

# Calling St. Polycarp

✖ When Marilyn Szewczyk was about to launch a network of pro-life pregnancy centers in Maryland, she turned to St. Polycarp for help. Reasoning that the obscure early Christian martyr didn't have many people asking for his intercession, Szewczyk figured she'd have easy access to his ear.

Lynn Anne Sukeena, one of Szewczyk's daughters, told me that her late mom put St. Polycarp to the test before selecting him. When a pro-life lobbying group was looking for office space in Annapolis, Szewczyk prayed to St. Polycarp. Sure enough, a prime spot was located in the State House. That was enough for Szewczyk, who officially named him the patron saint of her outreach network, Pregnancy Center, Inc.

Thirty years later, the network is thriving – as noted in this story in last week's Catholic Review.

St. Polycarp is apparently more busy than people think.

Barbara Dean, former parish relations manager for The Catholic Review, e-mailed me last week to tell me of her own encounters with the saintly bishop of Smyrna (in what is now Turkey). Ben, her youngest son, decided to take St. Polycarp as his confirmation name. He will receive the sacrament in June at St. John the Evangelist in Severna Park, where Barbara Dean works in the parish office.

When Ben told his mother of his selection, Dean looked at him quizzically and told him to stop making up names.

After discovering from co-workers at St. John that St. Polycarp was indeed real, Dean apologized to her son and read a report he had written on St. Polycarp for his confirmation class.

"I went to daily Mass on his feast day (Feb. 23)," Dean said, "to show my respect to this wonderful saint and ask for forgiveness since I didn't think he was a real saint at all when my son mentioned his crazy name."

Dean said St. Polycarp is now constantly popping up in her life. She recently received an unsolicited mailing at work that contained a plastic tab for a key ring. On one side was an image of Christ on the cross. On the other was a quote from St. Polycarp that read, "If we pray to the Lord to forgive us, we ourselves must be forgiving. We are all under the eyes of the Lord."

"It is now hanging on my key ring," Dean said, "and I am finding that St. Polycarp is a very special saint. I wish more people knew about him."

Time to put St. Polycarp on my list of intercessors.