When the Lord bestows on man the gift of fatherhood, He entrusts to him an irreplaceable mission.

As protector, guardian and transmitter of the Father’s love, man reaches the heights to which he has been called by grace.
Fathers are so important.

They profoundly impact how we view ourselves, what we value, our hopes for marriage and family and our relationship with God. Their love, presence, self-giving and example of living help us grow closer to God. Our relationships and human weaknesses inform us. As young adults, we realize that our hearts’ longings and the longing for a Father who knows us intimately, love us tenderly, understands and accepts who we are, wise and strong and will love us unconditionally; this is God alone. Our relationships with our earthly fathers are meant to give us a taste, an experience, however incomplete, of the love God has for us. So we can find ourselves disappointed in our relationships with our parents because we are expecting another human person to fill an infinite longing within. Only in God are we destined to find the love that truly satisfies and completes us.

The impact of a father is immeasurable.

The following stories illustrate how one father’s love and example had a profound impact on his daughter Faustina (one of our postulants) and his son-in-law Will and his family.

Top 10 ways to grow into a really good Dad

1. Say yes to the challenge of fatherhood, each day.
2. Love your wife and treat her with great respect — the model you set will greatly influence your children’s decisions later.
3. Make prayer an essential part of your life.
4. Teach your children to pray, and let them see you pray, regularly, in private, to the sacrament.
5. Spend time with your children. Play with them.
6. Let them know you enjoy the gift of being their father.
7. Love your children enough to discipline them.
8. Teach them clearly right from wrong.
10. Forgive your children and allow them to hear you say “I’m sorry.”

More examples of a man who demonstrates The strength of a man lies in his willingness to give of himself totally to his wife and children.

When asked about her relationship with her father, our postulant Faustina immediately responded: “Growing up I knew my Dad loved me.” She paused trying to articulate just what he did to provide her with that certainty. “The language of his love was the sacrifices he made to be with his family. He made it a priority to be home for dinner every night, and never disappeared afterwards. Free time for him meant family time, evenings and weekends were spent helping us with our homework, going to our games, and taking us on day trips. Through his gentle encouragement and confidence in me, his love was present to me even when I was struggling in school or sports. And in receiving his love I found that I not only wanted to love him, but I wanted to be good for him.”

Examples of her father’s generative self-giving made a lasting impression on Faustina: “He always ready to give up what he had for me. I remember, we had this old clunker with the muffler hanging off that made a lot of noise. I hated driving in it. But he would take it to work every day and leave the motor car for us. Even after I moved out, I knew that he would be there for me whenever I needed him, without question. I could call him in the middle of the night if my car broke down, and he would be there to help.”

As she reflected, Faustina realized that the faithful and loving relationship that her mother and father shared was at the heart of it all. “If I didn’t see him loving my Mom none of this would have mattered. He was always seeking to serve her. He would help with the cooking and was always the last person to sit down at dinner, making sure everyone was taken care of first. I would see him sacrifice what he wanted to do for my mother. He loves simply being with her. It’s sweet.”

The greatest gift his father provided was to pass on the faith to his children. “He stressed the importance of having a relationship with Jesus. He would tell us, you can’t call Jesus your friend if you just talk to him in the morning and at night. You have to invite him into your day.” He was a great example of this, “I would see and hear him pray throughout the day, asking for help and thanking God. It was natural, like talking to a friend.”

Mr. Bianchi’s piety became an icon of the Heavenly Father’s love for Faustina. “When I would go to Church and hear about God as a father, it was a natural connection to make. If my earthly father, who is broken and has human weaknesses, I have experienced, loves me like this how much more would God love me, accept me, treasure me, in college I was so surprised to find people say that they didn’t believe God loved them. I was completely dumbfounded. I thought that experiencing God’s love was just second nature, like breathing. Look around, see the beauty of creation, you’re alive... of course God loves you! But I realized that many people struggle with that. I can’t thank my father enough for this gift.”

The strength and security that a father’s love provides is exceptional. While not all are blessed to have had an experience like Faustina; we all have access to the incomparable love of our Heavenly Father. “See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may call the children of God.” And lest we doubt his personal love and providence for us, he sent Jesus to reassure us of his fidelity and promises. “In this way the love of God was revealed to us; God sent his only Son into the world so that we might have life through him.”

In our next article, Faustina’s brother-in-law reflects on the impact Mr. Bianchi’s example has had on him and his family.
Putting family first

by William González

IT WAS TIME to make another decision: phone call to tell my wife that problems had come up and I wouldn’t be coming home the next day as scheduled. I was thousands of miles away, yet I could hear the disappointments in her voice as she tried to understand. She was used to this happening, but it didn’t make it any easier for me.

For four years I felt the strain that my frequent and sometimes unpredictable absences would render upon my family. I decided something had to change. I chose to take a position that meant a significant reduction in pay but would require far less travel and allow much more control over my schedule. Doing what was right for my family — and what I believe was God’s will — brought serenity and relief.

My father-in-law served as an admirable role model in this regard. A busy doctor with his own practice for years, he made the sacrifice of taking a much less desirable position as a prison physician. In doing so, he was able to work a more regular schedule and be present to his eight children. Naturally, the work environment presented its share of difficulties, but he was home everyday when his kids were coming home from school. Steve Woods, in his book, Christian Fatherhood, remarked, “For our children, love is a four letter word spelled ‘F-I-M-E.’” This resonated deeply with my wife, who still talks about her father’s heroism with heartfelt gratitude.

While changing jobs is not a necessity or even an option for most, all of us should take time to evaluate the importance we place on our work and family. As we consider the task of “balancing work and family,” the word “balance” seems to infer a kind of equality. However, as husbands and fathers, our wives and children need to be a higher priority. No matter how much you pour into your job, in the final analysis, the day will come when you are no longer fulfilling that position; someone else will fill your shoes, perhaps even doing it better. On the other hand, no one can step into your role as father.

On the 10th Anniversary of his entrance into eternal life

A BELOVED SPIRITUAL FATHER

His Eminence John Cardinal O’Connor was known to many as a Prince of the Church, the late Archbishop of the city of New York, and an international leader and diplomat. He held prestigious degrees and the esteemed titles of Cardinal and Admiral. He was greatly admired for his leadership and his bold leadership of the Church. Yet of all the titles His Eminence held that of Father was most important to him.

His daily celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass was the very center of his life. Through this worship of God, and His deep love for Jesus Christ, he was given the strength to make an offering of himself to God for his Rock and to live as a good shepherd until the end.

One of Cardinal O’Connor’s most passionate beliefs was the irresistible power of restorative suffering. He often preached and taught that by uniting our suffering with the suffering of Christ on the Cross we can become instruments of enormous good in the world. He frequently shared with his own priests who were suffering or ill, that Christ did not make possible the salvation of the world when he was teaching, preaching, or working miracles, but when he was suffering and suffering on the cross. While he appeared to be utterly powerless with His arms spread wide on the cross, He was radiating the greatest power ever unleashed in the world. In his final days, Cardinal O’Connor shared his own suffering with that of Christ’s and fully lived out his priesthood. And in and through this great suffering, he experienced the love of God. In a final conversation with a fellow Cardinal he shared his experience of the wonder of the love of God, and said “the love of God is staggering, absolutely staggering; it is impossible to measure the love of God that has for us.”
The Life of John Cardinal O'Connor

1920-2000

June 29, 1983
He was installed as Bishop of Scranton and was thrilled to be back in his home state.

March 19, 1984
He was installed as Archbishop of New York. Before his arrival he announced: "Efforts on behalf of the unborn are going to be number one priority. They will permeate everything I do." Early in his years in New York, while in prayer he was struck by the scripture verse, "this demon can only be cast out by prayer and fasting." Relating these words to the widespread concern for human life in our world, he was given the inspiration to found a religious community of women totally dedicated to interceding on behalf of the unborn and the most vulnerable.

1979
Hoping to return home as a priest parish after his military service, he was named auxiliary bishop in charge of the military vicariate. Before his ordination as a bishop, he made a retreat in Ciudad, Germany and visited the concentration camps. In placing his hands in the consecration, he felt the intertwined streams of Jews and Christians, Rabbi, priest and minister. He thought, "Good God, how could human beings do this to one another." He received a life transforming grace and promised that for the rest of his life he would do everything he could to protect and enhance the sacredness of all human life.

Oct. 15, 1984
He announced from the pulpit in St. Patrick's Cathedral, "Any woman, of any religious persuasion, of any ethnic background, of any color, who comes to the Archdiocese of New York under pressure to have an abortion and not having any money, we will give her complete medical and hospital care free of charge. If she wishes to keep her baby she will have it, or they will help her place the baby for adoption." Since that announcement,

over one hundred thousand women have been served by the Archdiocese and the Sisters of Life.

May 25, 1985
Elevated to Cardinal. During that year, he launched an annual Mass for the handicapped which became one of his greatest joys as Archbishop. He established the State's first AIDS unit at St. Clare's Hospital in Manhattan. Over the years, he would quietly visit over a thousand AIDS patients during the night. He would simply listen to them and do the humble tasks of warming the patients' beds and cleaning them.

1989
He became known, nationally and internationally, for his diplomatic skills meeting with presidents and leaders of nations to negotiate peace and the release of hostages. He was known nationally for his work on the U.S. Bishops' 1983 peace pastoral, his vigorous pro-life work, his promotion of Catholic-Lutheran relations and his efforts for Middle East peace.

Nov. 2, 1989
After more than five years of prayer, he wrote a column in Catholic New York entitled, "Help Women, Sisters of Life," inviting women to contact him who might be interested in forming a religious community.

June 1, 1991
The Sisters of Life was founded with eight women. Reflecting on the event he said, "It is close to being a num- ber one joy as anything I have experienced was the founding of the Sisters of Life. That was an extraordinary thing. Each time a new sister makes my heart leap up more than almost anything you can talk about."

August 1999
He was diagnosed with cancer and states that "I am in inexpressible peace and my life in the hands of a loving God." Throughout his illness he continued to say Mass in the Cathedral bringing witness to the power of redemptive suffering, and the Good Shepherd who cares and gives his life for the flock.

May 3, 2000
HIs Eminence John Cardinal O'Connor entered eternal life. Ten of thousands of people of every religion and background waited in line to pray their respects while he lay in state. The incredible outpouring of emotion throughout the days of mourning gave witness to the fact that he had touched the hearts of individuals through his fatherly love, kindness, compassion, and tremendous generosity.

John Joseph O'Connor was born on Jan. 15, 1920. In a row house in Philadelphia, the fourth of five children born to Thomas and Dorothy O'Connor. His father was a skilled painter, specializing in gold leafing and his mother was a devout and kind woman. His love for the handicapped developed at a young age, as he was very close to a cousin with Down syndrome. When he was ten, he was seen by his sister sittign a young handicapped girl who was being taunted on the street by a gang of boys. Growing up, he always picked up jobs in the neighborhood to help earn money for the family.

Dec. 15, 1945
Ordained to the priesthood for the Archdiocese of Philadelphia and assigned to St. James High School as a teacher and guidance counselor. He taught night school for adults, hosted two weekly Catholic radio shows, worked in psychiatric hospitals, taught the mentally disabled, and assisted at St. Gabriel's Parish.

One of the many children born atSacred Heart of Jesus, the Home Helps for pregnant women, and the Voice of Cardinal O'Connor.
Giving God Permission

On the eve of his death, May 2, 2000, just blocks away from his residence, Nancy, a guest at Sacred Heart Convent, was kneeling in the chapel and received the grace to "Give God Permission." The next day her daughter Caroline entered the world and Cardinal O'Connor entered eternal life. She recounts her story.

What was your response to the news of your pregnancy?
I seriously thought my life was over. I had an entire future planned out. I would work for a little while, travel, get married and then settle down. When I unexpectedly got pregnant, it was like the entire world went dark. Having recently graduated from a Catholic university, I was extremely humiliated. I thought, "How can I do this?" I felt like I had no options. I began looking for a place where I could go to deal with my situation. I needed somewhere to think about what was happening to me and about the baby, who I honestly could not fathom being a part of my life. Then, somebody told me about the Sisters of Life.

How was your time at Sacred Heart?
Before I came to Sacred Heart, I felt like a completely broken person. I was mad at the world, mad at myself, depressed, and utterly hopeless. I remember ringing the bell and coming through the front door for the first time. I saw another guest, Jennifer, smiling with her baby. I saw the Sisters smiling, I smiled, and from that moment I really started to heal. It wasn’t because of anything anyone said. There was no "let’s have a group session or let’s talk about you." It was simple things that really made a difference like laughing with the other guests and the Sisters (they are pretty funny) and being part of a community.

What had to change for you to accept your pregnancy?
I spent a lot time praying in the chapel, usually late at night. Even after I accepted I was having a baby, actually raising a child still seemed impossible. Where would we live, how would I support us? The night before I delivered, I was in the chapel desperately praying. I was in tears just saying over and over again, "I can't do this." In a moment of grace, everything changed. I heard the Lord speak to me and say, "Give up and trust Me." It was like the weight of the world instantly lifted and from that point on, I committed myself to being a mother.

-Nancy
What has it been like since Caroline’s birth?
I look at my life now and all of the miracles and blessings since Caroline’s birth and I thank God for Cardinal O’Connor and his vision for the Sisters of Life and Sacred Heart of Jesus Convent. I definitely found myself at Sacred Heart. It wasn’t just a birth for Caroline, it was a birth for me—becoming a mother. My focus totally shifted outside of myself.

You said miracles happened.
Can you share some of them?
It has been miracle after miracle. I got a great (affordable) apartment in Manhattan just a few blocks from Sacred Heart. Through the help of one of the other moms at Sacred Heart, I got a job at a magazine, which turned out to be the beginning of a fantastic career for me. Carl, Caroline’s father, also came back into my life. We were married in 2002 with Caroline as my maid of honor. Along with Caroline, we have 2 other daughters, Ava, 6, and Clara, 1. My life didn’t turn out like I expected. I never in a million years thought I would spend six months in a convent in the middle of New York City, especially pregnant. But I am totally renewed and grateful for the way things did happen. I thank God for leading me along this very difficult path.

Why do you think this decision is such a hard one for many women?
I think women in my situation are the most likely to have abortions because they’re in college or have a good job; they have their lives planned out, and they know what they want. They have all of these expectations about what life is going to be like, and an unplanned pregnancy isn’t part of it. It’s a humiliating situation that many women would rather not expose themselves to. It’s tempting to have an abortion and make it all go away. It seems like the easiest thing, but it’s not. If I had chosen that, just think of what I would have given up. To other women struggling like I did, I can only urge them not to allow the world to tell them what will bring them happiness. Be strong, pray, listen to God and have faith that by courageously walking through the pain and loving their child into this world, it will all work out. It will be better than they could have ever imagined—whatever their current situation. And, find the Sisters of Life!

Now after ten years what is it like when you come back to Sacred Heart?
I love coming to Sacred Heart. My kids love Sacred Heart. The Sisters spoil them with treats and they run up and down the stairs like they own the place. I’m still very close to the moms that lived here with me. The bonds with the moms and with the Sisters, are powerful. We are our own special family and this convent will always be my home.

Updates from the mission

Villa Maria Guadalupe
Once again we will be hosting LIFE FEST on July 4, 2010 at Villa Maria Guadalupe. All are invited—bring the family—to join us as we celebrate the gift of life with music, talks, games, Holy Mass and a Marian Procession. Visit our website for more details and for a listing of our fall retreats.

Hope and Healing Mission
In our Hope and Healing Mission, we are privileged to witness God’s merciful love at work in the lives of women who have suffered the effects of abortion. After a recent Day of Prayer and Healing, one woman said, “This is the most peace I have felt in the 29 plus years since my abortion. I truly feel God’s mercy.” Another woman commented, “The most important message I took from the Day of Prayer and Healing is that the process of healing from abortion is not about who you are or what you have done but about who God is and what He has done.” Another person wrote, “The Sisters have helped me to rediscover God’s love and compassion and I was given the courage to ask for His forgiveness. They have truly helped me break free from the grasp of my guilt and despair. I feel as though I am reuniting with humanity. I am beginning to enjoy my family for the first time and I feel a closer sense of God that has long been missing in my life.” We prate God for His mercy that endures forever.

Visititation Toronto
Our Toronto Visitation Mission is growing daily with over a thousand Co-workers who are inspired to build the culture of life in Canada. Our mission center, where we serve pregnant women, is now fully operational, located at St. Catherine’s Parish in Downtown Toronto. In the past several months, we have had the joy of seeing many new babies welcomed into the world with love as they bear witness to the truth that life is always a good. Our toll-free Canadian number for pregnancy calls is: 1-877-LIFE-380.
Sisters of Life
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- St. Frances de Chantal (Novitiate House, Vocations)
  198 Hollywood Avenue
  Bronx, NY 10465
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  Fax: 718/792-9645

- Villa Maria Guadalupe (Retreat House)
  159 Sky Meadow Drive
  Stamford, CT 06903
  203/329-1492
  Fax: 203/329-1495

- Sacred Heart of Jesus (Holy Respite)
  450 West 51st Street
  New York, NY 10019
  212/397-1396

- Visitation Mission to Pregnant Women
  320 East 66th Street
  New York, NY 10021
  Pregnancy help call: 212/737-0221
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- St. Augustine Convent
  2661 Kingston Rd.
  Scarborough, ON
  M1M 1M3 Canada
  416/261-7207 (ext. 266)
  Fax: 416/261-0923

- Toronto Visitation Mission to Pregnant Women
  St. Catherine of Siena
  1099 Danforth Avenue
  Toronto, ON M4J 1M5
  Pregnancy help call: (416) 463-2722
  Fax: (416) 463-1687

- Dr. Joseph R. Stanton Human Life Issues Library
  1955 Needham Avenue
  Bronx, NY 10466
  718/881-7286
  Fax: 718/881-7287

- Post-Abortion Retreats
  toll free 866/575-0075
  hopeandhealing@sistersoflife.org

Web Site: www.sistersoflife.org

What might happen in our land if one million courageous Christians declared their uncompromising allegiance to Jesus Christ and to biblical faithfulness on some of the most urgent moral issues of our day?

The Manhattan Declaration, released in November 2009, affirms the dignity of every human being as a creature fashioned in the image of God, possessing intrinsic rights of equal dignity and life; marriage as a union of man and woman, ordained by God; and religious liberty, the inherent freedom of human beings created in the divine image.

Christians are joining together to affirm our right and, more importantly, to embrace our obligation, to speak and act in defense of these truths. We call upon all people of good will to consider and reflect on the issues addressed.

Signatories Include: Archbishop Timothy Dolan, Cardinal Justin Rigali, Archbishop Chaput, as well as Dr. James Dobson, founder of Focus on the Family.

PLEASE JOIN US: in reading and signing this declaration by going to: www.manhattandeclaration.org