

St. Juan Diego Women's Center

Help for Pregnant Women and their Babies

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 23, 2018

My First SAVE

By Christine Ibanez, Executive Director

I'm a brand new Executive Director at a Women's Pregnancy Help Clinic in east side San Jose, CA. I've been here 6 months now, and have spent a few off hours "here and there" praying outside our clinic with volunteers and the wonderful people from 40 Days for Life.

But today my life changed.

I joined the Saint Juan Diego Women's Center mid-career, after spending a dozen years in Accounting and Finance. I had worked at start-ups in the illustrious Silicon Valley, had stocks and options that went from boom to bust overnight. I was never fulfilled, and kept seeking the next challenge. One of my best friends and mentors, Board Chair Rafael Betancourt, kept nudging me when the SJDWC Executive Director, Willie Lopus, was planning on retiring. He suffered a heart attack years earlier, but still kept persisting in running the Center. He wanted to leave, but they had not found the right person. I found out now that God was sharpening my sword and preparing me for the biggest challenge in my life. When my last company ran out of venture capital funding, Rafael dove right in with an offer for me to join the Pro-Life movement and bring the Center into the next generation.

I've been on the "fast & furious" path of updating everything about the Center from a business perspective- new website, newsletters delivered via email, social media blasts, donor management system, e-funding and e-donations, accounting back-office automation, and outreaches to young people in the community. As I write this, I'm putting together content to work with young adults and youth with Students for Life in teaching a blend of "Theology of the Body and Pro-Life Apologetics", and booking out the schedule to "wine and dine" with my former colleagues from the business world. Everyone can PRAY for us, everyone can be a Pro-Life Warrior, and if you have a steady paycheck, I'd like a few Dollars for Diapers each month, please.

I took the leap as well to become a Local Coordinator for the 40 Days for Life movement here in East San Jose, CA. We had a campaign up & running in West San Jose, with Rilene Simpson leading the charge. San Jose sadly has 4 Planned Parenthood clinics, with one being right next door to my Pregnancy Center. We had different groups of Prayer Warriors that already came to our clinic on a somewhat regular basis, but we had not officially been part of 40DFL until now. We prayed about it, I filled in the application, found a little pocket of money to fund the costs, and voila- 2 prayer locations in San Jose now open!

We prayed throughout the 40 days at both locations, coordinating prayer groups and sending out the word to local churches, schools, Knights of Columbus, and more. East San Jose was it's own unique situation- it is right next to a Starbucks, a phone store, a WIC distribution center, and a high school, boasting 1,100 students, of whom 78% are Hispanic, and 80% are considered economically disadvantaged. We have fertile ground in our own backyard.

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On our "closing day" for East San Jose was Friday, March 23rd. After a week of rain and freezing cold, we finally had sunshine and warmer weather. The clouds moved constantly overhead, and spring was blooming in cherry trees all around us.

I had taken a crash-course with Sidewalk Advocates for Life, and I consider myself very much a novice at Sidewalk Counseling. I can pray the Rosary with the best of them, and stand in a group holding signs "We are praying for you", "40 Days for Life", "Students for Life", etc. I'm a great keyboard Apologetic, and I love giving talks to youth and young adult groups. But 1:1 with a young girl about to enter the abortion clinic? Not so much experience!

We had finished the Rosary, our mighty group of 6 Prayer Warriors. Our Spanish Advisor, Laura, was handing our Rosaries and prayer cards to passers-by. The rest of us held signs, waved and smiled at the cars passing, and said "good afternoon- buenas dias" to students. They eyeballed us and mostly looked away or kept going, laughing to themselves. We were "old, white farts", yeah. I don't have Street Creds in this neighborhood- I'm the age of their parents, and wrong demographic. LORD, help me! MARY, pray for me!

Laura had to return to our office, so I took over handing out Rosaries/ Rosarios. Teenage girls looked at me clearly like I'd lost my mind, but often took the rosary. "I will pray for you, will you pray for me?" I asked. Um, sure, and they'd shuffle away.

SHE walked by. Alone, scared, disheveled, carrying a large tote bag of belongings. Older teen- maybe young 20's.

I raised my sunglasses, looked her in the eyes and extended my hand, a Rosary in my open palm. "Hi. Would you like a Rosary? It's to pray. I'm Christine. I will pray for you, will you pray for me also? Are you ok today? You look tired, is everything ok?"

She took the pearly white Rosary and clutched it. I looked past to our Senior Counselor, Patsy, and smiled. She glided over, and with the grace of Our Lord, so gently approached. "Are you going in there today?" "Yes", the girl whispered, eyes down to her feet. "I think I'm pregnant again, but don't know which boyfriend did it this time....."

"Would you like a free pregnancy test? It takes just a minute, and I will help you. How about some tea and cookies? It's cold out here, and we have a wonderful and warm place inside". Patsy's arms looked like the wings of an angel as she gently embraced the young girl, and together they walked over to our Center. The young girl looked over her shoulder to me, and gave a little wave, Rosary in her hand.

As I found out later, the pregnancy test was inconclusive, the 2nd line was faint. She was maybe a week overdue, and this early along, it can be difficult to tell without a blood test. She opened up to our counselor- she was between shelters, had a case worker, and was surviving on the streets. She did have a place to go that night, and she and Patsy made an arrangement for her to come back in a few days for another test, have a hot lunch with us, and a safe, warm place to talk. She has had 3 abortions already,

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and said "maybe I won't abort this time..... do you really say you can help me the whole way through this?" YES, oh dear Lord, YES!

Our office is like a living room, we share our lunches every day, there is music, laughter and prayers. We have images of Our Lord and Our Lady of Guadalupe on every wall, and we have a tiny chapel in our kitchen. We are Old School, and amazingly, the environment is comforting to young ladies who cross our threshold. They say they feel like they are in their grandparent's home, and well, yes, we serve tea, biscuits and coffee.

Everything is in God's Hands. I don't know that she'll return, but I am praying on it feverishly today. Will you please pray for "J", that she will accept our open invitation to accept His love, and our support?

Thank you all and God Bless,

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Vision: *A World Without Abortion*

Mission: *To Support women through "Birth and Beyond" and for choosing LIFE for their unborn babies, in a Christ-centered environment.*

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