



ONE LIFE TOUCHED,

# THE WORLD CHANGED

**L**oving life into the world one heart at a time might seem an inefficient means of spreading an urgent message, but only when we forget that each human heart has an infinite horizon, expanding all the way to God. When hearts are freed in love, the power and mercy of the Lord are unleashed upon the world in a new way, and the reach of that grace is immeasurable.

L o v e   u n l e a s h e d

SISTERS OF LIFE



## *The cry of every human heart* Love me.

A few months ago, some Sisters were on a walk and met a five year old girl and her three year old brother. In a span of a few moments they were as old friends — they had exchanged names, laughed together, and talked about the profound realities of God and prayer (children get right to the heart of the matter). As the Sisters said their good-byes and God bless you's and turned to leave, the five year old became indignant and, with arms outstretched ready for a hug, commanded the Sisters: "Hey! Love me first!"

**Love me.** Isn't that the cry of every heart? We can't help but desire to be noticed, delighted in, received and affirmed by another. We are made to be loved, we have a need to be loved. And this need to be loved is not an imposition on others. It is a gift — the "me" in the "love me" is supposed to be a gift for the other! There is something unique in each of us, a special communication of the Word of God given to the world. When we pause to notice this in another, delight soon follows, and delight clears the way for us to receive that other into our hearts. This is the experience of being loved — there is room in someone's heart for me, a space where I am noticed, received and affirmed, and therefore safe to trust — I can begin to fly, and in the right direction.

**Love me first.** The culture of life is not built on rules but on God's amazing YES to us. And this yes needs to be experienced before one can understand the ways He guides us, warning us about some behaviors, encouraging us in others. Without knowing His love, it's just too easy to settle for less than the glory for which we're made. The sacrifices seem meaningless. So the Lord loves us first: He comes to meet us as a little baby, He comes to us in the Eucharist, personally. He comes to us in his Holy Spirit, to fill our hearts with his love. His way is the way the Lord asks us to share the charism of life — one heart at a time. Loving life into the world one heart at a time might seem an inefficient means of spreading an urgent message, but only when we forget that each human heart has an infinite horizon, expanding all the way to God. When hearts are freed in love, the power and mercy of the Lord are unleashed upon the world in a new way and the reach of that grace is immeasurable.

God knows this is true of every heart including yours and mine, and so he wants us to share his love in a way that will stretch our hearts, too. Loving in this way demands an active faith in the power of God's word, it demands the integrity of relationship, of moving out of oneself time and again for the other. And something happens: as we love those who are vulnerable, their goodness and courage humbles us, we cry with their struggles, we rejoice in their joys. We become *for* them, and they become a gift for us in ways we could never expect, for authentic love is creative: it always brings new life.

This way of love is within everyone's reach; we celebrate the promise of its possibility this Christmas. Jesus comes to us small and helpless, yet knowing the deepest desires and potential of our hearts. Let us let Him love us this season, more than ever before, that we might hear His call to love life into the world, one heart at a time.

*May you have a blessed Advent season  
and a holy Christmas, Mother Agnes Mary*

# love multiplies

## THE VISION

*to see every person as "a wonder"*

One life is all it takes to change the world forever. This reality is expressed by George Bailey's guardian angel, Clarence, in the movie *It's a Wonderful Life*, "Each man's life touches so many other lives. When he isn't around he leaves an awful hole, doesn't he?" As Sisters of Life, we build our missions on the rock of this same truth: that the person before us is a unique and unrepeatable image of God, precious in His sight. Our approach to building a culture of life is to change one heart, one life at a time. "For this to happen we need first of all to foster, in ourselves and in others, a contemplative outlook. Such an outlook arises from faith in the God of life, who has created every individual as a 'wonder'. It is the outlook of those who see life in its deeper meaning . . . It is the outlook of those who do not presume to take possession of reality but instead accept it as a gift, discovering in all things the reflection of the Creator and seeing in every person His living image." (Evangelium Vitae, #83)

## TO SEE, THAT WE MAY LOVE

To see God's glory revealed in them . . .

Blessed John Paul II spoke of man as willed by God, as "chosen by him from eternity and called, destined for grace and glory." Pope Benedict XVI speaks similarly when he speaks of human life as a "manifestation of God and His glory." We are surrounded by that glory, even now. We catch a glimpse of it when we watch an Olympic athlete soar, or when we hear a symphony in perfect harmony. We experience it when we are reunited with someone we love; we delight with joy when a baby discovers his foot for the first time or takes his first steps. These are the moments of our lives that are "ever ancient, ever new," a phrase that St. Augustine uses to speak about the Lord and His beauty.

These glimpses of glory and the wonder of each life can easily be lost sight of, especially as we experience the pain and woundedness in our world. The value of the "one" seems to have been diminished, especially as the culture is focused on goals of efficiency, mass production, success and ease of living. While these goals can be helpful in building up society, a downside is that we can lose sight of the singularity and wonder present in each human person. Cardinal O'Connor would comment that if there were millions of the same life reflecting the divine image, then the loss of one life (or even hundreds of thousands) would only be as the loss of a falling star. But each human life is an unrepeatable act of Almighty God and has infinite value, simply in the fact that it exists. The Lord never loses sight of the preciousness of our lives. We remain within His gaze at all times.

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*"Such an outlook arises from faith in the God of life, who has created every individual as a 'wonder'. It is the outlook of those who see life in its deeper meaning...It is the outlook of those who do not presume to take possession of reality but instead accept it as a gift, discovering in all things the reflection of the Creator and seeing in every person His living image."*

God loved and willed you into being. Nobody is an accident. You have life, only by an intentional loving creative act of God. You exist because God wanted you.

## Changing the World, One Heart at a Time

Love has the power to change the world. Mother Teresa said, “Never worry about numbers. Help one person at a time and always start with the person nearest you.” Still, we may be tempted to ask ourselves, “What can just one person do? What can I do to change anything?” But because each of us is uniquely made in the image of God, we do have the power to change the world, and that power is love. Built upon the foundation of self-giving, sacrificial love, the culture of life will emerge from the culture of death. Change most effectively occurs through the quiet yet powerful outpouring of love, by caring for those gripped by fear and hopelessness, with tangible expressions of practical compassion. St. John’s first letter proclaims, “Perfect love casts out fear.” Love is the only agent powerful enough to remove our fear and the fears of others.

In order to be a resource of hope for those in need, we take Mary as our model, who went “in haste” with self-forgetful love to assist her cousin Elizabeth. Like our Lady, we seek to allow Jesus, conceived beneath our hearts and actually received within our bodies in Holy Communion, to radiate through us to each person we meet. Time and again, Christ has stirred up new life and hope in those we serve when we place our trust in Him and step out in faith. This risk of faith in love almost always demands personal sacrifice – bringing forth new life typically does! – but it is more than worth it for the joy that follows.



Cardinal O’Connor had an amazing gift to see the hidden potential within another and to draw it forth through the creative power of love. He focused on one person, one soul, at a time. He kept in his mind’s eye an individual, a real person whom he knew. For instance: a pregnant young woman without the support of those who are important to her; a young man dying a victim to AIDS; a woman or a man suffering silently and alone after an abortion; a priest who had wandered into the mist; the frail elderly and the terminally ill. These real people, with faces and names he knew, were at the center of his mind, his heart and his activity. Cardinal O’Connor didn’t just talk about the sacredness of human life he set about each day to do whatever good the Lord allowed, in very tangible and practical ways, for those with whom he came in contact. These acts, revealing the tender providence of God for each, touched people deeply and were not forgotten.



When it comes to the women we serve, we strive to delight in each woman for who she is, which gives her the interior strength and courage to engage the challenges of life, and to embrace her unborn child. Part of our mission is to invite others to become our Co-workers of Life, to share themselves in some capacity, with one who is vulnerable or in need. This form of practical compassion, of sharing oneself with another, has enormous strength and power because everyone needs to know that someone cares enough to take a risk on them. One by one our acts of loving one another in real and tangible ways, one heart at a time, will change the climate of our own culture. By demonstrating that the lives of others have meaning and value and that God loves each personally and infinitely, we, as God’s instruments, will renew the face of the earth.

When one experiences her dignity and goodness, she is able to share her new confidence and joy with others. The gift of self, modeled on Christ’s self-emptying, has the power to transform the future and create a civilization of love, for it takes love to change hearts. In this way we can all, by God’s grace, become instruments of love, mercy and hope – even if for just one soul – for that one life that will change the world...as every life does.

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# EXPECTANT

When fear gives way to wonder and awe

*“Then I began to see, like a ray of light breaking through the darkness, the beauty of God the Father’s enduring love who can turn our sufferings into moments of great beauty.”*

# HOPE

Being a mother or a father is an extraordinary blessing that entails the capacity for both unfathomable joy and tremendous heartache. As children become older, many parents experience the tension of wanting the best for them yet sensing that as young adults they must be allowed the freedom to make their own decisions. In the midst of these joys and sorrows, accomplishments and struggles, parents are given the opportunity to make extraordinary acts of faith in God and in their children.

As we approach Christmas, we look to the holy family, seeing the self-giving love of the Blessed Mother and the mighty courage and strength of St. Joseph that allowed Christ to be born and in a mysterious way, unite himself with every unborn child. As Sisters of Life, we are often privileged to witness the sacrificial acts of mothers and fathers that give life to their children.

One afternoon in September, at our Visitation Mission in Manhattan where we serve women who are pregnant, a man named Alex\* called asking for assistance on behalf of his college-aged daughter. Alex had recently learned that his daughter, Maggie, was pregnant and was planning to have an abortion. As we hear time and again, Alex and his wife were deeply disturbed by their daughter’s plans to have an abortion, but felt paralyzed in expressing their concern too strongly and running the risk of pushing her further away. Alex knew in the depths of his heart that an abortion was not the solution. Although it might seem like a temporary relief for Maggie, he could see that the abortion would profoundly wound her and eventually fill her with regret and sorrow. Alex also longed to see the face of his grandchild. We encouraged him to stand firm in his resolve for what he knew was right. He began to realize that as a father it was his responsibility to try to protect and guard his daughter from making destructive choices. He knew that he could not sit idle but had to pray and be proactive in helping his daughter.

Alex had a new hope. Over the next week, he called Maggie to encourage her. Eventually she stopped answering her phone so he left messages for her and asked her to call us, but she never responded. Since she would no longer answer her phone, Alex decided to drive several hours to her college campus to see her, but before he was able to make the trip, he left us a message: “Sisters, thank you for all your help, but Maggie had the abortion yesterday. It’s over.” I will never forget the tone of his voice when he spoke those words. They contained a heaviness of loss and utter defeat.

A few months later, I answered a call from a woman named Janet. She explained how stressed she was and that she just needed to talk. I listened to her as she described all the struggles her daughter was experiencing at college, including an unexpected

pregnancy. The details seemed vaguely familiar. Janet went on to say that her daughter, out of anger, fear or frustration, told her and her husband that she had an abortion, but they recently learned that she in fact did not have the abortion and was still pregnant. As the conversation was ending, I assured her of our prayers for her family and asked what her daughter’s name was. She responded, “Maggie.”

My heart leapt with joy, so much so, that I actually jumped out of my chair. This was the same Maggie we were praying and fasting for a few months earlier. I immediately thought of Alex and how defeated he felt thinking that his efforts with his daughter had failed, yet they had truly taken root in her heart. As I spoke with Janet, she shared that things were slowly turning around, and for the first time in years Maggie joined them for Sunday Mass the day before.

Then I began to see, like a ray of light breaking through the darkness, the beauty of God the Father’s enduring love that can turn our sufferings into moments of great beauty. I asked Janet if she realized that the previous day was the first Sunday of Advent: the moment when the Church invites us all to contemplate the unborn Christ hidden in the Virgin Mary’s womb. Janet said she did recognize this and began to cry as she saw in Maggie a young mother who also found the grace to say “yes” to God’s gift of new life.

Eventually, Janet put Maggie on the phone and we talked about the many things she experienced over the previous months. Maggie shared that after months of despair, and of not knowing what to do, she was finally excited about her baby and had a sense of hope. She was proud to tell me herself that she attended Mass on the First Sunday of Advent. Maggie’s spirit’s lifted as we talked about how perfect it was that she returned home to the Church on the day when we begin to prepare for the birth of our Lord.

In God’s great Providence, the seed of faith that was planted in Maggie’s heart by her father’s encouragement months earlier, began to blossom on the first day of Advent, the season of expectant hope. All seeds need time to gestate, but when the soil has received the needed light and nourishment, a magnificent flowering springs forth.



## Parental Impact

*Studies consistently show that parents have the greatest impact on their children’s decision to save sexual activity for marriage, and that young people prefer to hear this message from their parents.*

*88% of teens ages 12-19 said it would be easier to postpone sexual activity if they were able to have open and honest conversations with their parents about it.*

*For more info visit: [www.generationlife.org/education/parents/](http://www.generationlife.org/education/parents/) or [www.chastity.org](http://www.chastity.org)*

(\*Names have been changed.)

Photo: iStock photo



Photo: iStock photo

Reaching out one heart at a time to share the power of God's mercy.

*"We can be so scared of God. We think we are condemned for committing 'the unforgivable.' But He is waiting for us. He desires our healing. Seek His forgiveness, and seek your child's forgiveness. Our children desire our healing too. They want our salvation. God's desire is for us to be reunited with our children, to reunite us as a family. He longs to give us His love, His mercy, and to make things as they were meant to be." – Theresa*

healing after abortion

# Reigning Mercy

Letting Mercy Himself flood and heal our shattered souls.

**Theresa Bonopartis** is the Director of Lumina/ Hope & Healing After Abortion, an outreach of Good Counsel Homes. She has been a close friend and Co-worker in our retreats for women and men who are suffering after an abortion. Her professional expertise, personal witness and experience of God's unfathomable mercy have made her a powerful instrument of the hope and healing found in Jesus Christ.

## Interview with Theresa:

■ **How does your story begin?**  
I had my abortion in the 70's, when I was 18. After, I wasn't the same person. I went through the motions of life, with no desire for anything. I struggled with depression, low self-esteem and suicidal thoughts. Desperate for love, I married a man who abused alcohol and was emotionally and psychologically abusive to me. After the birth of our second son, I knew I didn't want my children to live in that environment. One day, when my husband was drinking again, I took the children and walked out the door.

I got a job working as a drug and alcohol abuse counselor. So many were coming to me because of their

abortions, and I was powerless to help them because I hadn't even been able to find help for myself. They were hurting, floundering in promiscuity, addictions, more abortions. It was so overwhelming; I burnt out.

■ **When did things begin to change for you?**  
The time came for my oldest son to make his first confession, and I received a notice that the parents needed to attend a meeting. I was terrified. I had not stepped in to a church in fifteen years; I felt like such a terrible sinner and was sure the walls would fall down on me. Father came into the room and started talking about the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Funny, you think you're going for the sake of your child, but he was definitely talking to the parents! He started listing particular sins, and I was shocked to hear him say, "God can forgive the sin of abortion." I thought, "Did I hear him correctly? Is it possible I can really be forgiven of this?"

It was my first inkling of hope. I felt sorry for my children whose mom couldn't cope with the day to day. I wanted more for the three of us. I called to see if I could talk to that priest. It was terrifying, but again, I was desperate. I went in, and tears still come to my eyes when I remember the compassion I was offered that day. He was the first person to acknowledge what I had gone through. He understood my feelings and the pain. Finally, I was able to go to confession.

Before I left, he gave me a Miraculous Medal of Our Lady. From then on, I started growing in my faith. I began going to daily Mass, spending time before the Blessed Sacrament, and praying the Stations of the Cross. Additionally, I started meeting with a therapist who was experienced in post-abortion counseling. So much healing took place. The wound of abortion is not solely spiritual, but psychological and emotional as well.

One night I was in the midst of despair, but I somehow also felt a deep trust in God. I didn't want the children to see me crying, so after putting them to bed, I closed myself in the bathroom, crouched on the floor, and repeated over and over, "Jesus, I trust in You." Hours passed in this anguish. I felt like I had climbed on the cross with Christ. Suddenly, there was a surrender, and a rush of love came over me. I felt His love wash away my sin and I knew my healing was complete. I've haven't felt that hopeless despair of abortion since, only profound love and forgiveness.

*(continued on next page)*

# JESUS I TRUST IN YOU

## ■ How would you explain the journey toward healing?

First, you can't put it on a time table. No one can begin to look at her abortion until she knows the love and mercy of God, because it's too terrifying. Healing from abortion is not about us and what we have done; it is about God and what He has done for us. There is a freedom in knowing that I am a sinner, and I have to depend on Him doing it in me. We make up reasons why God can't heal us. If you've had one or 10, if someone forced you, or you chose it, healing is possible because Jesus came and died for our sins. The journey is a unique one for every person, and God is going to work in His own way. He wants to heal everything, not just the abortion itself, but all that led up to it. We have to trust in God and take one day at a time, doing His will even though we may not feel it. He sees. He knows.

## ■ What is available for those who are suffering?

First, they can always pick up the phone and call or email. Then, there are Days of Prayer and Healing for women, and a separate one for men to attend. The goal for that day is to give each participant hope that healing is possible. They hear the witness of someone who has gone through it, and are given the opportunity to share their own experience if they want to. We also have monthly gatherings for those who have attended one of the Days. Each month addresses a different issue connected with healing. And there are weekend retreats. It is beautiful to see how the women and men support and encourage one another along the journey.

There is also a Day offered for those who have had an abortion after an adverse prenatal diagnosis. And there is a Day for those whose sibling was aborted. They are able to come together and share the pain and struggles they've experienced. People come to find they are not alone, and that others understand them.

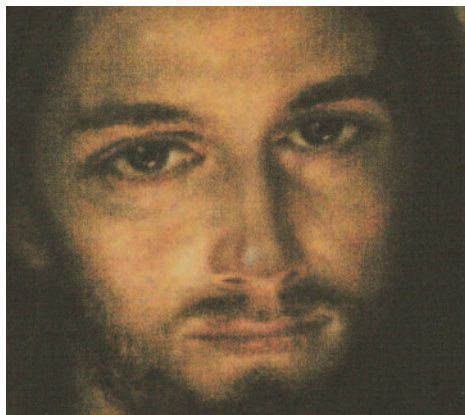
## Steps Towards Healing:

- 1) Know there is hope of healing. Listen to the testimony of someone who has been through the journey of healing.
- 2) Draw close to God and have a relationship with Him in prayer, this allows you to look at the experience with honesty, and in the light of His mercy.
- 3) A Spiritual director can be very helpful.
- 4) Most people benefit from counseling.
- 5) Name your personal abortion connectors, which are people, places, and things that remind you of your experience and cause you to react.
- 6) Take advantage of the supports around you—developing relationships with others who have been through the journey of healing.

7) Call or email Theresa or the Sisters of Life:

**Theresa:** 1-877-586-4621 or [lumina@postabortionhelp.org](mailto:lumina@postabortionhelp.org)

**Sisters of Life:** 1-866-575-0075 or [hopeandhealing@sistersoflife.org](mailto:hopeandhealing@sistersoflife.org)



## ■ Why did you choose “Entering Canaan” as the name of the retreat?

When the Israelites were called out of the slavery of Egypt into the Promised Land, they had a huge journey to make, one filled with many different trials and struggles. But God said, “I'll be with you all the way.” It's the same with the journey of healing after abortion. There are interior battles to fight, but He's with you the whole time. It's our own journey to the Promised Land, back to God, trusting in that love He has for us. Along the path each person finds peace, renewed joy, and gratitude. You begin to stand in awe of His mercy and generosity. You are made free to realize that you are a beloved child of God, and come to really know and experience that love. All you need is to stay on the road, and take advantage of the supports available.

## ■ What has been your greatest joy along the way?

I marvel at God's mercy. Look at what has come about because of my son. Even though he was never born, look at what he has done, in spite of me! It's amazing. I've been privileged to help countless women and men suffering from abortion's aftermath. And who taught me how to love? My son. Who brought me back to God? My son. God took this totally horrible thing and used it as the catalyst for so many graces.

## ■ What would you say to someone thinking about starting this journey?

You don't have to stay in this hell. If you fall into despair, even after you've been to confession, reject anything that would keep you in that pit, and reclaim the forgiveness you have received. You need to say, “I'm not going to listen to this,” and pick up the phone and talk about it.

We can be so scared of God. We think we are condemned for committing “the unforgivable.” But He is waiting for us. He desires our healing. Seek His forgiveness, and seek your child's forgiveness. Our children desire our healing too. They want our salvation. God's desire is for us to be reunited with our children, to reunite us as a family. He longs to give us His love, His mercy, and to make things as they were meant to be. There is nothing to be afraid of because He's not standing there to condemn. He wants to bring us to His Heart to heal us. With His grace, you will be able to forgive yourself, and in the end, you realize that your child is the very person who brings you to God.

My whole life has changed. I entered into life again, instead of walking around like someone who is dead. It is possible! I know what God has done for me. I know He will do the same thing for you. In spite of anything that you feel, your faith isn't your feelings. There's no limit to God's mercy. He can heal you.

## To contact Theresa:

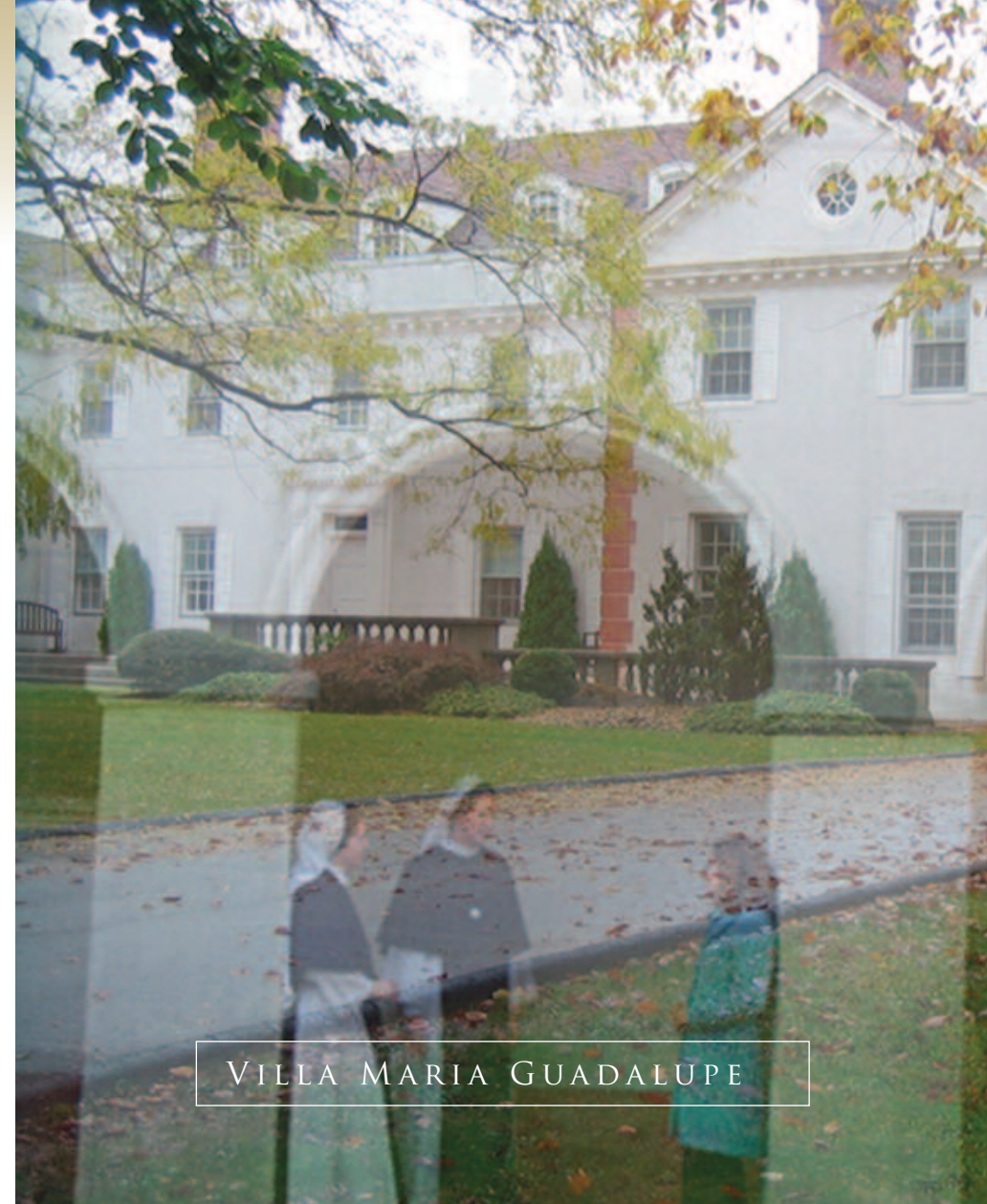
1-877-586-4621 or [lumina@postabortionhelp.org](mailto:lumina@postabortionhelp.org)  
[www.postabortionhelp.org](http://www.postabortionhelp.org)

**Upcoming Day for Men:** May 19, 2012

**Upcoming Day for Siblings:** March 10, 2012

**Upcoming Day for poor pre-natal diagnosis:** March 24, 2012

**Upcoming Day for Women:** February 11, March 17, April 28, June 9



# Retreat!

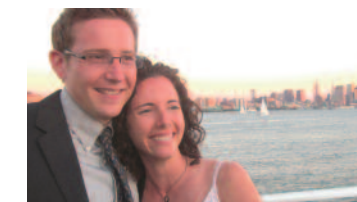
Perhaps you have heard this internal battle cry well up from within, a response to the wearying skirmishes of the day to day. And what does it entail, going on a retreat? We give ourselves the freedom to set other things aside, granting the Lord permission to reclaim our inner world for Himself, spreading His reign of peace over us.

Some choose to go on retreat because they want to come to know deeply the Word of God, to learn more about their Catholic faith, eager to receive instruction on prayer and its practice. Others come to experience the filial love of the family of the Church within Christ-centered friendships. There are also those who seek healing, silence, and mercy. For many, a weekend retreat allows the necessary space to reflect on the events of one's life, gaining perspective and newfound strength and encouragement.

The reasons for coming are numberless, but the one reason that underlies all others is that Jesus Himself has extended an invitation, and we receive the grace to respond in faith. In this culture, frenzied with activity and swimming in noise, we can find ourselves entangled in nets of obligations and deadlines, so much so that we can unwittingly resist the gentle mastery of Christ! He would beckon his disciples to leave the labors of their ministry to be alone with Him. He says the same thing to us today, “Come aside and rest awhile.” We long for it, this rest that Jesus promises.

**Tamar:** “A desire was laid on my heart to be able to listen to what God is calling me to be, to do. I am so busy. I wanted the quiet where I can return to Him and to that joy, love and comfort that He gives. On retreat, I received a grace to surrender everything to God. I told him that I needed help to trust. When I let go, I felt a total freedom. There is something about praying in adoration; I can just open my heart before Jesus.”

**Matthew:** “My mom had been diagnosed with cancer, and we were receiving hospice into our home. I was feeling really angry with God over her illness. The night of Eucharistic Adoration I said to God, ‘Whatever your will is...’ I looked up at Jesus in the monstrance, and I was filled with peace. All of the pain and sorrow I was experiencing in my heart melted away; it just disappeared. I was healed. Everyone has something that needs to be healed. For me the retreat was nourishing, fortifying and healing.”



*Mathew proposed to Tamar at Villa Maria Guadalupe during a Frasatti Retreat. They will be married on May 12th, 2012!*



**Orlie:** “The peace I experienced on retreat was incredible – you feel like you are in God's Kingdom! There's nothing

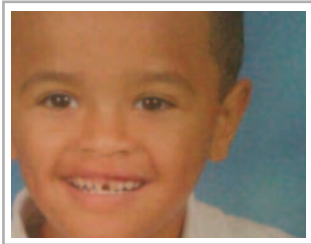
like that sense of renewal. I felt clean, like I could start over. It was when my initial healing started. I let go of so much baggage, especially during Eucharistic Adoration. It changes you so much. God has always been apart of my life, but now He's at the forefront – and I'm fixated!”

**For more information about upcoming retreats and to register:**  
[sistersoflife.org](http://sistersoflife.org)

*(Villa Maria Guadalupe retreats)*

# Miguel's Way

*of drawing others to see the meaning and beauty of life*



Three times a day we recite in the Angelus the commemoration of the saving event of God's entrance into history, through the response of Mary's freedom. Our founder John Cardinal O'Connor would say, "Mary

would never see the world in the same way again because she had conceived beneath her heart the Word, the Son of God made flesh within her."

In Mary, we see the capacity we were meant to live. We see the trust God has in each of us and the reality that every invitation to receive life also brings new life in unexpected ways. Unlike us, in Mary there is no resistance. She has not been wounded by anything selfish. She calls us to discover the ability that Christ gives us to see His coming again and again.

One day at our convent, a young and pregnant mother, Shanesse, came to the door with little Miguel, her wide-eyed boy of five, clutching her hand in terror. Miguel, Shanesse explained, was a child with Autism. Gradually, between furtive glances at his mom and the Sisters, Miguel seemed to find a sense of comfort and eventually became confident enough to explore. Winking at Shanesse, one Sister slipped out to accompany Miguel as he passed down the back stairs and up the front stairs peeking in our doorway before making another pass. He was very content to keep this up as his mother and I caught up and chuckled over their adventure on the subway.

Near the end of our time, I came out to check on Miguel and discovered another adventure underway. I laughed out loud at what I saw. There, swirling around his feet, were hundreds of images in hues of soft red, deep blue and flecks of gold, in perfect cadence, each tilted carefully to reveal the gentle face of a beautiful Lady. Last year, Villa Maria Guadalupe printed their schedule of retreats on color postcards featuring the face of Our Lady of Guadalupe. The postcards had been sprinkled about – and each one seemed to smile up at us.

Shanesse emerged peering down anxiously at the scene. She was about to apologize, but when she saw us all gazing down over Miguel's small shoulders, enraptured by his feat, she laughed. Her face, concerned about a "mess," relaxed into the warmth of recognition. She saw that we beheld and appreciated her son – the one who brought her out of herself – the one whose own unique way of being invited her to love, to know love. And in that rest, even if at first unknowingly, she acknowledged the presence of Another. Later she actually said it was at that moment she felt the peace that things would be all right, God seemed real, real enough to be present to her need.

In instances like these it becomes evident: when we receive life, His coming to us, we participate in His giving life to the world. When we welcome Him, as Mary did, in our ordinary concrete circumstances with a readiness to respond – we experience life as abundant. When we welcome Him we experience ourselves as alive and the truth that Christ is present even when life is confusing or difficult.

Yet how often we become used to our patterns and ideas and the distractions of the day. We resist or fear interruption; time can weigh upon us and it can become habitual to hunch our shoulders against the demands of the day. We feel our limits; we feel our weakness to do more. It is here that the Cross confronts us. So we turn to Mary, and with her we acknowledge that God is the Father of everything, that He has given us everything in His Son. The openness of her embrace, her "Yes," shines as a reminder to us. In her we can believe that everything comes to us within His Providence and it spills out of His hands like a seed or a promise – Life! Mindful of our need, we beg the grace to know in our day that nothing comes to us outside the radius of God's tenderness for us. He is near. He is here. He is speaking to us. He is revealing something of Himself to each of us.

Cardinal O'Connor imparted the legacy of this vision to us quoting a poem, *The Annunciation*, by a Redemptorist, Father Duffy: "And nothing would again be casual or small, but everything with light invested over-spilled with terror and divinity..."

We seek to welcome the Light of Christ's coming every day. These encounters are not just for Sisters, but for every Christian. Just as the Holy Spirit overshadowing Mary's "Yes" enfleshed Christ in the great event 2000 years ago, the Holy Spirit comes to bring Christ again and again. May this Christmas Season be a time when we seek to see with the eyes of our hearts and receive a deeper awareness of His coming right before us in each person in the ordinary circumstances of our lives. And may Our Lady accompany each of us on our journey with her maternal embrace and the encouragement of her prayers.



*Miguel's little brother Shane was born on June 10, 2010.*



She saw that we beheld and appreciated her son – the one who brought her out of herself, the one whose own unique way of being invited her to love, to know love. And in that rest, even if at first unknowingly, she acknowledged the presence of Another.

# A GREAT PRAYER FOR LIFE

# forgive us & heal us

**We invite you** to join the Sisters of Life and the Knights of Columbus by participating in the National Prayer for Life Campaign, a nine month Novena for Life beginning on March 25th, the Solemnity of the Incarnation of Our Lord, through Christmas Day 2012. We will be united each day in lifting up to Almighty God a great prayer for life so that we and the people of our time may see and respond to the incomparable dignity and value of every human being. Visit [www.nationalprayerforlife.org](http://www.nationalprayerforlife.org) to join us and for more details or to order prayer cards for your parish, family or group.

Moved by profound concern for the destiny of every man and woman...

a great prayer for life is urgently needed, a prayer which will rise up throughout the world. Through special initiatives and in daily prayer, may an impassioned plea rise to God, the Creator and lover of life, from every Christian community, from every group and association, from every family and from the heart of every believer. Jesus himself has shown us by his own example that prayer and fasting are the first and most effective weapons against the forces of evil (cf. Mt 4:1-11). As he taught his disciples, some demons cannot be driven out except in this way (cf. Mk 9:29). Let us therefore discover anew the humility and the courage to pray and fast so that power from on high will break down the walls of lies and deceit: the walls which conceal from the sight of so many of our brothers and sisters the evil of practices and laws which are hostile to life. May this same power turn their hearts to resolutions and goals inspired by the civilization of life and love.

*(John Paul II, The Gospel of Life, #100)*



## Novena Prayer for Life

Eternal Father, Source of life,  
Open our hearts to see and desire  
the beauty of your plan for life and love.  
Fill us with your Holy Spirit so that  
our love will be generous and self-giving  
and we may be blessed with joy.  
Grant us great trust in your mercy.  
Forgive us for not receiving your gift of life  
and heal us from the effects of the culture of death.  
Instill in us and in all people a sense  
of the sacredness of every human life.  
Inspire our efforts to protect and  
care for the most vulnerable,  
especially women who are pregnant  
and their unborn children,  
the sick and the elderly.  
Strengthen us in the hope  
that with you nothing is impossible.  
We ask this in the name of Jesus,  
who by his Cross makes  
all things new. Amen.

Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mother of Life, Pray for us.



**Sisters of Life**  
St. Paul's Convent  
586 McLean Avenue  
Yonkers, New York 10705

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

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As our gift to you, a novena of Masses will be offered for you and your family beginning on Christmas Day.

May you and  
your loved ones  
have a very merry  
and blessed  
Christmas!

*Sisters of Life*

## SV Directory

**St. Paul the Apostle**  
(Generalate)  
586 McLean Avenue  
Yonkers, NY 10705  
914/968-8094 Fax: 914/968-0462

**St. Barnabas**  
(Postulant House)  
445 East 240th Street  
Bronx, NY 10470  
718/708-6742 Fax: 718/708-6744

**St. Frances de Chantal**  
(Novitiate, Vocations)  
198 Hollywood Avenue  
Bronx, NY 10465  
718/863-2264 Fax: 718/792-9645

**Villa Maria Guadalupe**  
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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 Fax: 212/397-1397

**New York Visitation Mission**  
to Pregnant Women  
320 East 66th Street,  
New York, NY 10065  
Pregnancy help call:  
212/737-0221 toll free: 877/777-1277  
Co-workers of Life call: 347/843-8900

**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

**St. Augustine Convent**  
2661 Kingston Rd., Scarborough, ON  
M1M 1M3 Canada  
416/261-7207 (ext. 266)  
Fax: 416/261-0923

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 ጽሑፍ ማግኘት  
 toll free 866/575-0075  
[hopeandhealing@sistersoflife.org](mailto:hopeandhealing@sistersoflife.org)

Web Site: [www.sistersoflife.org](http://www.sistersoflife.org)

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