

PRO-LIFE WORK IS

Spiritual COMBAT

By Bill Crane

“Who do you people think you are?”

I would rather reign in hell than serve in heaven!”

The young driver yelled from a small SUV. Next to him sat a young woman while a baby wiggled in the car seat immediately behind her. Meanwhile, the driver was literally on the wrong road. Determined to hassle us, he had overshot the driveway of the so-called health care facility. Then again, according to his own words, he also had rejected the road to eternal life.

Nevertheless, a group of prayer warriors stood fast that Wednesday morning, like every other Wednesday, praying outside the abortion facility in Glen Ellyn, Illinois when this man reminded us that pro-life work is spiritual combat. As the Navarre Bible commentary on Revelation 12:9 says: “Once a most exalted creature... [Lucifer] became a devil because when God created man in His own image and likeness, he refused to acknowledge the dignity granted to man... As a result the devil and his angelic followers were cast down to earth to be imprisoned in hell, which is why they ceaselessly tempt man, trying to make him sin so as to deprive him of the glory of God.” And as with all battles, our pro-life work requires spiritual power to affect real victory.

Prayer conquers

In his book *Closed: 99 Ways to Stop Abortion*, the inspiring pro-life warrior Joe Scheidler proclaimed: “The battle will be won. Legalized abortion will be stopped, but not just through books about how to stop it or through the activities of those who work to stop it. It will be stopped by the combination of these activities with deep, fervent prayer, with the conviction that God is there and that He wants us to do His will.”

Scheidler is right. The combination of deep, fervent prayer and pro-life activities is necessary to achieve victory in the spiritual battle over abortion. Not everyone who prays will be active, although we hope that all who are active pray. As Scheidler points out, the power of prayer and the need for it cannot be stressed enough.

Abortionist and NARAL co-founder Bernard Nathanson, M.D., who claimed personal responsibility for over 60,000 deaths as director of the world’s largest abortion site, received tremendous help from



Photo by Richard Heimer

This center looks like any other business in Glen Ellyn

prayer. In his autobiography *The Hand of God*, Nathanson confessed that the combination of faithful witness and prayer by pro-life activists moved him to conversion:

I had been aware in the early and mid-80s that a great many of the Catholics and Protestants in the ranks prayed for me, were praying for me, and I was not unmoved as time wore on. But it was not until I saw the spirit put to the test on those bitterly cold demonstration mornings, with pro-choicers hurling the most fulsome epithets at them, the police surrounding them, the media openly unsympathetic to their cause, the federal judiciary fining and jailing them, and municipal officials threatening them—all through it they sat smiling, quietly praying, singing, confident and righteous of their cause

Prayer warriors protest the grisly deeds inside the center



Photo by Richard Heimer



Photo by Richard Herner

Illinois locals begin pro-life meetings with prayer

and ineradicably persuaded of their ultimate triumph... And for the first time in my adult life, I began to entertain seriously the notion of God—a God Who problematically had led me through the proverbial circles of hell, only to show me the way to redemption and mercy through His grace.

Then on the 1996 feast of the Immaculate Conception, Nathanson was baptized and confirmed by New York's Cardinal John O'Connor. At that same private Mass in the catacombs of Saint Patrick's Cathedral, Nathanson received his first Holy Communion surrounded by the Catholics and Protestants who were instrumental in his conversion. Those friends included Father C. John McCloskey, Charles Colson and John Haas, as well as Joan Andrews Bell and her husband Christopher.

And so we see that when prayer is said near abortion and "birth control" facilities, something spiritual happens. After 20 years of the grueling *NOW v. Scheidler* case, the U.S. Supreme

Court vindicated Joe Scheidler for the third time by ruling that he's not a criminal when he speaks and prays outside abortion centers. This huge victory for all pro-lifers goes to show that even if we do not see a direct or immediate result of prayer, we can be sure that our petitions to heaven are effective.

Pro-lifers gather for Mass and Eucharistic Adoration



Photo by Richard Herner

Recognize the enemy

Let us remember that the pro-abortion escorts who guide pregnant mothers to tragic decisions have something in common with us—they are believers. They think abortion is a worthy cause and they religiously defend "a woman's right to choose." Many of the escorts we meet come from Planned Parenthood and they are disturbed by the unwavering presence of prayer warriors. From time to time these escorts will call the police with false reports saying that one of the praying pro-lifers has made threats to his or her person; but it is good to know that they are disturbed by our prayerful presence and so we persist.

We also recognize that under God every human person's dignity is rooted in freedom. In *Human Liberty*, Pope Leo XIII said: "This

honorable freedom of the sons of God, which nobly protects the dignity of the human person, is greater than any violence or any injustice. This is the freedom that the Apostles claimed with unshaken constancy, that the apologists defended with their writings, and that the martyrs in such numbers consecrated with their blood."

Prayer warriors are called to abortion sites when the wind is howling, the snow is flying and the cold is near zero degrees Fahrenheit. We are called out when the humidity is dense and heat is a stifling 100 degrees. In other words, every innocent life threatened by abortion cries out for mercy and justice, not only to heaven, but also to those of us on earth. Our Lord Himself calls on pro-lifers with His description of the envious one: "[The devil] was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44).

Choice weapons

Most of the Glen Ellyn prayer warriors attend daily Mass. I would encourage the faithful who cannot pray outside abortion facilities to attend Mass as often as possible and offer up Holy Communion for all souls from the beginning to the end of time. After all, the sacrifice of the Mass is infinitely powerful and thus it cannot be diminished by dedicating it to everyone.

Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta said, "If people spent an hour a week in Eucharistic adoration, abortion would be ended." Many of my fellow prayer warriors take this to heart. As theo-

gians say, there is a link between seeing our Lord hidden in the Host and seeing a person hidden in the womb. We know that God dignified human nature by making us in His image. In the Incarnation, He also became one of us as the "Son of Man," Who was once hidden in His mother's womb. In other words, faith takes us beyond appearances so that we can say the preborn child has dignity equal to us, even when he is a single cell resulting from fertilization. And if we can see Christ in the Host, then we can begin to see Him in the poor, the weak, the terminally ill and even the person who is ugly with anger towards us.

Years ago, my wife and I went to San Giovanni Rotondo where we met an American Capuchin monk who had cared for Padre Pio. The monk told us that the very first thing Saint Pio did upon rising was to fall to his knees and pray a Rosary. Padre Pio had great battles with the devil and he dubbed the Rosary "the weapon." That's one reason why Catholics pray the Rosary outside abortion facilities, along with other favorite

prayers such as Pope Leo XIII's Prayer to Saint Michael.

When the young man tried to intimidate us by yelling that he "would rather reign in hell," it was a confirmation for me and my fellow prayer warriors. Contrary to his intentions, we were encouraged to strengthen our defense of the preborn. We took his self-incrimination not as evidence that our prayers were futile, but rather that prayer has power. In his rant, the screamer had enjoyed his freedom to choose God or hell; and he had enjoyed this great nation's right to free speech. That he was disturbed by our choice to defend the right to life further inspires us to pray for not only for him, but especially for those who cannot speak for themselves.

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Pro-lifers pray for mercy and justice outside an abortion business



Photo by Richard Herner