

Setting a Place at the Table: Living Our Missionary Call

Dignity of Human Life



A Quick Summary

The Catholic Church proclaims that human life is sacred and that the dignity of the human person is the foundation of a moral vision for society. This belief is the foundation of all the principles of our social teaching. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops states that "as a gift from God, every human life is sacred from conception to natural death.

The life and dignity of every person must be respected and protected at every stage and in every condition. The right to life is the first and most fundamental principle of human rights that leads Catholics to actively work for a world of greater respect for human life and greater commitment to justice and peace"

"As pastors and teachers, we proclaim that human life is a precious gift from God; that each person who receives this gift has responsibilities toward God, self, and others; and that society, through its laws and social institutions, must protect and nurture human life at every stage of its existence" (USCCB, 2001). This is not just a task we are concerned about promoting in our own country. Our responsibility is to the whole world. As Catholics, we are called to ensure that each human being's fundamental right to life and dignity is upheld.





In the *Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities: A Campaign in Support of Life* the Catholic Bishops have invited us to rededicate ourselves to restoring respect and legal protection for every human life from conceptual beginning to natural end. The document calls for an intensive educational effort in the Catholic community and is grateful to those who participate in the Church's teaching ministry. We encourage you to go to a computer and use the resources of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops at www.usccb.org where there is a wealth of information to help you prayerfully consider how you will champion the Gospel call to creating a Culture of Life.

Key Terms

Gospel of Life: As Catholics, we believe that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is a "Gospel of life." It invites all persons and societies to a new life lived abundantly in respect for human dignity. (USCCB, *Living the Gospel of Life*, #20).

Genocide: deliberate and systematic destruction of a racial, political or cultural group.

Migration: to move from one country, place or locality to another.



Fast Facts

- There are over 460 Scripture references to the word "Life" in the Bible
- Executions from the Death Penalty in the U. S. between 1976 and June of 2005= 962, 10 were women. (U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, and Death Penalty Information Center)

- There are over 740 million internal migrants (within their own country) and 214 million international migrants. That's nearly 1 billion people on the move! (Human Development Report 2009, UNDP).
- Over the course of approximately 100 days, an estimated 800,000 people were killed during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda.

Some Helpful Quotes

"Prayer is the foundation of all that we do in defense of human life. Our efforts- whether educational, pastoral, or legislative- will be less than fully fruitful if we do not change hearts and if we do not ourselves overcome our own spiritual blindness. Only with prayer - prayer that storms the heavens for justice and mercy, prayer that cleanses our hearts and our souls - will the culture of death that surrounds us today be replaced with a culture of life."

www.usccb.org/about/pro-life-activities/pastoral-plan-prolife-activities.cfm

"A great prayer for life is urgently needed, a prayer which will rise up throughout the world. Through special initiatives and in daily prayer, may an impassioned plea rise to God...Let us therefore discover anew the humility and the courage to pray and fast so that the power from on high will break down the walls of lies and deceit; the walls which conceal from the sight of so many...the evil of practices and laws which are hostile to life." -Pope John Paul II, *The Gospel of Life*, no. 100

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"In the bread of life, the Eucharist offers us abundant life. It gathers in all the justice issues around life and quality of life. It speaks to the life of the individual and life of society. It links human life and human dignity. It challenges us to seek a place at the table of life for all God's children." (Promoting Life and Dignity Around the World, Sr. Margaret Scott, 2005 on www.usccb.org).

Quick and Easy Lesson Plan Activities

1) Use a concordance (text and on-line version) to show the children how to locate over 460 references to the word "life" in Scripture. Encourage students to look up a variety of passages, read and reflect upon them, then select one to spend more time pondering. Students may choose to write a prayer or journal entry. Students may choose to use the Scripture reference in response to a "letter to the editor". Students may choose to make a greeting card for someone they love and include

the Scripture reference as an encouragement. Students may write to inmates on death row and offer hope via the Scripture reference. Students may choose to illustrate the Scripture or create a religious cartoon.

2) Define *Genocide*. Have students research threats of *Genocide* around the globe (Israel, Rwanda, Armenia...). How do threats of *Genocide* affect our human experience? What can be done to show our solidarity with those from different cultures around the globe and promote the cause of peace and the culture of life?

3) Migration is a phenomenon that has been a reality for thousands of years. Consider the Old Testament story of the Israelites wandering in the desert for 40 years looking for a home or of the New Testament story of The Holy Family's escape to Egypt to avoid the wrath of King Herod after the birth of Jesus. Today, our world faces the same challenges regarding migration but in an ever intense way. Many migrants are fleeing persecution whether it be religious or during times of civil war. Others are leaving their homelands in order to find a better life for themselves and their families as their countries of origin offer no opportunities and only a life of utter poverty. In all cases, our Catholic tradition teaches us to welcome these brothers and sisters saying "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me" (Mt 25:35). We also hear the Apostle Paul state "There is neither Jew nor Greek . . . for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). As members of the Body of Christ, we are all one human family in the eyes of God, equal in dignity and rights. How are we called to welcome the stranger in our communities? For younger students talk about this as from the perspective of a new student in school or an immigrant family who has moved in next door. How do we show them the dignity that they deserve even though we may be different in language, culture and customs- yet created and loved in God's likeness and image? Discuss how we can learn from each other's differences and also find many things that we share in common and how this can be the bridge between developing relationships that respect human life and human dignity. For older students, encourage them to research more thoroughly the causes of migration around the world and specific example of where it is taking place. A great resource for migration to the U.S. and the Catholic call to action is through the Justice For Immigrants Campaign of the USCCB.

www.justiceforimmigrants.org

3) Sort photos or pictures clipped from magazines to make a collage of the culture of life; be sure to include diversity of ages, races, abilities, etc. so that no group is

left out. Post the collage as a banner in public view. Decide upon an appropriate title/message to post with the collage that promotes life.

5) Discuss the difference between being pro-birth and truly pro-life. Consider these words from [Living the Gospel of Life, no. 22](#):

To focus on the evil of deliberate killing in abortion and euthanasia is not to ignore the many other urgent conditions that demean human dignity and threaten human rights. Opposing abortion and euthanasia "does not excuse indifference to those who suffer from poverty, violence and injustice. Any politics of human life must work to resist the violence of war and the scandal of capital punishment. Any politics of human dignity must seriously address issues of racism, poverty, hunger, employment, education, housing and health care" (*Living the Gospel of Life, no. 22*).

How can we promote a vision of pro-life that takes into account the importance of promoting human life and human dignity in all areas from conception to natural death?

6) Have children clip newspaper articles of current events that involve crime. Pray for both the victim(s) and the alleged perpetrator(s). Pray for justice and reconciliation. Ask, "What would Jesus do?" Discuss how healing might be brought about in the context of Christ and the desires of His heart in these situations.

Scripture

[Deuteronomy 30:19](#)

Choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live.

[Exodus 20:13](#)

You shall not kill.

[Genesis 1:26-31](#)

God created man and woman in his image.

[Deuteronomy 10:17-19](#)

God loves the orphan, the widow, and the stranger.

[Psalms 139:13-16](#)

God formed each of us and knows us intimately.

[Proverbs 22:2](#)

The Lord is the maker of both rich and poor.

[Luke 10:25-37](#)

The good Samaritan recognized the dignity in the other and cared for his life.

[John 4:1-42](#)

Jesus broke with societal and religious customs to honor the dignity of the Samaritan woman.

[Romans 12: 9-18](#)

Love one another, contribute to the needs of others, live peaceably with all.

[1 Corinthians 3:16](#)

You are holy, for you are God's temple and God dwells in you.

[Galatians 3:27-28](#)

All Christians are one in Christ Jesus.

[James 2:1-8](#)

Honor the poor.

[1 John 3: 1-2](#)

See what love the Father has for us, that we should be called Children of God.

[1 John 4:7-12](#)

Let us love one another because love is from God

Papal Encyclicals/Church Documents

Centesimus Annus, #11 (On the Hundredth Year) - Pope John Paul II, 1991

Spe Salvi (Saved in Hope) - Pope Benedict XVI, 2007

Evangelium Vitae, #3, #54 (The Gospel of Life) - Pope John Paul II, 1995

Catechism of the Catholic Church #1958

Gaudium et Spes, #27 (The Church in the Modern World) - Second Vatican Council, 1965

Caritas en Veritate, #32 (Charity in Truth) - Pope Benedict XVI, 2005