

Understanding our Icon

WE HAVE ONLY ONE APPROVED IMAGE TO REPRESENT THE GABRIEL PROJECT

Our message to pregnant mothers is represented by word and image on our church signs and literature (see poster at bottom of page).

Our message is an offer of support and a sign of hope. In fact, we refer to our sign as a "sign of hope" rather than a "sign of life" and depict our message utilizing the *traditional* Gabriel Project icon rather than the *Madonna of the Streets* painting as some other Gabriel Projects do. The reasons why are important.

The purpose of our signs and literature is to reach out to pregnant mothers, not potential volunteers or supporters. It is only the mother's emotional reaction that is important. We need to be concerned with how pregnant mothers may perceive our message and with their impression of how we perceive their situation. We want them to feel a sense of hope and welcoming.

The angel in our icon not only represents the message Archangel Gabriel gave to Mary and we extend to pregnant mothers. He also represents the parish community and our individual parish "angels". He is a symbol of protection, ours and God's. The mother in the icon embraces her child *and motherhood* with confidence and she too is a symbol of protection. The child in the icon rests peacefully in the arms of mother.

Below is an excerpt of a critique I read of the *Madonna of the Streets* (also known as *Madonna of the Poor*)*.

The focal point is the girl's face with its pleading and expressive countenance. It is wrapped in a gold colored headdress, the only warm color of the whole painting. The blues and grays and dirty whites of mother's and child's dress and of the whole backdrop suggest hardship, toil and poverty. There is a contrast between Mother and child: while the child is safely cuddled and asleep in the arms of his mother, the mother appears to be standing on somebody's doorstep begging for shelter and food.

You may see the painting differently, but I think there is enough truth in the above critique to avoid usage of this painting to represent our ministry. I don't think our potential clients would welcome being portrayed in that way or being perceived as someone whose personal circumstances should arouse pity. They might even be discouraged from calling the Helpline. Worse yet, they might think, "If I have this baby, I'll be like the girl in this painting. I really can't afford to have this baby". Many parents abort their children because they believe they can't afford to raise them. If a potential client is impoverished, we want our sign to elicit hope, not reflect her current situation which she may fear will worsen with the birth of her child.

Please only use our approved icon on any literature, poster or webpage you prepare for advertising The Gabriel Project.

*Though many people have conceived this beautiful painting as portraying Mary and Jesus, this was not the artist's intention. It is actually a painting of an eleven year-old girl holding her one year-old brother. The artist called the painting *Madonnina* (Little Mother). It eventually gained world fame and came to be known as *Madonna della Strada* (Madonna of

the Streets), also known as *Madonna of the Poor*. It is revered by many as a holy image of Mary and Jesus and a spiritual interpretation could be made when viewing it in that way, however that is not the issue here.

Fredi D'Alessio 9/12/2011(excerpted from team memo)