



## MEET THE HELPERS OF GOD'S PRECIOUS INFANTS

By Mary Angelita Ruiz

Early morning sun slanted through the beams of the elevated train platform that runs down Roosevelt Avenue in Jackson Heights of Queens, New York. A crowd of some 60 people walked beneath reciting the mysteries of the Rosary, all kept in sync by a gentle voice intoning Hail Marys over a set of walkie-talkies. Hands jostled rosary beads, pictures of Jesus, pink sheets of paper printed with the morning's prayers and hymns. Two men led the group as they carried a four-foot framed icon of the Virgin of Guadalupe, and all along the sidewalks and in passing cars the inhabitants of this Hispanic neighborhood paused to make the sign of the cross.

The crowd came to a halt in the middle of the street, protected by New York City policemen, and turned to face the unassuming upper room of a building on a block crowded with doughnut shops, ATMs, Mexican restaurants, and 99-cent stores—most not yet open. This is an abortion clinic and the crowd had come, not to protest with shouts and judgments, but to pray—in a full minute of silence spent kneeling in the street under the rumbling subway cars—for all who have passed and all who will pass through its doors.

Among this remarkable group are two extraordinary men who've devoted their lives to America's most vulnerable. One is Monsignor Philip J. Reilly, founder of the Helpers of God's Precious Infants, the group which sponsors these vigils each month. The other is Steven McDonald, formerly a detective with the New York City Police Department and now a tireless pro-life activist.



*The Helpers begin with Mass and prayer.*

### Monsignor's mission

Msgr. Reilly has been working for pro-life causes since 1967. "I had been doing anything and everything," he said, "but I was doing it," and that led to frustration in many of his efforts. After 22 years, he said, "I got to the point where I asked God, 'I give up, what do You want me to do?'" Then he

knew the answer was, "Let Jesus take over," for after all, "the purpose of being pro-life is eternal life." Thus Reilly was called to found an apostolate based directly on the example of Christ that would "take seriously the Son and the woman."

"What do [people] have to see in the people present outside the abortion mill, Golgotha?" he asked. "They have to see Christ. The only thing that will move people to leave the culture of death is to meet real Christians, to meet Christ."

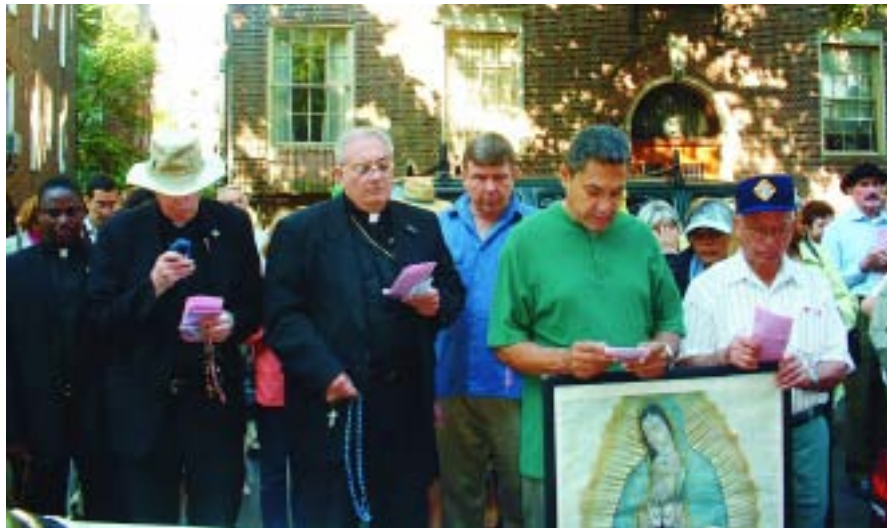
Founded in 1989, the Helpers of God's Precious Infants focus on bringing the love of Jesus to mothers and those who accompany them at abortion clinics each day. There is no official membership: any volunteer who joins the effort, whether by physical or prayerful presence, is considered a Helper. The Helpers sponsor

### Spectacular witness

There are thousands, probably tens of thousands, of spectacular stories associated with the work of the Helpers of God's Precious Infants. Msgr. Philip Reilly jokes that he gets more religious vocations in his present apostolate than he did as rector of a seminary; priest after priest has come from his trenches, and in his first prayer group was Mother Agnes Mary Donovan, now superior general of the Sisters of Life.

The Helpers have saved untold lives. Hints of God's reach through the Helpers are found throughout their newsletters: an abortion clinic closed in Kaufberren, Germany; another closed in Vienna; in 2004, some 1,000 women turned away from two abortion clinics where the Helpers pray on Eight Mile Road in Detroit. On the day of this interview, Msgr. Reilly happily said that while he prayed and counseled that morning at a clinic, nine women turned around and kept their babies.





*Msgr. Reilly and Brooklyn Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio lead the Helpers.*

Mass and Eucharistic adoration in neighborhood churches. They lead rosary walks to abortion clinics and pray each morning outside

those clinics. The Helpers conduct sidewalk counseling and provide spiritual support with personal prayer and sacrifice. Their works

are present in a host of cities across America and numerous countries around the world.

### Tireless apostolate

Msgr. Reilly stresses that the Helpers are an apostolate, and the apostolate cannot begin and end with the life of the preborn child, just as the work of Christ does not begin and end at Calvary. Even if the mother has an abortion, he said, “we must be there for her. Sometimes the child dies before everyone comes to their senses. If she does abort, after four minutes her reaction is usually, ‘Thank God.’ But then after eight minutes, it’s, ‘Oh my God!’ Then there’s

grieving and everyone walks away from the woman because abortion is supposed to be the answer. Tell that to some other fool. I’m outside the abortion clinics every day, and I know what it does.”

“The demonic lie,” he added, is that “abortion brings back yesterday.” Not only does the mother suffer terrible psychological and even physical consequences, but “eternal souls are at risk: Mom and Dad, the doctor, Grandma. Every single child is killed one at a time by the people to whom God entrusted it. Sometimes the mother is the least responsible of the whole bunch.” Therefore, the Helpers are dedicated to providing or finding spiritual, psychological

and material support for every woman they encounter, whether she aborts or chooses to keep her child. Msgr. Reilly said, “Those who have abortions are surprised and grateful when the Helpers are still loving as they come back out.”

Mary Angelita Ruiz is a junior fellow at *First Things*, a journal of religion and public life. See more about The Helpers of God’s Precious Infants online at <http://members.aol.com/infants1>.

E-mail this article from our web site [www.CLMagazine.org](http://www.CLMagazine.org).



### Witness to the power of faith

Steven McDonald is easy to recognize among the Helpers. He is in a motorized wheelchair, paralyzed from the neck down and even to breathe, he needs mechanical assistance. McDonald understands more deeply than others what a miracle life is. In New York media, he’s been cited for his opposition to embryonic stem cell research.

In 1986, McDonald was part of a plainclothes anti-crime unit deployed to Central Park to investigate a pattern of violent crime. The suspects were teenagers.

When on July 12 McDonald and his partner questioned three teenaged boys who fit the description of the suspects, the boys fled, and McDonald and his partner split up to chase them. McDonald managed to stop two, when the third walked up behind him.

“He shot me in the head,” recounted McDonald, “then he shot me in the throat, and as I lay down he shot me a third time. When I was shot I was very frightened. It was painful. It was terrify-

ing. I knew I was dying and I wasn’t ready to. I heard my partner yelling on the radio and I lost consciousness. I heard my partner chase the boys.”



The paramedics found McDonald’s partner “sitting on the ground covered in my blood, holding on to me. They raced to the nearest hospital in Harlem, and in a very short time they came out and told the police commissioner I was going to die.”

The NYPD and the McDonald family sought an emergency second opinion from Bellevue Hospital, where the staff was able to save Steven. Hundreds of police officers, in and out of uniform, thronged to the hospital to be with the McDonald family, especially with his wife, Patti Ann, who was three months pregnant with their son Conor. Then-mayor Ed Koch arrived, as did Cardinal John O’Connor, and they found an incredible witness to the family’s faith.

The family knelt at his bedside praying the Rosary. The cardinal, deeply touched, promised that Mass would be offered in the hospital for as long as the

detective remained there. Although a surgeon had suggested putting Steven in a home, Patti Ann knew that the only way to live was with her husband by her side.

“All the good that came after the shooting came from God,” McDonald said. “He was there in the park, there in the hospital. God was constantly there for me when I was shot, through the shooting and the days after.”

“Mind you, it’s not that there weren’t days I wanted to give up—days I didn’t want to live any more. But God had a larger purpose and a plan for my life.”

McDonald said there were some days he wanted to live on, some days he wanted to die, “but God was always there. I experienced that in the Mass. My mother tells me there was a very memorable day when I was intubated, and I couldn’t receive the Eucharist. The cardinal laid the Eucharist on my forehead. The Mass, the Rosary that they would pray every day, prepared me for this moment.”



Now McDonald is an instantly recognizable figure of the pro-life movement. He speaks at prayer vigils, at elementary and high schools, at community colleges and on national stages. His beloved charity is a home for single pregnant women called Momma’s House in Rockville Centre, New York.

He speaks lovingly of all the people, from young children to adults, whom he educates about respect for life and to whom he reads a prayer called “You Are Special,” taken from the handbook of a group much like the Helpers.

Like Msgr. Reilly, McDonald draws his strength, and the deep love for everyone he encounters, from Christ. McDonald said, “I never thought, in 1986, that I would be doing this. But it

just shows you what God will do if you say ‘Yes.’ Mary of Nazareth is our model of yes, and I think God is calling us wherever we are, whatever our circumstances are, calling us to do something for Him. And I said yes 19 years ago. Not that I always do it right—I’m far from perfect. But I try more times than not to say yes to God, so here I am.”