

Devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe keeps pro-life message in sight

By Jean M. Schildz
Review Staff Writer

Our Lady of Guadalupe has been watching over the St. Louis area from above for some time. A local pro-life group is seeking continued donations to keep her there.

Two billboards display the Blessed Mother's image as the "Empress of the Americas." The signs also include the images of three children and the message, "Love your babies ... born and unborn."

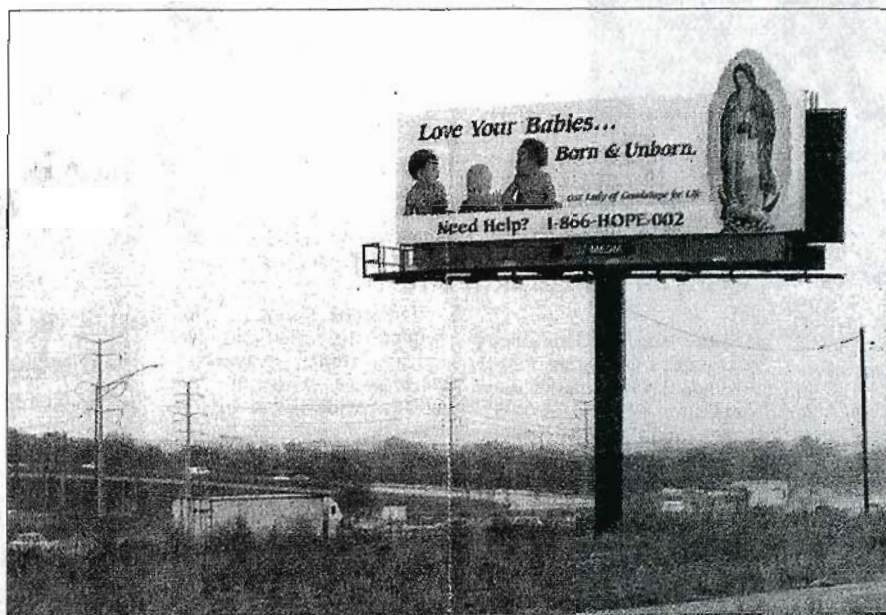
Our Lady of Guadalupe for Life, the group sponsoring the billboards, is identified on the signs along with the telephone number, (866) HOPE-002 (467-3002). Callers are connected to Catholic Services for Children and Youth, a Catholic Charities of St. Louis agency.

The pro-life group's first sign went up at Interstate 44 and state Highway 141 on Oct. 1, 2002, at the beginning of Respect Life Month and has been there ever since. A second billboard conveying the same message, which has been up since January 2003 at various locations, is now at Interstate 370 and Cave Springs Road. Both boards are lighted for viewing day and night.

The signs offer help to all in need, but particularly to those who may be considering an abortion.

About 130,000 vehicles pass the two signs daily. More than 45 million vehicles travel by the billboards in a year's time, estimated Anna Maria Usselmann, Our Lady of Guadalupe for Life board president and member of Assumption Parish in Mattese.

Additional board members and their parishes are Lu Curtin, secretary/treasurer, St. Catherine



MARIAN BRICKNER

SOMEONE TO WATCH OVER US — Traffic streams by one of two area pro-life billboards displaying an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe. This sign is located at the intersection of Interstate 44 and state Highway 141. The other is at Interstate 370 and Cave Springs Road. About 130,000 vehicles pass the two signs daily. A local pro-life group is seeking continued donations to keep the signs up.

Laboure in Sappington; Jadenne Meyer, St. Catherine Labourer; Mary Hodge, Ascension in Chesterfield; Eileen Summers, St. Boniface in South St. Louis; and Steve Vogel, Epiphany of Our Lord in South St. Louis.

Usselmann said it was Mary's wish that billboards with her image as Our Lady of Guadalupe be placed on St. Louis-area highways.

The signs offer help to all in need, but particularly to those who may be considering an abortion, she said.

Having seen the Marian image and message, expectant mothers have changed their minds about having an abortion "and instead they

saved the lives of those babies," Usselmann said. "So this is how important the billboard is."

Linda Young, director of development for Catholic Services for Children and Youth, said her agency has received and continues to receive calls for assistance as a result of the billboards' message.

"It's working. People do respond to it, and it's helpful to young ladies," Young said.

Those who call often respond to the agency's expectant parent services and adoption services. The agency also refers callers to other services and resources where applicable as needed.

Our Lady of Guadalupe for Life would like to display more billboards in the area but needs

additional donations to do so, said Curtin, the group's secretary and treasurer.

To date the nonprofit organization has been able to keep two billboards up mainly through the donations of individuals and a few parish pro-life groups and Knights of Columbus councils. Keeping the two signs in place costs about \$3,000 a month.

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It has been a struggle at times to get the money, Usselmann said. "Sometimes I lose sleep over it and implore the Blessed Sacrament for help because this is (Mary's) wish and we must obey and continue forward."

The pro-life group perseveres in its effort, she said, because "we need our Mother to help, to heal our country. She is the most powerful one who will save our children. ... Many, many souls, many, many lives we want to save. This is all we want to do for our dear Lord."

Added Curtin, "Just people looking at Our Lady are converted. They don't need to call the phone number. They're just converted there by looking at her."

People also may send prayer requests and intentions to Our Lady of Guadalupe for Life. The group's faithful keep the petitions in their prayers during daily holy hours.

Donations may be sent to Our Lady of Guadalupe for Life, P.O. Box 22024, St. Louis, MO 63126. Make checks payable to Our Lady of Guadalupe for Life.