



Diocese of Joliet

Office of the Bishop

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Each October in our country we Catholics observe “Respect Life” month as a reminder of our responsibility to work tirelessly for the building of a culture of life. This is a serious, solemn responsibility – but it is also an expression of our unwavering hope in God! The theme of this year’s observance – “Hope and Trust in Life” – is taken from the words of Pope Benedict XVI. He calls us to proclaim the gift of life, to serve life, and to promote a culture of life, with the sure confidence that in doing so we give hope to the world.

Our belief in the sacredness of life flows from Sacred Scripture, which teaches that we are made in God’s image and likeness. Of all the magnificent beauty of the world and its creatures – all created by God – only the human person is God’s image and likeness! That profound truth undergirds and enlivens our work toward building a culture of life, a culture which sees the image of God in every human person.

It has been the constant teaching of the Church that life begins at conception. In fact, it was not the birth of Jesus that was first announced by an angel – it was his conception in the womb of Mary! From the beginning, Christians sharply distinguished themselves from the pagan cultures that surrounded them by rejecting abortion and infanticide. It would have been inconceivable to profess that we are made in God’s image and likeness and then snuff out a human life.

That human life begins at conception is a scientifically observable fact. Thus, from conception all humans have rights – including the right not to be killed! Opposition to abortion, then, is a matter of human rights, not religious opinion. The Catholic Church does not seek to impose its belief on others; it seeks instead to call everyone to recognize the observable fact that life begins at conception and to further recognize the dignity of the unborn child as well as his or her right to live.

Based on this fundamental and undeniable premise, Catholic teaching goes much further. Our concern stretches from abortion to euthanasia, to serving the poor, and to the death penalty. Being Pro-Life means that we will respect others and treat them in a way that is consistent with the dignity God has

given them. No one can ever be cast aside, ignored, or forgotten because they are deformed, sick, elderly, foreign, poor, or in prison. To the contrary, they are the ones who have a claim on us precisely because we are Christian! The Catholic Church in this country has a proud heritage of demonstrating its commitment to life through outreach to all in need, particularly the most vulnerable. Did you know, for example, that we are one of the largest providers of social services in this country, second only to the federal government? As Jesus told us, "Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40).

God's will is life: the life of the unborn, the full life of infants born to poor mothers and fathers, the nourished life of the hungry, the sheltered life of the homeless, the safe and peace-filled life of the elderly and handicapped, the forgiven and transformed life of those who have done serious wrong, the faith-fulfilled life of people like you and I who see the will of God as the only right choice.

This annual observance of Respect Life month gives us an opportunity to thank those who have worked tirelessly to defend the sacredness of life from the moment of conception to natural death and to re-commit ourselves to respecting life at every opportunity, each day of our lives, in every person we meet. Together may we continue to build the Culture of Life!

Sincerely in Christ,

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J. Peter Sartain  
Bishop of Joliet

