

Guest Column

Knees on the Ground

Closing three abortion facilities on the U.S.-Mexican border, prayer accomplished what politics couldn't.

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After being condemned to a martyr's death in 1535, the great English attorney St. Thomas More penned *A Devout Prayer*, which ended with a plea of humility: "The things, good Lord, that I pray for, give me the grace to labor for."

This profound final appeal demonstrates how God often answers the prayers of His faithful: by igniting within them a zeal to work toward the very ends for which they pray, no matter the cost or opposition. I have seen this spirit embodied in hundreds of local 40 Days for Life volunteers, leading to the closure of three local abortion centers in just over three years—or more precisely, *exactly 40 months*.

For many years, I focused on abortion solely as a political issue. I grew frustrated by the lack of progress toward a culture of life despite all my time and efforts. This became especially poignant when, in September 2014, a Whole Woman's Health abortion center was announced to open in my hometown of Las Cruces, New Mexico—the "City of the Crosses."

Abortion suddenly became no longer just a political issue to debate on social media or at the ballot box, but a local crisis harming women and children just 50 feet behind our local family pizzeria. With New Mexico being infamous as the "late-term abortion

capital" of the nation, we knew we couldn't turn to our state government for help. Instead, we looked for guidance from 40 Days for Life leaders in our sister city of El Paso, Texas.

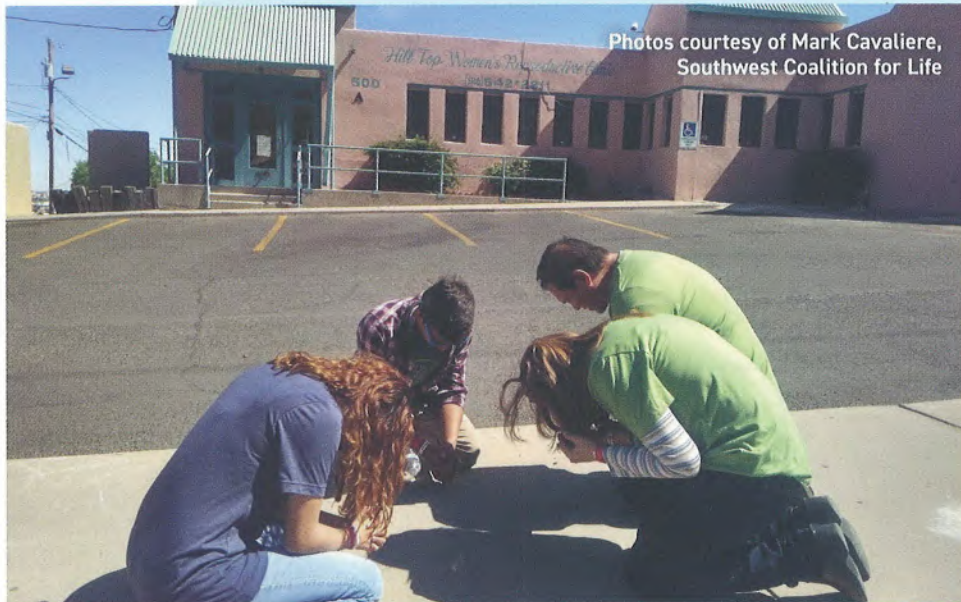
The pro-life movement in El Paso had been running long and strong for many years. In 2007, Gaby Avila moved into a duplex directly behind El Paso's notorious "Hill Top" abortion center. For nearly a decade, she lived humbly and in secret as a full-time pro-life missionary, helping women and saving babies from the traumatic violence of abortion on a daily basis.

I'll never forget the living room meeting where I first met Gaby. For the first time, I was in the presence of someone who didn't just *talk* pro-life and *vote* pro-life and *post* pro-life, but lived it—every waking moment, every breath and fiber of her



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THE ABORTION FACILITY COUNTED ON CAESAR BUT DID NOT COUNT ON THE CHURCH.”



Photos courtesy of Mark Cavaliere, Southwest Coalition for Life

being existed for the singular purpose of sparing the least of those among us from the most brutal violence of abortion.

And at the climax of this faith in action was her co-leadership of a 40 Days for Life campaign. God, in His goodness, has used 40 Days for Life campaigns to save thousands of children, close dozens of abortion facilities, and even help hundreds of abortion workers quit!

All this fruit was not being accomplished through laws and politics, but *in spite of* these temporal hurdles. I discovered a world of Christians not just petitioning Caesar to help our neighbor for us, but humbly getting their knees on the ground to petition our King and turning from our wicked ways so that God will heal our land.

Talk about an “A-ha!” moment. In December 2016, just 27 months after opening and five 40 Days for Life campaigns later, that same Whole Woman’s Health facility—which had bragged about their “freedom” from abortion restrictions in New Mexico during the pro-abortion Obama Administration—closed its doors for the last time, citing financial trouble due to “suddenly not getting enough patients.”

While Whole Woman’s Health had put its faith in secular legislators, we put our faith in Christ and His precepts. The abortion facility counted on Caesar but did not count on the Church—united across denominational, partisan, and even state lines—showing up to help the very women whom Whole Woman’s Health intended to exploit for profit.

The Holy Spirit then fanned that spark into a wildfire, uniting thousands in peaceful vigil across the larger

Borderland region. In July 2018, we witnessed God close a second abortion facility, Reproductive Services, after 45 years in El Paso. Encouraged by this momentum, people gave even more sacrificially of their time, talent, and treasure, forming unbroken chains of literal knees-on-the-ground prayer and full-time year-round outreach.

After months of hopeful signs, in April of 2020, El Paso’s notorious Hill Top center became our third local abortion facility to shut its doors for the last time—after 36 years in operation. With three local facilities closed in just over three years and just two left to go, our new goal is to see God go five for five!

Our movement is about to face some very challenging times. Do not despair, but instead roll up your sleeves and say, “Challenge accepted.” Yes, as our signs say, we pray to end abortion.

But are you ready to labor for it?



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