

JPIC Corner

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Coordinator's Note

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The Right to Life

Pope Benedict XVI, commemorating the 63rd anniversary of the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights stated in his Angelus message, “[L]et us remember that the first of all human rights is the right to life.”¹ The defense of human life from the moment of conception to natural death is at the heart of Catholic social teaching. In an ever expanding culture of moral relativism an “individual conscience is finding it more and more difficult to distinguish between good and evil in what concerns the basic value of human life”;² therefore, it is all the more urgent to proclaim the sanctity and dignity of human life in the formation of conscience.

Words traditionally employed for a culture of life are now empowering the culture of death. In this culture, vocabulary such as “death, annihilate, kill, destroy, and exterminate” are conveniently avoided. Abortion is now labeled as termination of a pregnancy; abortion rights are now identified as women’s health-care rights; euthanasia is considered to be an act of compassion; the killing of human embryos is replaced with disease prevention; the vulnerable and weak lose their status and rights as human beings because they interfere with a “fully productive and perfect society.” The expression “quality of life” has lost its meaning as living fully as a human being before God and others. It is now defined as happiness, even if that “happiness” is preserved through the deliberate killing of an unborn child, the physically/mentally handicapped, and the elderly.³ If someone speaks out on the unique character and value of human life, he/she is considered to be a racist. Human life



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and the biological life of animals, etc. are on equal footing. The systematic substitution of words such as “compassion” and “health care” for “death” and “destruction” can cause an idea that dismisses the dignity and worth of a human being to become more attractive and even persuasive. The usage of language reserved for the good and welfare of human development has been redefined into language which condones and attempts to justify evil.⁴

Catholic Social Teaching from the outset fundamentally rests upon the life, dignity and worth of each human being created in the image and like-

Continued next page

Did You Know?

- A prospective employer cannot legally ask you if you are pregnant or intend to become pregnant. ([Source](#))
- About 15% of women who are pregnant suffer a miscarriage. ([Source](#))
- An estimated 60,000 people in the USA were sterilized (often involuntarily) between 1907 and 1979. ([Source](#))
- Seven weeks after conception, a baby’s toes form. ([Source](#))

The Right to Life, continued....

ness of God. This is the heart of the Gospel message. Jesus embraced all of humanity as brothers and sisters. We are all sons and daughters of God, united in a civilization of love. It was Jesus who reached out to the marginalized, the vulnerable, the sick, and to those who were denied their rights and liberties as human beings.

Respect for the dignity and worth of all human beings from the moment of conception to natural death is a challenging task for our human community. The right to life is the first of all human rights. All other human rights follow from this essential truth. When we believe this, we will then be able to form consciences according to the will of Christ and act accordingly. In this way (as noted in another article) the human community may be a community of life and for life.

Throughout this year, let us be united in prayer that we may have the courage to stand up for life and be witnesses of God's compassionate love, especially for those who are most vulnerable. God bless.

Sources:

1. [December 11, 2011, Angelus](#)
2. Kevin E. McKenna, *A Concise Guide to Catholic Social Teaching*, Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 2002, p. 26.
3. Cf. Brennan, William, *Confronting the Language Empowering the Culture of Death*, Miami: Sapientia Press of Ave Maria University, 2008, p. 91.
4. United States Catholic Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), *Living the Gospel of Life: A Challenge to American Catholics*, Washington: USCCB, 1998, no. 10.



Photo for illustration only.

Did you know? Seven weeks after conception, a baby's toes form.



Photo for illustration only.

7 ways we can be pro-life in 2012

Pregnant? Need Help?

Below are a few organizations that specialize in assisting pregnant women with services such as: free pregnancy testing; confidential counseling; emotional support; baby and maternity clothes; housing referrals and more.

- [OptionLine](#)
- [Bethany Christian Services](#)
- [Birthright International](#)
- [The Nurturing Network](#)
- [Catholic Charities](#)
- [Gabriel Network](#)

#1: Promote Existing Resources

What resources are available to pregnant women, single parents and struggling families in your community? Are there flyers in your church, high school, college, and/or workplace that give information for where a woman can find pregnancy counseling and assistance with housing, food and clothing, etc.? Spread the word- at your school, in your parish, on your blog, etc. - about the help that is out there so that more women in your community who do face an unplanned pregnancy know that help is available!

- [Sample Parish Bulletin Announcements](#)
- [Free Ads and Online Banners](#) (from Feminists for Life)
- [Free Online Banners](#) (from The Nurturing Network)

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#2: Support Pregnant and Parenting Students

We certainly don't want our high school or college students to become pregnant. Teens who become pregnant are less likely to graduate high school (much less college), and teen parents and their children are much more likely to live in poverty (among a host of other negative statistics). Pregnancy during college can interrupt a student's schooling and increase the chances that he or she will drop out.

So perhaps then it is not much of a surprise that nearly 1 in 6 abortions are to teenagers between the ages of 15 and 19, and that women ages 20-24 have the highest rate of abortions (32% of all abortions are performed on women in this age group). In fact, 38% of all women having abortions cite that having a baby would interfere with their education as one of the reasons they "chose" abortion.

While it is important to teach and encourage our children and our students to postpone sexual intimacy until they are married, we should also support those students who are pregnant or parenting. By supporting pregnant students, we help them see that there really are other options, and not to feel that that the only way they can continue their education is by having an abortion. When we support parenting students, we help them rise above the statistics, finish their education and be better prepared to care for their families. Support can take multiple forms, such as offering flexible scheduling for classes, offering on-site day care, promoting local resources, including maternity coverage in college health plans, etc.



Photo for illustration only.

- [Need Help?](#)
- [National Campus Resource Directory for Pregnant and Parenting Students](#)
- [Feminists for Life - College Outreach Program](#)



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In some cities, friends gather together to knit booties and caps as gifts for babies born at a local hospital. ([Read news article](#))

#3: Say "Congratulations" and Mean It

When we find out a friend, coworker, or family member is pregnant, especially unexpectedly, what is our reaction? Depending on the circumstances, we might be concerned, and with good reason. However, let's always make our first reaction an affirmation of life, not of current or potential difficulties. We can say "Congratulations! When are you due?" first, instead of variations on "What about work/school?" or "How will you ever manage having two children so close in age?"

There are many ways we can celebrate the miracle of life, and in a society that sometimes views children as an inconvenience, it is even more important that we do so. So the next time someone shares their happy news with you, take a moment to celebrate the new life: send a congratulations card; send flowers or help organize a baby shower. You can still offer to be there to support him or her, especially if the pregnancy is difficult or unplanned.

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A Few Reasons for Hope

Below are a few stories from people who have changed their position on abortion, or who chose life despite very challenging personal situations.

From Former Abortion Providers

- [Testimony of a former abortion provider](#)
- [Testimony of Dr. Anthony Levantino - Former Abortion Provider](#)

From Mothers of Aborted Children

- [The Lord Never Gave Up on Me](#)
- [Opt for LIFE: Adoption and Abortion - Which I regret](#)
- [My Kids Are My Life](#)

From Fathers of Aborted Children

- [Remembering Thomas](#)
- [The abortion was long ago, but for a regretful father the guilt lingers on](#)

From Mothers who Chose Life

- [If I Had Known It Was You](#)
- [Pro-Choice Pressure](#)
- [God does not make mistakes. We must always choose life.](#)

#4: Hope: We Can Make a Difference

In a country where there are over 1.2 million abortions a year, few restrictions on when and how abortion is performed, and poll results indicating that a majority of the population favors keeping abortion legal, it can be challenging to hold on to hope that one day things will be different, or to feel like our efforts to reduce abortions are having any impact. Yet there is reason for hope.

The Holy Spirit is constantly working within us, and some people, including doctors who used to perform abortions, have had a change of heart. (See article: [Former abortion provider who became pro-life dies](#)) Pregnant women in need have changed their minds and cancelled their abortion appointment, thanks in part to the support of pro-life people and organizations. Women and men who have suffered the devastating effects of abortion have spoken up and shared their stories, combating the idea that abortion has no serious or long-lasting negative effects and also reaching out to people who may be considering abortion. Furthermore, while polls show that most Americans favor keeping abortion legal, they also show that most Americans favor increased restrictions, such as requiring parental consent for minors.

So this year, stay hopeful. Remember that the Holy Spirit can and does work within each one of us and can help us use our talents, our experiences, even our mistakes, to make a difference.

- [Marist Poll: Abortion in America \(in partnership with the Knights of Columbus\)](#)
- [Pew Research Center Publications, Slight but Steady Majority Favors Keeping Abortion Legal](#)

#5: Give Witness to Life



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Giving witness can be a powerful tool in the effort to respect life. Here are a few ways you might consider giving witness this year:

- Participate in a local Life Chain, 40 Days for Life, prayer vigil, or other pro-life event
- Use pro-life checks, pins or bumper stickers.
- Participate in or organize a baby shower for pregnant women, especially those who may not have anyone able or willing to have a baby shower for them.

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#6: Allow People to Grieve

Losing someone we love is a painful experience and grieving is a necessary part of the healing process. Yet as a society, too often we downplay or ignore that need when it comes to parents who have lost their unborn child, whether to miscarriage, stillbirth, or abortion.

An estimated 15% of women who are pregnant (and know that they are pregnant - many miscarriages occur before a woman even knows she is pregnant) have a miscarriage. In most cases, there is nothing a woman can do to prevent the miscarriage, and in about half of stillbirths, no cause can even be determined. However, many parents still experience feelings of guilt along with their grief. These feelings of guilt can be compounded if the pregnancy was unplanned, especially if the mother and/or father had mixed or negative feelings about the pregnancy.

While no words will take away the pain, we can help show our respect for life by allowing parents who have suffered the loss of their child to miscarriage to grieve that loss and honor their child. Check out the links to the right for a few resources. You might also see if your parish has a yearly Mass for Hope and Healing, and if not, talk to your pastor to see if the parish can start one.

Grieving is a necessary part of the healing process.

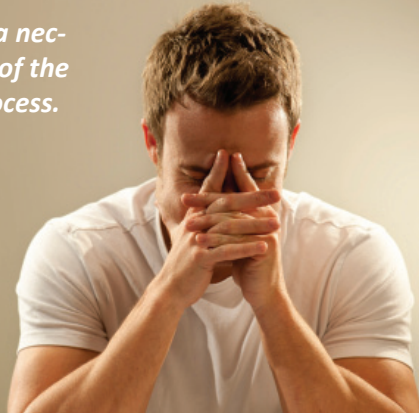


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Ever wondered what the Church teaches regarding babies who die before they can be baptized? Read [Fr. Foxen's response to a question about Limbo.](#)

Resources - Miscarriage and Stillbirth

- [Miscarriage: Moving from Grief Toward Healing For Your Marriage - Overcoming Obstacles, Miscarriage](#)
- [Suggestions for supporting a parent whose baby has died](#)
- [Share: Pregnancy & Infant Loss Support, Inc.](#)

Resources - Abortion

- [How to Talk to a Friend Who's Had an Abortion](#)
- [Rachel's Vineyard](#)
- [Hope After Abortion](#)
- [Adverse Psychological Reactions: A Fact Sheet](#)

Grieving after an Abortion

If you are struggling with grief and regret after an abortion, know that you are not alone, and healing is possible.

In a society that considers abortion a woman's right, it can be very hard for the people who experience regret and sorrow after an abortion to grieve their loss. After all, if it were really just a "blob" of cells and not a baby, what reason would there be to grieve? Furthermore, many in the medical community claim that abortion has no lasting negative effects, which can lead a woman to look for a different reason for her pain, or to think that something is wrong with her because she does feel regret.

Luckily, and thanks in part to the men and women who have spoken up about their experiences, more people are realizing that abortion can cause adverse reactions long-term, even if the immediate reaction is a sense of relief. (Many women seek help for their suffering 5-12 years later). Post-abortion counseling and support is available.

God Loves Us

It is important that we remember that God always loves us.

If you are suffering from your decision to abort or your involvement in an abortion, healing is possible.

Post abortion counseling is available for women who have aborted as well as fathers and grandparents of aborted children. Learn more at:

- [Rachel's Vineyard](#)
- [Hope After Abortion](#)

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#7: Be Both Pro-Woman and Pro-Child

One of the contributing factors to abortions is actually a lack of support for women, especially pregnant women. Just look at some of the reasons women give for having an abortion (*Source*, p. 113):

- 21% say they cannot leave their job to take care of a baby
- 22% cite unemployment (23% say they cannot afford the basic needs of life)
- 14% say that their husband or partner wants them to have an abortion
- 19% say they would have to find a new place to live

Every day, Catholic and other pro-life organizations around the country are helping pregnant women and young or struggling parents with both material and emotional support including counseling, clothing, housing, referrals to local resources, and more. Whether it is in volunteering our time or skills at a local pregnancy resource center, organizing a free baby-sitting service, working with a high school to allow pregnant students to continue taking classes, making sure colleges offer housing for parenting students and maternity coverage in student health care plans, or working to overcome discrimination against pregnant women in the workplace, we can all help create a society that respects the rights and dignity of both women and their children.



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About JPIC Corner

JPIC Corner is a monthly publication of the USA Province of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart:

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