II’s summons to the new evangelization at World Youth Day in Denver, felt a burning call “to reintroduce Christ and His Church on college campuses.” After sharing the vision with Archbishop Chaput in Denver, they piloted a campus ministry program at Benedictine College in Atchison, Kansas. Springing from two campus missionaries on one campus in 1998, the Fellowship of Catholic University Students (FOCUS) has exploded to being nearly 500 missionaries on 113 campuses in 36 states and Washington, D.C.. Currently, more than 20,000 FOCUS alumni are involved in parish life in the U.S., a number expected to skyrocket to 75,000 by 2022. Within this number, 547 have made decisions to pursue Catholic religious vocations.

Working in collaboration with FOCUS, our Sisters speak on University campuses across the country, sharing God’s plan for life and love. In 2015 we launched a full-time mission of evangelization in Denver, working with FOCUS missionaries and campus chaplaincies at the University of Colorado Boulder, Colorado State and University of Northern Colorado. The Sisters have recieved an amazingly warm welcome from the students and seek to bring them the hope and surety of knowing that they are known, loved and awaited by Christ.



Photos courtesy of FOCUS

Hearing the voice of The Healer

The Road back to Him

Interview by Sr. Mary Margaret Hope, SV

We first met Sarah through our Hope and Healing Mission for women suffering after abortion. A week after Sarah participated in one of our Hope and Healing Retreats she discovered that she was pregnant. She experienced a powerful grace of healing through God's Providence during her pregnancy and her life has been completely transformed.*

What was your experience of God when you were younger?

My father is not a Christian, but my mom converted when I was a teenager. I was baptized after I went to school. I didn't know what I was doing; I just did it because a friend invited me. My sister, who is a very devout Catholic, always brought us to Church, but I struggled with religion. I knew there was God, but I wasn't close to him. I didn't believe in prayer. I mean, how does it work? I needed to see. I didn't know who I was. Sometimes, I would go to Church but then I would drop it again; I would say 'God is not for me'. I think that is why He wanted to do a miracle in my life, so that I would believe.





◀ **Our mission of Hope and Healing after abortion:**
Bringing those hurting to the merciful Heart of Jesus

I felt like something changed in me. It was so healing. The Lord is the Healer. After that day I could walk down the street and be happy. I used to be in pain before, but now everything has lifted. -Sarah

What happened when you moved away from your family? I left home because I wanted to find a better life, to discover new things. I had my own business, selling clothes and cosmetics, but I wanted to travel. I grew up in a beautiful family, but when I moved away, I lived a different life. I was hanging out with the wrong people. It drew me into a lot of things I regret, and I ended up having several abortions.

What do you think was the beginning of your conversion experience? I don't know how to explain it. It is grace upon grace upon grace. I was suffering a lot after my abortion experience. I thought: 'How can God forgive me? It's too much; God is going to judge me.' My mom prayed for me a lot. She would always ask me: "Did you go to Church today?" My sister told me to go to speak to a priest and he encouraged me to go on a retreat with the Sisters of Life. I also thank our Holy Mother Mary. She helped me a lot.

What happened to you on that retreat? It was a beautiful time for me, to spend a whole day with the Lord. I had never done anything like that before. During the holy hour, when I was praying before the Blessed Sacrament, I felt like something changed in me. It was so healing. The Lord is a healer. After that day I could walk down the street and be happy. I used to be in pain before, but now everything has lifted. It is really a miracle. I know my children are in the hands of Mary.

When did you find out that you were pregnant? It was about a week after I attended the Hope and Healing Retreat. Nicholas's father and I were living together. When I told him, he was happy at first, but then something happened. He got scared and said he didn't know how we could handle it. When I told my sister, she was so worried about me. I was working then as a nanny-housekeeper, living in five days a week and on the weekends with my boyfriend.

How did you decide what to do? I said to my sister. "I'm trusting in God. I want to see what He has for me." I prayed to God, and I heard the Lord tell me: "I will do it." That was a strong word for me. But, He didn't say: "I'm going to take care of your pregnancy," or "I'm going to take care of your job." He said: "I will do it." I would go back

and forth thinking: "This is so vague. Look at all these problems I have: If I tell my boss I am pregnant maybe I will lose my job, and I don't have a place to live yet. What am I going to?" But then it came to me: Nobody ever in this world told me 'Jesus is a liar.' So if Jesus said 'He will do it' then He will do it. So I trusted in that Word until He resolved all my problems one by one.

How did God resolve your problems? God is so real. It's a miracle for me that I found the Sisters of Life. Imagine me, pregnant, not knowing where to go. I called Sr. Loretto Michael and she was so kind to me. She told me if I ever needed a place to stay, they could help me. At first, I didn't want to move in with the Sisters. I couldn't imagine leaving my boyfriend. But to this day I am realizing that everything was prepared by the Lord. I tried to avoid it, but one night something happened and I had to leave right away. I called the Sisters



and they told me I could come right away. I went to Sacred Heart Convent and the Sisters welcomed me and showed me the room they had prepared for me.

What happened with your job?

I was so nervous but when I told my boss I was pregnant, she was so happy for me. She let me keep my job through my pregnancy and the whole family helped me along the way. I could see Jesus working. Each time He did it in a smooth, happy way. I was happy at work, I was happy at home with the Sisters. The happiness I found with both, I never had experienced in my entire life.

What was it like living at Sacred Heart Convent?

I owe a lot of gratitude to God. Being at the convent throughout my pregnancy was a great blessing for me. I would come back from work on the weekend and everyone would say to me “Welcome Home!” I would think: “This is my home! This is the house of the Lord!” I had never known such real people. I’ve been in different places but I never saw people so happy. I felt so free! I thought: “I know they’re not going to reject me. I’m so happy they accept me for who I am.” It was a big transformation in my life. I could see people praying for me and it strengthened my faith. It made me believe. God is real! If not, how is it possible that you don’t know where to go and that same night somebody says to you “Come”? That’s why I believe in prayer now. Our prayers are not in vain. God is really listening.

How else did you experience God’s Providence in your pregnancy? I thought God could not forgive me for my past; I was afraid something would happen to the baby. But I had the happiest, healthiest pregnancy. I had no morning sickness. I was able to work, taking care of three people until the week before my due date. Where was all this strength coming from? When I came to Sacred Heart, I found peace within me that I never had in my entire life. Recently I was reading the Bible. Jesus said: “The peace I give you the world can never give.” It was so true in my life. The peace that is in me moves me forward in everything I do. I don’t know how to explain it; God is so real. It’s so true.

After experiencing the reality of God’s Providence in your life, how did you respond? I really believe that my conversion came through my pregnancy with Nicholas. That’s how God called me. After Nicholas was born, for the first time I decided to fast and pray. I said: “I want to know who you are, God. I want you to tell me who I am.” You see, I didn’t know myself. We don’t know who we are; only God knows. The way I used to live, it was like ‘if somebody can tell me who I am then I’ll be with him.’ Now smoothly, gradually, God was revealing himself to me, revealing who I was. When you call out to God, God whispers into your heart who you are and what to do. I never experienced that before. God whispered a beautiful thing to me that changed me; He told me I’m a beautiful woman. That’s why I changed. I used to fight with people in every place I was, in my past life. That was no life. Now I’m living in Christ. I can see the difference. I am the opposite of who I was before.

How do you see the world differently now?

I was reading 2 Corinthians (5:17): “When you are in Christ, you are a new person. The old things have passed away.” In these three years since my time in that holy house, I have learned so much. When I see my son, I think: ‘Wow! He’s so handsome.’ That’s the hand of God. I didn’t make him. God made him in His own image. Before, I used to think so negatively about myself. I would think: ‘I’m not smart.’ or ‘I’m so slow.’ But no more! I just want to tell God that He created me beautiful in His image, and accept who I am. Otherwise, it’s like telling God He didn’t do a good job. I am a beautiful woman. It’s true. It’s so real. We are all beautiful people, that’s how God made us.

How has your life changed since you experienced God’s love? Last week, for the first time, I talked to Nicholas’s father and we talked “truth.” Everything I told him was about God. He couldn’t believe it. He said: “That’s not you.” But I said: “That’s me.” When God calls you, He doesn’t just call you, He dwells in you. He changes everything, your whole way of living. When you are serving God, you have to try to live the way our Blessed Mother lived, a decent life, a life of holiness. So people can see Christ in you. We’re all sinners. But when you have the Spirit of God in you, you have to try as much as possible to stay away from the smallest sin against the Holy One. I never really read the Bible much, but recently I’ve been reading it, and all I can say is, everything is so true! That marriage is a sacrament! That you see God through children, through the poor people on the street! That Jesus came for people like us, for the sinners.

When we sin, we think ‘How am I going to kneel before the Lord and tell him I’m sorry? I don’t think he’s going to forgive me.’ It’s not true! God is so forgiving! The heart I have now is so different than the one I had before. If God can forgive all that I did, why can’t I forgive my neighbor? That’s why I forgive my son’s father. God put love in me, to love people no matter what happens.

Are you ever afraid that you’ll go back to your old life? I love my new life. I don’t know how to explain it. People look at me and ask ‘How does she live like that?’ The happiness He gives me, nobody can take it away. God is so real. I am not ashamed of talking about God. People think I’m going to go back to the way I was before, but I can’t go back again.

These days, I am working as a taxi driver. Only, I’m not the one driving. I tell all my passengers: “Jesus drives my car.” Jesus is the best driver! I know I did a lot of things in my past, things that still haunt my present life. But since my pregnancy with Nicholas, everything is so different. From the beginning, I knew this child was coming from heaven, and the devil was defeated. After he was born, my mother took Nicholas in her arms and danced around the room singing a traditional song from our country: “Yesu doudi” Jesus is the winner! I think that expresses it perfectly.

THE SISTERS OF LIFE
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Sisters of Life 25th Anniversary Celebration
*Join us June 1st, 2016 for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass
at 10:30 am at St. Patrick's Cathedral, NY, NY.*

Block party following Mass!
*All are welcome to join us after Mass
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Simone and João Lukas Vito born at Sacred Heart of Jesus Convent

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