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## **"You can still find a village in the city"**

Julie received difficult news after the delivery of her sixth child: due to an infection from the epidural needle, her body was partially paralyzed. When her friends learned of her situation, they started planning how to support the family over the next several months. Julie narrates her own story.

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The delivery did not go as expected. I suffered a very rare complication

called “epidural abscess.” A bacterium (MRSA) got into the epidural needle and caused an infection in my central nervous system. They operated on me, but I was unable to move and had to remain in a wheelchair with no sensation in my lower body. It was dramatic for our family because we have six young children, including the newborn.

When we discovered the extent of my injury and how slow the recovery would be, many people offered to help us. Some friends bought a wheelchair, while others paid for an orthopedic chair, a special air mattress, a chair for the bathroom, and all sorts of other things I wrote about in a WhatsApp group.

Many friends gave us financial help without us asking for it. Thanks to that and to recommendations from two others, two physical therapists

came to my house to work with me from the very beginning, which helped with my recovery. A nurse friend offered to help out free of charge, doing all sorts of things, from changing diapers to giving injections.

We were overwhelmed by the love we received as a family during this difficult time. Hundreds of people sent messages saying they were praying for us. We also received relics and water from Lourdes and two rosaries, one of which was blessed by Msgr. Fernando Ocariz, the Prelate of Opus Dei.

I returned home after a few days, and then it was time to coordinate the domestic logistics. When my husband and I were trying to coordinate schedules and create a detailed list of chores, some friends phoned, offering to bring dinner daily and put the children to bed on weekends. One of my husband's

friends even showed up at our door to pick up three huge bags of accumulated laundry and returned them washed and folded.

We did not have enough regular income to pay a maid, but our friends generously and cheerfully helped us. They came at seven in the morning to help my husband and returned at night, even telling stories to our children to put them to sleep. Their closeness extended to weekends, when they took our children for walks in the park and other places.

Little by little, encouraged by the constant and indispensable support we were receiving, we were able to face the obstacles before us. We did not always find solutions and were not always able to maintain our serenity, but I believe that God granted me his help through the prayers of so many people.

For example, the principal of one of our children's schools took my son to the chapel, and they prayed together for my health. My husband went to Mass at that school and was surprised to hear the priest say that he would offer the Mass for my recovery.

Over the last few months, I have shared some reflections on the events in a WhatsApp group. Everyone comments on how much it touches them, how eager they are to hear about my progress, and how much they are praying for us. I am convinced that I am sustained by the daily communion, which several priests take turns bringing to our home.

These are just a few examples of the huge network of people that has become incredibly visible in this family crisis. We have never felt alone, which is the worst type of

suffering. I have never felt helpless. I feel a supernatural strength that keeps me cheerful and optimistic about my recovery most of the time. How can I be discouraged when so many people are praying for me and are opening their hearts to me, wanting to do anything they can to help us?

As a supernumerary of Opus Dei, I have felt that this family with supernatural bonds, which helps materially and spiritually, does not replace the natural family. It is actually bigger than the natural family, and it embraces and supports it.

Several months have passed and I still cannot stand or walk without support, but I now can feel and move much more. I have exceeded the doctors' expectations. They are amazed to see my progress, as the

usual prognosis for nerve recovery is slow.

It has not been an extraordinary miracle like that of someone unable to walk who then stands up. This is an ordinary miracle, spread out over the weeks, with material aids and daily and constant prayers. This is the kind of daily, ordinary holiness that we members of Opus Dei strive to practice. The hope that has sustained me during this miracle of my recovery tells me that it will be total.

The Pope speaks a lot about the loneliness and individualism of our times, but in this trial, I have seen the generosity and love of the many people who are close to us. As a family, we have learned that it is possible to share suffering with others, making it lighter. You can still find a village in the city, a village in

which there is mutual help and  
friendship.

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