

SENIOR LIFESTYLES

Volunteer saves babies by caring for mothers

By Lisa Benoit
Catholic News Service

PEARL CITY, Hawaii — Four teens slip through the door of the Problem Pregnancy Center in Pearl City at 2:15 p.m., minutes before the end of Geri Canubida's watch.

She had been expecting them. After 23 years on the job, she knew she would see the young face behind the anonymous phone call made an hour earlier asking the center's closing time.

The retired Catholic schoolteacher, a native of Brooklyn, N.Y., spends Wednesday afternoons helping young women make the most critical decision of their lives — determining the fate of their unborn child.

"These girls are so frightened — you just feel for them," said Canubida, who herself has been battling for her own life, against cancer, for eight years. "And so we are there. The most important thing is that we provide a Christlike atmosphere for these girls to come to."

Canubida, a member of Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish in Ewa Beach on Oahu, first began counseling pregnant women in 1977.

At the beginning, she said, "I was so focused on the baby that I wasn't even looking at the girl. And I was getting angrier and angrier that people would choose to do that (have an abortion). I felt like it wasn't working."

In the early 1980s, Canubida decided to quit volunteering. One Saturday, while driving her car to the pregnancy center, a warning light flashed on the dashboard of her car. She stopped at a gas station for help. Recognizing her, the mechanic asked her if she still "did that work."

Unsure of how he knew her, she asked him what he meant. He said he was now married and that his wife had given birth to a boy. Canubida had helped the couple.

"I went flying out of there and I felt like

the Lord was telling me to stay," she recalled in an interview with the *Hawaii Catholic Herald*, newspaper of the Honolulu Diocese.

A little while later, she read a book that changed her approach to those she counseled — *Silent Holocaust* by Jesuit Father John Powell. Canubida said that at the end of the book, a pregnant girl walks out of the priest's office and asks him, "I know you love the baby, but do you love me, too?"

"In this book he shares that these women are the victims of abortion and we need to concentrate on them," she said. "If we don't show them Christ, then we haven't done anything."

Canubida said that the age range of girls who typically come to the center is 15 to 21 years old, but she has had women as young as 14 and as old as 45.

The girls are identified on the center's medical client cards by first name only and date of birth.

During a visit, Canubida first gives the girl a pregnancy test. While awaiting the results, she shows them an informational video, and afterward counsels the girl and any friends who may have accompanied her.

With the girl's permission, she asks three questions: "What does being pregnant mean to you?" "What is an abortion?" "Is abortion morally right to you?"

Canubida said that regardless of their history, she also stresses chastity to those she counsels and tries to help them see why they should save sex for marriage.

To those who learn they are pregnant, Canubida says: "Congratulations. You might think that is awful, but I believe that baby is a gift from God and there is a reason for everything."

She also tells them "that they can handle it" along with the fear that their parents will be angry.

Her hour or two with a girl is the only chance she has to help her through her



Lisa Benoit/Hawaii Catholic Herald

Gerri Canubida, a volunteer at the Pregnancy Problem Center in Pearl City, Hawaii, has spent 23 years counseling women in crisis pregnancy situations.

trauma.

"You really never know (what they'll do). It's in the Lord's hands," she said. "You do the best you can and leave it up to him. When I come home and when I go to Mass, I pray for the girls I saw."

For those who choose abortion, the ex-

perience will not be easily forgotten, noted Canubida, who has counseled many women suffering trauma in the aftermath of abortion. She added that the biggest surprise in counseling pregnant teens is the number of mothers who urge their daughters to have abortions.

Happy 100th to ...

Delia Sanzo Chiappone, a parishioner at Holy Rosary Church, Rochester, turns 100 on Sunday, Feb. 18. When asked the secret of her longevity, Chiappone replied with a laugh: "I wish I knew myself. I can't believe I reached it myself. I think it's God's will."

Chiappone was born in Hulberton, Orleans County, and grew up in Holley. At age 18, she married Michael Chiappone and moved to Rochester where the couple had three children, including fraternal twins. She worked for several years as a clerk at the old Neisner Bros. store on Main Street.

Her husband died in 1961 and, for the past 33 years, Chiappone has lived

with her daughter, Rosaline Cerone, in Rochester. Chiappone has eight grandchildren (another one is deceased) and eight great-grandchildren, and both generations have a set of fraternal twins.

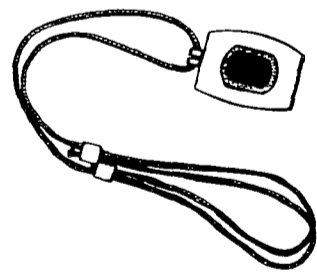
Her family and friends will hold a party Sunday at her home to mark her first century. Chiappone regularly went to church until a year ago, but receives Communion at home now because the winter conditions make it difficult for both her and her daughter to get out. Chiappone said she is grateful for her long life and her daughter added that Chiappone regularly prays for everyone.

"I hope many, many other people get to reach my age," she said.

—Rob Cullivan

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