

Prayerfully expecting: A nine-month novena for mothers-to-be

By **SUSAN BRINKMANN**
CS&T CORRESPONDENT

When a woman writes a book in the middle of a crisis pregnancy, it's bound to be special. And when that manuscript has been reviewed and blessed by Blessed Teresa of Calcutta, it becomes unique.

That was the case with the Catholic writer Donna-Marie Cooper O'Boyle, who was 10-weeks pregnant with her fifth child when profuse hemorrhaging made doctors think she was about to miscarry. With her youngest child still in diapers, and her oldest only 13, she was put on complete bedrest.

"My doctor didn't have a hopeful attitude," O'Boyle said from her home in Litchfield County, Conn. "He said to me one time, 'I almost wish you'd hurry up and have this miscarriage.' Those words were like a sword through my heart because I had such hope. ... I was hoping and praying. Every time I went to get another ultrasound, it always showed a tiny, beating heart."

Then, in the midst of trying to run her household from her bed and living room couch, O'Boyle began to feel inspired: "It all came to me in a moment that a pregnancy is actually a nine-month novena. It's a living novena to God. I decided to start writing down reflections on motherhood and pregnancy."

"Prayerfully Expecting: A Nine Month Novena for Mothers to Be" was born before the delivery of her daughter, Mary-Catherine, who is now 16 years old.

"I didn't pursue publishing it right away because I was so busy with my children," O'Boyle said regarding the years that passed before the book was published in 2007 by Crossroad Publishing.

But she did take the time to send the manuscript to a dear friend to review — Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta, founder of the Missionaries of Charity.

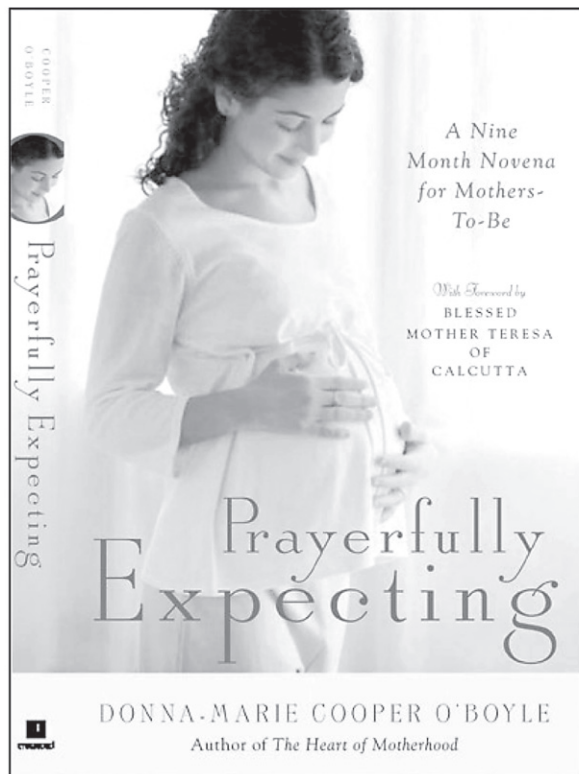
O'Boyle met Mother Teresa about 20 years ago in the order's Gift of Peace House in Washington, D.C., when she and Mother Teresa attended the same Mass. Afterward, O'Boyle's daughter, Chaldea, genuflected in front of the Blessed Sacrament and Mother Teresa was so impressed with the child she came up to give her a big hug.

The meeting was the beginning of a decades-long friendship in which O'Boyle met with Mother Teresa at least a dozen times and received 22 letters from her.

"I would share my writing with her in my letters, and sent her the manuscript that I wrote during this pregnancy. She read it and had her spiritual director go over it," O'Boyle said.

Family concerns and her work as a lay Missionary of Charity kept O'Boyle too busy to pursue publication until October 2005, when she put together "The Catholic Mother's Prayer Book" for Our Sunday Visitor, which was also based on reflections that also came out of her crisis pregnancy. A second book, "The Heart of Motherhood," was published by Crossroad in 2006.

"Prayerfully Expecting" is designed to be a keepsake for



information about the biological changes taking place in the baby during each month of the pregnancy — informing mothers, for instance, that their baby will experience the greatest increase in size and physical change of its entire life during the first four weeks of its existence.

She also includes many excerpts from Church teachings that affirm family values as well as the dignity of women.

"The book is meant to help transform pregnancy into a beautiful, living novena to God," O'Boyle said.

"It should help the expectant mother be more peaceful and more in touch with that life growing within her, and to start praying for that unborn baby right from the start," she said. "It also encourages the dad to put his hand on her abdomen in the morning or the evening, and say a prayer together in blessing of the baby."

The book has space for mothers-to-be to write down what they're thinking and feeling, as well as blank pages for ultrasound pictures, or to write a personal blessing for the baby.

"It's a keepsake for the mother and a baby book for the unborn," O'Boyle said. "It's yours to write on, to pray with, and, hopefully, to look back on years later to reflect on that beautiful time," she said.

The book includes a foreword and blessing by Mother Teresa and an apostolic blessing from Pope John Paul II.

"Let us pray that we women realize the reason of existence is to love and be loved," Mother Teresa said in the foreword she wrote in 1991, "and through this love become an instrument of peace."

O'Boyle's book may be ordered through her Web site at www.donnacooperoboyle.com; from Crossroads Publishing Company at www.cpcbooks.com, or by calling 800-707-0670.



Contact Susan Brinkmann at fiat723@aol.com or (215) 965-4615.



Joseph, Donna-Marie Cooper O'Boyle son, with Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta in 1989 in a New Jersey convent. Mother Teresa was rejoicing in Joseph's birth after a difficult pregnancy.

mothers-to-be. It contains prayers to two great intercessors for expectant mothers — St. Anne, the mother of Mary, and St. Gerard Majella — as well as reflections, rosary meditations and excerpts of Church teachings for each month of pregnancy.

"I wanted to let expectant moms know which saints they could call upon for help, and to put it in a format that's all mapped out," O'Boyle said.

In the book's introduction, she suggests that when using the book, mothers should try to put themselves into a spiritual and prayerful frame of mind: "You may want to ask our Lord to enlighten your mind and strengthen you both physically and spiritually during this novena of preparation for the birth of your child," she writes. "Ask also for all the graces possible to become the mother that you are destined to be."

In addition to suggesting prayers, she also includes infor-



(courtesy photo)

Donna-Marie Cooper O'Boyle with Mother Teresa of Calcutta in 1988. O'Boyle was pregnant with her son, Joseph, at the time of this photo. Mother Teresa put her hand on O'Boyle's abdomen to bless the unborn baby.