



# *An Encounter with Angels*

Tips on Sidewalk Counseling

By Patsy Gonzalez



*Dedicated to Our Lady of Guadalupe  
Patroness of the Unborn*

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*Front cover: Song of the Angels by William Adolphe Bouguereau*

## Introduction

*"Joy comes to those who in a sense forget themselves and become totally aware of the other". Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta*

If Christ walked the earth today, He would probably consider sidewalk counseling one of the greatest acts of His mercy. By becoming a channel of truth, in the spirit of love and compassion, the counselor transmits hope to a mother who feels her only recourse to her unwanted pregnancy is an abortion—which ultimately brings her to spiritual, emotional and, possibly, physical destruction.

One can be pro-life philosophically, but when faced with the reality outside abortion mills, one begins to truly understand the gravity and horror of abortion. It is frequently said that in an abortion, there are two victims—the mother and her baby. It is in this spirit that the counselor embarks on the mission to save both lives, one physically and the other spiritually. If a counselor harbors any anger, judgment, or bias towards the mother headed towards the clinic, her heart will never be touched. It is love *and* truth that changes her heart. The counselor must first save the mother before she saves the child. Concern must be both for the mother as well as the child. The fate that a mother will face is far worse than her unborn child's.

The abortion mill is the "belly of the beast". Like sheep to slaughter, troubled women approach the clinic hoping to find an escape for their painful dilemma.

This is the last chance to save them from a devastating choice. This is also where the Holy Spirit calls a few faithful souls to intervene on behalf of these unborn babies, that they may live out the plan God is unfolding for them and for their mothers.

Not everyone is called to sidewalk counseling, but praying outside a facility is the power behind any success. Prayer disposes a woman's heart to hear the message. Many have remarked that, in time, they found their courage and their voices by just coming out to pray.

## Two Major Principles:

There are two major principles that one must keep in mind when embarking on sidewalk counseling.

### 1. **The battle to save lives is a battle between good and evil.**

The adversary in abortion is not the abortionist, clinic workers, partners, legislators, or any host of others who perpetrate abortion, but Satan, the father of lies. People involved in the fight must be mindful that all those involved in the killing are also in desperate need of prayers and deliverance. "A prepared messenger is better than a prepared message". It is crucial that a counselor be grounded in prayer and the sacraments, that there is spiritual preparation before being out on the sidewalk. Praying while waiting for women to approach the mill makes the counselor an effective channel for the Holy Spirit.

### 2. **Success is not measured by results.**

Mother Teresa, in one of her most famous quotes on mission work, remarked, "God does not ask if we are successful, but only if we are faithful". Sidewalk counseling outside abortion mills is possibly the most difficult mission field because turning women away seems almost fruitless. Many experienced counselors and picketers will testify that sometimes years later, a woman will stop by to say, "My baby is alive because you were there when I came for my abortion." Sometimes, it is the *next* pregnancy when a mother considers life because she remembered the trauma of her abortion and the people who stood outside to intervene for her baby. This is called the "atonement child". It happens on occasion that a mother, still vacillating on her decision to abort, will change her mind and simply drive on when she sees pro-life people standing outside a clinic. Passersby, who witness pro-life activities outside mills are educated on the evils of abortion and there are times when the consciences of clinic workers are touched, compelling them to quit. A faithful presence outside clinics is never fruitless.

## What makes an effective sidewalk counselor?

**Empathy:** If a counselor transmits an understanding of how the mother is feeling, at the same time remaining objective enough to help her, she may begin to open up and begin to feel trust towards the counselor. Knowing that someone is willing to share her burdens will bring hope to the abortion bound woman.

**Sincerity:** Be yourself. Each person is unique with his own gifts and talents. A counselor, after learning the basics by perhaps watching another counselor, will be better able to transmit genuine sincerity when using his own personal style and life experiences.

**Unconditional acceptance:** Being judgmental is the surest way of losing a mother to an abortion. When she feels you are condemning her, she will shut down. The message must be transmitted in such a way that she knows, that even if she goes ahead with her abortion, you are there for her in the aftermath.

**A warm, caring personality:** A woman being counseled can feel a warm and caring spirit. She may have felt unloved or abandoned by her partner or support system, but loved by a stranger radiating Christ. Warm and caring people make excellent counselors.

**A Deep Faith:** It is really the Holy Spirit in action outside abortion clinics. A faith-filled counselor will transmit God's love and providence for the troubled mother. Because she has most likely had a lifestyle far away from any religious experience or has rejected it, she may not be open to "God talk" until she is ready or when you have already bonded with her. St. Francis said, "Go out and preach the good news-- and sometimes use words". Divine law and natural law are perfectly compatible. Often, it is better to first counsel an abortion bound woman with the physical, relationship, or emotional consequences of destroying her baby before speaking of spiritual matters. God has written the truth in every human heart; the counselor's message will resonate in her soul. Because counselors represent Christ, their demeanor must be Christ-like at all times. Seeing rosaries and other prayer materials brings awareness that it is faith that is motivating you to be on the sidewalk.

## **Who is the abortion bound woman?**

There is a high probability that the abortion bound woman comes from a broken home without knowing the love of a good father. This underscores the value of male counselors because he provides the image of a protective, loving father.

Women are created to bear and nurture children. It is her nature to bring forth life and to protect her children. When a woman first hears of her pregnancy, she feels a sense of awe, but when her partner or family are unsupportive of her pregnancy, fear and rejection drive her into a crisis—believing her only escape is to have an abortion. The crisis may interfere with the woman's ability to look at a problem and come to a rational decision. She becomes willing to go against her nature to survive, becoming like the proverbial animal that tragically gnaws off its leg to get out of a trap.

These fears may include:

- Fear of losing her husband or boyfriend
- Fear of interrupting her education or career
- Fear of being hurt by an abusive husband if she doesn't have the abortion
- Fear of bearing a child conceived in an extra marital affair
- Fear of financial instability
- Fear of telling her parents
- Fear of being judged
- Fear of having a child when she is over 40

Fear of being too young to have a child  
Fear of fetal deformities through drugs or medication  
Fear of having the baby because she is uninsured or illegally in the country  
Fear of bearing a child born out of rape or sexual abuse  
Fear of having one more child

The St. Juan Diego Center has been instrumental in changing hearts in all these situations—even in the hardest cases.

When a woman realizes that she is alone because her environment is hostile to her situation, her fears overwhelm her and she begins to gradually distance herself from her unborn child.

Once she is able to de-personalize her baby, to deny that she carries this tiny human person in her womb, she is finally able to see an abortion as her only option. (Most are unaware of the excellent resources in their communities that can address some of these issues which crisis pregnancy centers are able to provide for them.)

By the time a woman makes a decision to abort her baby, she has already aborted her child spiritually and emotionally. By the time, she is walking into an abortion mill; she is no longer thinking about her baby, she is only thinking of herself. She is no longer open to weighing her options—she is finished with the painful process of detaching herself from her baby. The quick fix will soon be behind her and she can move on with her life. Because she is now at peace with her decision, she is not happy to face people outside the abortion clinic who once again stir up her confusion and fear.

### **How will you recognize the abortion bound woman?**

She was asked to wear a comfortable, two-piece, loose fitting outfit for her appointment. She will most probably be wearing a sweat suit or leggings. Her partner, friend or parent will accompany her, as she needs a ride home after her procedure. She may look somber and conflicted, even tearful. A woman coming alone may arrive and leave in a cab. Several friends may accompany a teenager.

### **Tools of the trade**

There is an array of good literature to give the women going in. It is important to have a rudimentary knowledge of abortion procedures, physical and psychological consequences, and fetal development. It is very important to have contact information on crisis pregnancy centers in the area. You cannot solve all her problems on the sidewalk, that's what the centers are for.

### **Suggested brochures and tools should include:**

A brochure on abortion procedures and physical/ emotional consequences  
A brief, simple list of local resources  
"Eight-Week Old Developing Baby" flyer  
Brochure on fetal development  
A small fetal model  
A pen

A cell phone (To make initial contact with a pregnancy center for her)  
A rosary or other prayer materials

### **Some opening lines:**

Sidewalk counseling is the Holy Spirit's work. Often, you may be inspired to say something to a woman or a couple as they approach the mill. Sometimes, in a more tightly controlled environment, you may only be able to call out a short message. By the time the woman approaches the clinic, she is no longer thinking about her baby.

American Life League's sidewalk counselor's guidebook states, "The best opening line is the one you come up with yourself. However, there are opening lines that are not appropriate. 'Please don't kill your baby', 'I'll take your baby for you,' and 'You will still be the mother of a dead child', are not very productive if you want someone to stop and talk to you."

### **Messages that will expose her risks from an abortion may be more effective:**

"You have a right to know that abortion is not safe".

"Abortion is blind surgery, you could really get hurt".

"Hi, I'd like to give you some information you won't receive inside this facility".

"You will regret this decision for the rest of your life".

"You have a right to know what really happens in an abortion".

"An abortion will hurt you physically and mentally, you will never be the same".

"I have some information on medical malpractice suits against this clinic I'd like to share with you." (Chicago method)

"Your relationship will never be the same".

### **Messages that show your support:**

"You are not alone, we want to help".

"We are here for you and your baby, we care".

### **Messages directed at the partner:**

"If you love her, you will protect her".

"An abortion will damage your relationship, she will blame you".

Reaching out to a woman with love is the best way to breach her defenses if she stops to talk to you. If she does stop to talk:

- Move away from the clinic. Some counselors invite the woman to a coffee shop if she is willing to talk privately.
- Call a local crisis pregnancy center immediately to speak with a counselor and make an appointment as soon as possible.
- If she willing, ask for her telephone number.
- If you are comfortable, give her your number.

Allowing her to open up by listening to her will increase your chances of her giving you the chance to take her to a crisis pregnancy center. It is not the responsibility of the sidewalk counselor to support the woman throughout her pregnancy.

If she stops to talk, don't get tongue-tied. Start by saying, "It must have been so

painful for you to come to this decision. You are not alone. I am here for you”.

Continue with some questions to help her open up, such as:

When did you learn you were pregnant?

How did you feel?

How does your husband/boyfriend, parents feel?

How have other people reacted to your pregnancy?

How did you come to a decision to have an abortion?

What are your feelings about abortion?

Do you know that chances are your relationship will not survive?

Listen carefully and build your conversation on how she responds. Your voice should be soothing and quiet. When she feels you understand, a seed of trust will start to grow. She will begin to see you as a friend. A mother who changed her mind outside a late term abortion clinic remarked that the soothing, angelic voices of two counselors moved her to choose life for her baby in spite of her fear of her abusive husband. She described her meeting with the counselors as *an encounter with angels*.

It is truly amazing how the Holy Spirit will give you the right words to help and comfort her. Your message, delivered with love and compassion, will bridge culture, age, religious beliefs, or social levels. It will simply be one heart speaking to another and she will allow you to reverse the decision she has made.

It is also remarkable that once you embark on a mission to save babies, you will have opportunities to do so even away from abortion clinics. People from the work place, relatives, friends, or their extended relationships may come to you for help in a crisis pregnancy situation. A pro-lifer, who regularly prayed outside a Planned Parenthood facility, received a call from her distraught sister whose daughter was abortion bound. She quickly mobilized to save the baby with the help of the St. Juan Diego Women’s Center. After her niece’s change of heart, the coming of this previously “unwanted” baby became the most joyfully anticipated event of her life. These cases may be closer than you think. With nearly 60 million abortions since Roe vs. Wade, everyone has been touched by the issue one way or another.

## **Who is the abortion bound man?**

There is a high probability that the abortion bound man comes from a single parent home. Having a physically or emotionally absent father, he has a very poor perception of what a nurturing, loving father is. In the St. Juan Diego Center’s experience, a male counselor speaking to him is very effective.

He may have different reasons for encouraging his woman’s abortion, but they can all be synthesized into one: Fear of taking responsibility. (This excludes the ones who valiantly fight for their baby or the ones who are unaware of the abortion). He may be the abusive, controlling mate, the scared teenager or the one who abandons her. He is most commonly the one who tells her, “I will support you in whatever you decide”. What she really hears him saying is, “I don’t love you enough to fight for our baby”—which only increases her isolation.

Just as women are created to bear and nurture children, a man is hardwired to procreate, protect and provide for his family. He is at risk, like the post aborted woman, for similar psychological and emotional traumas, expressed through symptoms like anger, depression, sexual dysfunction, abuse of drugs or alcohol, guilt, loss of self-esteem, inability to keep relationships, even suicidal thoughts. (There is a proliferation of information and websites on the effects of abortion on men as more and more of them come forward to give their testimonies and to search for healing).

During the recent 40 Days for Life Campaign in Toronto, Canada, a counselor approached a man who was waiting outside an abortion clinic to get some air while his wife was inside for her abortion. After showing him information on the terrible consequences both his wife and unborn baby would suffer, he rushed in to bring her out. He brought her out just in time—to the utter joy of the pro-lifers praying outside.

A wise counselor will not see the man as the adversary, but will appeal to his protective instincts to keep the woman he loves from suffering physical and emotional harm from an abortion. With the proper approach, he can become an ally in the effort to save the baby, thereby saving all three from the tragedy of abortion.

## **There are a few Do's and Don'ts to consider in sidewalk counseling:**

### **Do's:**

*Be spiritually prepared.* Attend mass, if possible, and pray before coming out to the abortion mill.

*Work in pairs.* It is a good safeguard in the event clinic staff may issue a complaint; you have a witness. It is also critical to have a counselor pray while the other is speaking to a woman.

*Be equipped with information.*

*Dress appropriately.* A well-dressed counselor looks like she speaks with authority.

*Pray more and talk less.* It is important to be vigilant; you may miss an opportunity to get to a woman because you are distracted. Chatting and laughing also give the impression that you are not serious about your message.

*Maintain a prayerful presence at all times.*

### **Don'ts:**

*Don't bring signs.* Your objective is to win the woman over; it is best to leave the signs with the picketers. Carrying a sign will intimidate her.

*Don't interrupt when a counselor is engaging a woman in conversation.* There are precious few moments for a counselor to establish a relationship with her. Only

approach if you are invited to do so.

*Don't yell or raise your voice.* The abortion bound woman is already in an agitated state.

*Don't accuse.* She already believes the media that Christians are judgmental and fanatic. Telling her she is going to hell or is a murderer will only harden her heart.

*Don't wear shirts with prolife messages.* You may not be able to extend your help after her abortion.

*Don't stand or walk on clinic property.* Stay on the public sidewalk.

## **Reversing the culture of death into the culture of life:**

No one lives in a vacuum. When a choice is made, its consequences reverberate through a family and into a wider circle of friends. Abortion becomes part of a family culture.

Tina had an abortion some years ago, followed by the abortion of her younger brother's girlfriend not long after. Clearly Tina's choice greatly influenced her brother's. Pregnant with her 2nd child, and opting for another abortion, she came to the St. Juan Diego Center that gave her facts she had never known—consequences on her health, her relationship and her unborn baby. The Community Pregnancy Center showed her the awesome beauty of her unborn child in an ultrasound. When she changed her mind, her joy was electrifying. Equipped with new facts, it is unlikely she would ever influence any one in her family or among her circle of friends to abort their babies again.

Casey, the woman at the late term abortion facility who called the counselors her "angels", had had 3 prior abortions. After her change of heart, she never again considered having an abortion. She had three children eventually.

When a woman in a crisis chooses life, even after prior abortions, she can reverse the culture of death in her family into a culture of life, whereby abortion is no longer seen as an option in an unplanned pregnancy. St. Juan Diego's clientele is largely made up of walk-ins brought by a friend or family member who had a change of heart. The center's best advertising has been through word of mouth.

If the family is the building block of society, then the family must have a culture of life to create a healthy society. Choosing life is essential to building a healthy society. Rebuilding our troubled nation will start with one baby, one mother, one family at a time.

## **Avoiding burnout**

One might wonder how some pro-life people don't burn out even in the face of extremely difficult or discouraging odds. We must always keep in mind that neither

victories nor failures are ours. It is God's fight and we are totally dependent on Him.

### **1. Keep your eye on the prize. Stay focused.**

When you embark on a mission of great spiritual value—the world, the flesh and the devil will go to war with you. You will not feel like getting up in the morning to stand outside an abortion mill, there will be seemingly more important things you would rather do, especially on a Saturday morning. You will not feel like being out in the rain, in the cold, or in the heat. You will feel like your efforts are not making a difference. You will *never* find a counselor who can't wait to get up in the morning to go out to the abortion clinics. A spiritual writer compares succumbing to feelings to a "master of the house who abdicates to his servant the responsibilities of running his household". Following Christ *always* involves an act of the will. Stay focused on Him.

### **2. Offer it up. Never take it personally.**

Light and Darkness converge outside the abortion mills; pro-lifers are the lightning rods. Emotions are heightened at the place where consciences are pricked. You will be called every name in the book, yelled at, accused of hurting women by taking away their right to choose—and even threatened. They will give you the finger. Or worse, the persecution can come from friends and family who think you have taken your beliefs too far. "Can the slave be greater than the Master?" It is Christ's truth that we faithfully defend. We give Him all that we must endure.

### **3. Stay united.**

The devil thrives on division. The Holy Spirit inspires souls in different ways. Your inspirations may not be someone else's. For example, some may think that graphic signs are counter-productive. Crisis pregnancy centers rarely use them in a quiet environment where women can be shown the truth in a different manner.

If abortion is murder, pictures of aborted babies show the awful truth. They have a place in the abortion debate. Displaying them is the last opportunity for those who are abortion bound to see the results of what they intend to do. If you are not comfortable with them, find another mill where you can counsel.

### **4. You are not a one-man crisis pregnancy center.**

An abortion bound woman may have an array of problems that brought her to where she is. A counselor's job is to assist her to a safe place (the crisis pregnancy center or a Project Gabriel parish) where she can work out her situation. You can be a friend, but allow her the space to solve her problems. Remember, you are an inspirational, not a professional counselor.

### **5. Stay in the presence of God.**

Staying in the presence of God keeps a counselor balanced. Invoke the help of the Blessed Mother, your guardian angel and saints in your efforts to save babies. You have innumerable allies in Heaven.

"Where evil abounds, so does grace". God gives us bountiful graces to persevere in the struggle and He will show us His grace operative in the situations we face and the souls He brings to us. We may go through long dry spells of seemingly fruitless efforts, but He will suddenly surprise us with an affirmation of a life saved when we least expect it.

He will bring us wonderful companions on the journey we would never have met in the secular world. He will introduce us to saints of the movement, both in heaven and on earth, who inspire us to stay on course without fear—Bl. Mother Teresa, Pope John Paul II, St. Gianna Molla, Pope Benedict, Dr. Bernard Nathanson (a former abortionist), Joe Scheidler, Mons. Philip Reilly, Fr. Corapi, Fr. Frank Pavone of Priests for Life, Mother Angelica and her EWTN network, and countless others that lead the charge for the pro-life movement.

### **"If you want to grow in faith, join the pro-life movement".**

*That* is a guarantee. A deep spiritual awareness through a renewed spirit of prayer is one of the most wonderful fruits of getting involved with saving lives and souls. It is pure love of neighbor.

If you are looking to grow in holiness, you have come to the right place; there are great spiritual rewards to be gained on the sidewalk. You will come face to face with your own frailties—your impatience, helplessness, spiritual pride, biases from your own experiences, fears, or a lack of charity. Your awareness of these faults will help you to grow in humility. Christ will purify your intentions so you will gain the grace to "be all things to all people" in spite of your weaknesses. In saving another soul, you will save our own.

*"He who causes a sinner to be brought back from his misguided way, will save his soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins."* (James 5:20).

Joe Scheidler, founder of Pro-life Action League, poignantly states that when the time comes for our judgment, and all we have going for us is that we cared, we will hear a chorus of little voices pleading on our behalf saying:

*"Be merciful to him because he loved us."*



References:

American Life League: *The Sidewalk Counselor's Guidebook*  
Seminar by Karen Black  
Prolife Action League: *No Greater Joy—Sidewalk Counseling video*

Prolife literature and websites:

*"making an informed decision about your pregnancy"*  
Frontlines Publishing – order@frontlines.org  
*"Eight-Week Old Developing Baby"* Hayes Publishing Co.  
<http://hayespub.tripod.cpm>  
American Life League—[www.prolifegear.com](http://www.prolifegear.com)  
Heritage House—[www.HH76.com](http://www.HH76.com)  
*"Chicago Method"* [www.prolifeactionleague.org](http://www.prolifeactionleague.org)  
[www.vitaecaringfoundation.org](http://www.vitaecaringfoundation.org)

Post abortion and women websites:

[www.hopeafterabortion.com](http://www.hopeafterabortion.com)  
[www.silentnomoreawareness.org](http://www.silentnomoreawareness.org)  
[www.rachelsvineyard.org](http://www.rachelsvineyard.org)

Post abortion and men websites:

[www.postabortionhelp.org](http://www.postabortionhelp.org)  
[www.menandabortion.info](http://www.menandabortion.info)  
[www.rachel'svineyard.org/men/index/.html](http://www.rachel'svineyard.org/men/index/.html)

Crisis-pregnancy services and information:

St. Juan Diego Society Women's Center  
12 North White Road # 5, San Jose, CA. 92157  
Ph. (408) 258-2008  
Website: <http://jdsomenscenter.org>

Or

Contact: Patsy Gonzalez: e-mail: [patsygee@yahoo.com](mailto:patsygee@yahoo.com)



### **Patsy Gonzalez**

Shortly after experiencing a crisis pregnancy in her family, Patsy moved to the US with her five children in 1989 from the Philippines (a country where the unborn child from the moment of conception is protected by its Constitution). The joy of having her grandson after her daughter's crisis encouraged her to intervene on behalf of unborn babies outside abortion clinics by picketing at mills in San Jose with her children. She later decided to become involved with sidewalk counseling outside a late-term abortion clinic in Redwood City. Patsy and her family also welcomed a few mothers in crisis to live in their home.

After the closing of the late-term mill in 1992, she moved on to the St. Juan Diego Society Women's Center in San Jose, California where she has been counseling women in crisis pregnancies for the last 17 years.

The St. Juan Diego Society Women's Center has seen over 650 babies confirmed saved since it opened in 1986. Patsy has written this little handbook in the hope that through her experience in better understanding the mindset of an abortion bound woman, she may be helpful in forming a more effective sidewalk counselor.

For more copies contact: St. Juan Diego Society Women's Center  
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### *A SIDEWALK COUNSELOR'S PRAYER*

*O my Jesus, I consecrate to You today my efforts to intervene on behalf of Your unborn babies. Enlighten me with the right words to change a mother's heart, to dispel the fears that hinder her from welcoming her precious child. Give me Your heart to love her unconditionally, without judgment, that she may see in me Your infinite mercy. Let my presence be a sign of Your hope which will reverse a decision which will bring her untold suffering. If she does not choose life for her baby, let my presence be a sign of Your forgiveness so that in her pain, she will discover Your merciful love and forgiveness.*

*Like Your Mother who stood at the foot of Your cross, I stand at the foot of the cross of these babies that will die today. I entrust them to Mary, Your mother, who will lavish them with her maternal caresses that they did not receive from their earthly mothers. I desire Baptism for these little ones so they may enjoy eternal happiness with You.*

*Grant me the grace, dear Jesus, to never falter in my mission to defend Your unborn children and help me to grow in the virtues that will assist me in turning the hearts of these mothers in crisis towards Your truth. Expand my capacity to love so that not only mothers and babies will be the focus of my concern but also abortionists, pro-choice legislators, clinic workers and all those who perpetrate abortions because they are the ones in most need of the grace of Your conversion.*

*I offer to You all the persecutions, discomfort, humiliations and discouragement I may suffer. Make me more fruitful through these trials to humble me. Surround me with Your heavenly angels and saints to protect me from all harm and temptation to earthly pride.*

*And lastly, purify my intentions, dear Lord, that I may do all and suffer all for Your glory. I thank You for the gift of my life— and help me to make my life a gift to others. Amen*