



ACTION GUIDES

Introduction

This year's Respect Life Program focuses on providing parish resources that are actionable and ready-to-go. The materials are designed to complement existing parish life and manifest that the Gospel of Life is part of the very fabric of the Gospel itself. This year's materials put a renewed emphasis on integrating existing resources into the life of a parish, school, or ministry.

To assist you in doing this, five new action guides have been developed to help leaders take advantage of opportunities to highlight and integrate Respect Life themes throughout the year. Liturgical celebrations and other annual calendar occasions provide natural opportunities to help build a culture of life.

The action guides are structured around five main calendar occasions: Respect Life Month (October 2019), the Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children and related events (January 2020), the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord and the 25th Anniversary of *Evangelium vitae* (March 2020), Divine Mercy Sunday (April 2020), and Mother's Day (May 2020).

What is an action guide?

Each action guide focuses on a specific occasion that relates to respect for human life and gives natural opportunities for building a culture that protects, cherishes, and celebrates life. The guides feature tools to help you build such a culture in your own parish or school. They contain sample timelines, "simple steps," activities, sample announcements and intercessions, and homily helps. Each contains ways to help you integrate your efforts into regular programming, so as to reach the greatest number of people in a given parish, school, or ministry—all without having to plan separate events. (Although, ideas for separate events are also included).

Who are the action guides for?

While the action guides have been developed primarily with parish leaders in mind, they also offer ideas for adaptation for use in schools, ministries, and even by families at home. These action guides can be used by diocesan, parish, school, and ministry leaders, as well as anyone who desires to build a culture of life in their particular faith community.

How do I use these action guides?

The action guides are intended to help leaders integrate respect for human life into their respective work and/or ministries. While specific dates and general timelines are often provided, they are only included as suggestions. Any of the ideas and activities included in the action guides that you find helpful can be used at any time. We also encourage leaders to build off the 2019-2020 theme, "**Christ Our Hope: In Every Season of Life.**" A reflection is provided at the front of this resource guide to help unpack the theme.

The Respect Life Program is meant to be brought to life by you! And the action guides are no different. While suggested action steps are provided, you are encouraged to adapt each guide as needed to best serve your parish, school, or ministry. When implementing these action guides, always remember to follow local policies and procedures, especially regarding safe environment guidelines. If you have any questions about local policies, consult your diocese, parish, school, or ministry staff.

The provided action guides are meant to serve as basic frameworks and jumping off points for your own creative ideas. Don't be afraid to make these plans and activities your own. As always, we'd love to see how you use the action guides in your specific ministry. Let us know what you're doing by emailing prolife@uscgb.org, or tag us on Facebook ([@peopleoflife](https://www.facebook.com/peopleoflife)) or Twitter ([@uscgbprolife](https://twitter.com/uscgbprolife)). *Thank you* for your dedication in building a culture in which every human life is cherished!





ACTION GUIDE

RESPECT LIFE MONTH: OCTOBER 2019

INTRODUCTION

Each October the Church in the United States celebrates *Respect Life Month*, and the first Sunday of October is observed as *Respect Life Sunday*. As Catholics, we are called to cherish, defend, and protect those who are most vulnerable, from the beginning of life to its end, and at every point in between. During the month of October, the Church asks us to reflect more deeply on the dignity of every human life.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops provides resources to help parishes, schools, families, ministries, and individual Catholics share the Gospel of Life during

Free downloads and additional electronic resources can be found at respectlifeprogram.org/october.

Respect Life Month and throughout the year. In the following pages, you will find a number of resources to help you celebrate Respect Life Month. Sample timelines, homily helps, announcements, activities, and more are provided to help you get started. You are encouraged to adapt these resources as needed to fit your specific parish, school, or ministry.

Free downloads and additional electronic resources can be found at respectlifeprogram.org/october.



SIMPLE STEPS

Here is a list of simple steps that you can use in your parish, school, ministry, or home to help celebrate Respect Life Month. These steps offer ideas on how to use the provided resources. Each step may not apply to your specific circumstance, but most can be adapted to suit your needs. These are a starting point, but the possibilities are endless!

1. Display the 2019-2020 Respect Life Program poster.

Think about a prominent place in your parish, school, or diocesan office. Hang the poster in the vestibule, on a door or window, on a bulletin board, or near the restrooms and water fountains. Choose a place where people will be most likely to see it. Parents could hang the poster on the refrigerator, a child's bedroom door, or a place you gather regularly as a family. *(Remember to seek appropriate permissions and follow any rules or guidelines if displaying the poster outside your home.)*

2. Print the Respect Life reflection in your bulletin or newsletter.

The Respect Life reflection unpacks the 2019-2020 theme, ***“Christ Our Hope: In Every Season of Life.”*** If space is an issue, short bulletin announcements are also available. Consider using our free downloadable bulletin cover or wrapper to help celebrate Respect Life Month with your parishioners. The Respect Life reflection can also be printed in your diocesan paper, featured in an email or newsletter, or used to inspire discussion during a family meal.

3. Preach about life on Respect Life Sunday.

The included sample homily notes tie into the lectionary readings and are provided for use by priests and deacons in preparing their homily for Respect Life Sunday. The Respect Life reflection can also be a source of inspiration. Encourage your local priests to preach about respect for human life by letting them know that these resources are available to them.

4. Pray for the protection of human life during the Prayer of the Faithful.

This is a great way to allow an entire parish or school to pray for the protection of life together! Sample intercessions are provided for use during the Prayer of the Faithful at Sunday Mass. Consider including one intercession at Mass each weekend in October. Schools can use these to pray for life at the beginning of the day or class period. Families can include these intercessions in their regular prayers in the morning, evening, or before or after a family meal.

5. Feature a different Respect Life topic in each week's bulletin.

Short, quarter-page summaries are available for many of our brochures, which cover a wide range of topics. Using the predesigned, downloadable bulletin box summaries, highlight an important Respect Life topic each weekend of October. For those who would like to learn more, each bulletin box also includes a web address where to find the full article. Or, if you have the space, use one of the corresponding, full-length bulletin insert versions of the highlighted summaries. These can be found at the same web address listed in each bulletin box.

We would love to see your Respect Life Month celebrations!

Show us how you celebrated by emailing prolife@usccb.org or tag us on Facebook ([@peopleoflife](https://www.facebook.com/peopleoflife)) or Twitter ([@usccbprolife](https://twitter.com/usccbprolife)).

SAMPLE TIMELINE

Fall is a busy season! Families have returned from vacation, a new school year is beginning, ministries that may take a summer break are back in full swing, and we're all trying to return to our regular routines. In the flurry of fall activities, October can easily sneak up on us before we know it! We have provided a sample timeline to help you prepare for Respect Life Month. While these steps apply most directly to a parish coordinator, they can be adapted to help you think about key steps you can take to plan ahead in whatever capacity you serve the Church.



AUGUST

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

August 1, 2019

Visit respectlifeprogram.org/october to review and familiarize yourself with the new materials. Download any resources you hope to use during Respect Life Month. This would include bulletin announcements, intercessions, the Respect Life reflection, bulletin covers or wrappers, graphics, homily notes, article summaries, instructions for ordering printed materials, etc.

SEPTEMBER

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30					

Early August 2019

- ◆ Meet with your pastor, and remind him about the upcoming Respect Life Month. Let him know what resources are available, such as homily notes and prayer intercessions. Consider sharing this year's theme with him, and ask what your parish might do to celebrate Respect Life Month this year. Most importantly, *ask what you can do to help*. Perhaps emailing him the homily notes directly will save him time. Or, he may ask if you can send the prayer intercessions to another parish staff member. If you have any bulletin submissions planned or have any special activities in mind, be sure to share this information as well.
- ◆ Contact your parish office regarding bulletin submissions, and open the lines of communication. Many parishes need content several weeks in advance to be able to include it in the weekly bulletin. Inquire about deadlines, and share what content you hope to have featured. This will help your parish plan ahead to allot the necessary space in the bulletin. If you plan to include materials such as bulletin boxes each weekend in October, you may need to make separate submissions. If you plan to complete the Interactive Respect Life Bulletin Board activity, you'll also need to plan to have announcements printed in the bulletin in advance. Sample announcements and instructions for the activity are provided.

OCTOBER

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		



September 3, 2019

Reconnect with appropriate parish staff regarding your bulletin submissions. Touch base with your pastor to offer further assistance and confirm any plans you may have made. This is the time to tie up any loose ends, verify that all content has been received, and determine if there are any follow-up tasks to be completed in the weeks ahead of Respect Life Month.

September 9, 2019

Begin gathering the materials you will need for the Interactive Respect Life Bulletin Board. Enlist the help of volunteers who might like to help you complete the preparation for this activity. This is a great way to get youth involved and allow parishioners to use their creative gifts.

September 30, 2019

Gather with your volunteers and bring the bulletin board materials. Put together the Interactive Respect Life Bulletin Board using the included instructions. Improvise as needed, and make it your own!

October 1, 2019

Respect Life Month is here, and it's finally time to hang the poster in a place people will see it! Now is also a great time to begin sharing announcements about Respect Life Month on social media or in monthly newsletters. You may want to pre-schedule some social media posts throughout the month with graphics, prayer intercessions, or the reflection on this year's theme.

October 6, 2019

On Respect Life Sunday, have volunteers staff a table near the Respect Life Bulletin Board after each Mass. Have examples of items to pin on hand, as well as printed reminders to bring in and add their own items throughout the month. Volunteers can help explain the activity and answer any questions. Include Respect Life resources on different topics on the table as well. If your parish has the space, consider leaving the table up for the duration of Respect Life Month.

October 12, 2019

Monitor the content being added to the Respect Life Bulletin Board and ensure that all materials are appropriate. Take special note of prayer requests, and consider how your parish community might pray for these specific intentions. Perhaps they can be included during a regularly scheduled Holy Hour, or lifted up during a particular ministry gathering. You may also want to add these to your own daily prayers and personal intentions.

October 27, 2019

Take some photos of the Respect Life Bulletin Board. Consider taking some with those who helped volunteer. Or take photos of those who participated, with their unique contribution. These photos* can then be shared in an email newsletter or on a parish social media page to highlight how your community celebrated Respect Life Month. These visual memories are also a great way to remember the final product and serve as examples if you'd like to complete this activity in future years.

**Make sure you follow all parish and diocesan policies for taking and sharing photos, especially those pertaining to minors.*

BULLETIN & PULPIT ANNOUNCEMENTS

◆ Bulletin Announcements

Option 1: Respect Life Sunday

Today is Respect Life Sunday!

Join Catholics nationwide in celebrating the kickoff of Respect Life Month. Find the reflection on this year's theme, "Christ Our Hope: In Every Season of Life," by visiting respectlifeprogram.org/reflection.

Option 2: Respect Life Month

October is Respect Life Month!

Join Catholics nationwide in celebrating throughout October. Learn more about upholding the sanctity of every human life at respectlifeprogram.org/respect-life-month.

◆ Pulpit Announcements

Option 1: Respect Life Sunday

(October 6)

This weekend, the Church in the United States celebrates Respect Life Sunday, kicking off Respect Life Month. See this week's bulletin for more information and a short reflection on this year's theme.

Option 2: Respect Life Month

Each October, the Church in the United States celebrates Respect Life Month. See this week's bulletin for more information and a short reflection on this year's theme, "Christ Our Hope: In Every Season of Life."

INTERCESSIONS

These sample intercessions were written for use during *Respect Life Month*; however, many can be used throughout the year. These intentions are appropriate for inclusion in the Prayer of the Faithful at Sunday Mass. Consider including one intercession at Mass each weekend in October.

The intercessions can also be printed in the weekly bulletin, included during prayer at a ministry or community gathering, featured in email newsletters, shared on social media platforms, or prayed during personal or family prayer times.

For all Catholics:
That on this Respect Life Sunday
we may recommit ourselves
to upholding the dignity
of every human life;
We pray to the Lord:

That during this Respect Life Month
our hope in Christ's resurrection
will strengthen us in protecting
the gift of human life;
We pray to the Lord:

That the life of every human person,
from conception to natural death,
might be protected in our laws
and cherished in our hearts;
We pray to the Lord:

For women and men suffering after abortion:
May the Church's abortion healing ministry
help them find peace and healing
through Christ's endless mercy;
We pray to the Lord:

For those nearing the end of life:
May they receive care that respects their dignity
and protects their lives as they place their hope
in the promise of eternal life;
We pray to the Lord:

May God grant us the wisdom and courage
to lovingly protect His gift of human life
at every stage, in sickness and in health;
We pray to the Lord:

HOMILY HELPS

These homily notes are provided to help priests and deacons illustrate the Gospel of Life through the Lectionary readings for Respect Life Sunday (October 6, 2019).

Any of these sections can be used individually to supplement a reflection on a particular reading. Or, these notes can also be utilized together as a complete homily to help unpack the 2019-2020 Respect Life theme ("***Christ Our Hope: In Every Season of Life***"), employing the readings of the day.

Other ministry leaders can also use these reflections to highlight Respect Life connections elsewhere, such as in a Bible study on the weekly Sunday readings, in a small group or a faith formation setting, or as part of another ministry gathering.

October 6, 2019 | Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time (Respect Life Sunday)

First Reading: Habakkuk 1:2-3; 2:2-4

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 95:1-2, 6-7, 8-9

Second Reading: 2 Timothy 1:6-8, 13-14

Gospel Acclamation: 1 Peter 1:25

Gospel: Luke 17:5-10

First Reading: Habakkuk 1:2-3; 2:2-4

In the First Reading we hear a voice crying out to God in anguish:

*How long, O LORD? I cry for help
but you do not listen!*

How often do we feel that God does not hear our pleas for help? How often do we fear that our prayers will not be answered in the manner we desire? The voice again cries out:

*I cry out to you, "Violence!"
but you do not intervene.
Why do you let me see ruin;
why must I look at misery?
Destruction and violence are before me;
there is strife, and clamorous discord.*

We can relate all too well to this feeling today. When we watch the news or scroll through social media, we are inundated by stories of violence against human life. The tone of public debate and discourse disrespects the very

dignity of the human person. We can often feel that misery surrounds us as abortion, assisted suicide, the death penalty, and other affronts to the dignity of the person find wide public support.

But God responds with a message of *hope*. We are assured that the Lord, “*will not disappoint.*” And that, “*the just one, because of his faith, shall live.*” While God does not promise to answer our prayers on our schedule or according to our plans, we know He does not abandon us. While suffering is indeed a part of our earthly life, our destiny is to share eternal life with Christ.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 95:1-2, 6-7, 8-9

In his encyclical *Evangelium vitae*, Pope St. John Paul II wrote that “the Gospel of life is not for believers alone: it is for everyone.”¹ Although faith allows us to more deeply understand the sacred value of human life, the light of reason naturally endows the human conscience with the ability to recognize the dignity of each and every person.

The psalmist writes, “*If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.*” It seems that many in our world have indeed hardened their hearts to the truth. They are unable to see the humanity of the child growing in his or her mother’s womb. They incorrectly believe that a person’s value is determined by his or her abilities. They fail to comprehend that one’s worth is not dependent on one’s age or circumstance. And perhaps, if we’re honest with ourselves, we’ve allowed our own hearts to be hardened to attacks against human life. Maybe we’ve allowed the pain of loss to make our hearts numb.

In a world that seems to have lost sight of the value of human life, we must pray that those whose hearts have been hardened would hear the voice of God and come to see the invaluable dignity of every person they meet. We must pray that our own hearts would be pierced by the suffering of the most vulnerable among us.

Second Reading: 2 Timothy 1:6-8, 13-14

Because the world in which we live is so often hostile to the Truth, proclaiming the Gospel of Life can be difficult. In many arenas, defense of infants’ lives, the lives of those who are disabled or dying, or the lives of any vulnerable human population is met with resistance. Proclaiming the Church’s teaching on topics like abortion, assisted suicide, and the death penalty can provoke challenging and emotional responses from



those who disagree. Sometimes we may find ourselves afraid to speak up about these issues in our families, among our coworkers, or with students in our school community.

We may fear disagreement, judgement, confrontation, or misunderstanding. But in the Second Reading, St. Paul tells us that “*God did not give us a spirit of cowardice.*” Rather, God has given us a spirit of “*power and love*”—and this should cast out our fear.

St. Paul encourages us to “*not be ashamed of your testimony to our Lord.*” He urges us to “*bear your share of hardship for the gospel,*” and reminds us of our “*strength that comes from God.*” Through our faith in Jesus Christ, we know that sin and death have been defeated. We know that our identity can only be found in our Savior. The sufferings and persecutions that we endure in our earthly life glorify God; and we are given the strength and grace to persevere in hope.

Gospel: Luke 17:5-10

Faith gives us this ability to hope. The example of the apostles in the Gospel encourages us to ask God Himself to “*increase our faith.*” If we struggle to find the courage to speak boldly about human life, we shouldn’t be ashamed. The apostles—who themselves lived, ate, and prayed with Christ—needed God’s grace to carry out Christ’s saving mission. We needn’t be afraid to ask God to increase our faith. For if we have but “*faith the size of a mustard seed,*” Christ can give us the power to do incredible things in service of the Gospel.

So today, as we recommit ourselves to upholding the teachings of the Church on the inviolability of human life, may we recall that we have merely “*done what we were obliged to do*” as followers of Christ. Christ is our hope, in every season of our lives.

¹ Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae*, (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995), no. 101.

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SAMPLE ACTIVITY

Interactive Respect Life Bulletin Board

This activity utilizes the Respect Life Program poster to help unpack the theme, “*Christ Our Hope: In Every Season of Life.*” The idea is to hang the Respect Life Program poster in the center of a large bulletin board or other prominent area with space around it.

Then, invite members of your parish, class, youth group, or other ministry group to add their own items illustrating and unpacking the Respect Life theme to the board or to the surrounding area.

To illustrate the concept you can pin some examples: a sonogram photo of a new family member; a birth announcement; a prayer card from the funeral of a loved one; a picture of aging grandparents; a flyer for an upcoming abortion-healing retreat; a note about volunteer opportunities at a local pregnancy center; or a sticky note with a prayer request related to cherishing life. This is where you can get creative! Invite others to pin items that help them see Christ’s presence in all the seasons of our life, from the beginning of life to its end.

Materials

- ◆ 2019-2020 Respect Life Program poster
- ◆ Large bulletin board (or a large wall or window)
- ◆ Push pins, tape, and/or a stapler
- ◆ Notecards or sticky notes
- ◆ Writing utensils (pens, pencils, markers)
- ◆ Scissors, *optional*
- ◆ Construction paper in various colors, *optional*

Directions

1. Place the poster in the center of a large bulletin board in your parish or school. (If you don’t have a large bulletin board, you can also use a wall or window to achieve a similar result. Simply swap out push pins for tape.)
2. Beneath the poster, post an explanation of the display so those who pass by can draw inspiration or participate.

Sample Explanation

October is Respect Life Month. This year’s theme is “***Christ Our Hope: In Every Season of Life.***” This Respect Life Bulletin Board is meant to unpack this theme and help us see Christ’s presence in every stage of life—from birth announcements to funeral cards and prayer requests to service opportunities. The central poster serves as an example and inspiration for our parish’s unique display. All parishioners are invited to participate by adding their own items that highlight the precious gift of life in its many seasons.

3. Select a number of items to post to get the bulletin board started. Choose from some of the examples listed above. Consider writing one of the provided intercessions for Respect Life Sunday/Month on a notecard and pinning it to the bulletin board.
4. Invite others to join in the activity by contributing their own content to the bulletin board. You will need to determine the best way to explain it and have participants bring items in. For example, if your whole parish is invited to participate, consider putting a note in the weekly bulletin or making an announcement before or after Mass. In a classroom or youth group setting, you can simply explain the activity and perhaps send a note home to parents. Families can also do this activity at home.

Sample Announcements

September 28-29

Please join us in celebrating Respect Life Month during October. We will be hosting a Respect Life Bulletin Board in the _____. All parishioners are invited to participate by bringing in items that reflect this year's theme, **"Christ Our Hope: In Every Season of Life."** You can add items to the bulletin board that help you to see Christ's presence in all the seasons of life. Examples of items you may consider pinning to the display could include: an ultrasound photo of a new family member; a birth announcement; a prayer card from the funeral of a loved one; a note about volunteer opportunities at a local pregnancy center; or a sticky note with a prayer request. Be creative! Materials will be on hand in the _____ to help you get started.

If you would like to have your item returned, please pick it up from the display by October 30. Contact _____ for more information: _____.

October 5-6

This weekend, we celebrate Respect Life Sunday and kick off October as Respect Life Month. All parishioners are invited to help us celebrate by posting items to our Respect Life bulletin board located in the _____. For more information, stop by the display after Mass or see the bulletin. We will continue to expand the display throughout the month. We welcome you in helping us celebrate the gift of life through your participation.

5. In a smaller group setting, once the bulletin board is complete, ask those who pinned items to the board to explain why they chose that specific item and what connection they see to Respect Life topics and themes.

Optional Embellishments

1. If you would like to be extra creative, you can divide your bulletin board in four quadrants—each quadrant representing one of the four seasons.
2. Before hanging the poster, use brown construction paper to make a tree trunk and branches. Cut out orange, yellow, and red leaves for fall; snowflakes for winter; flower blossoms for spring; and green leaves for summer.
3. Attach these cutouts in the designated quadrant to create a four-seasons tree. These can be added sparingly without needing to fill in the entire bulletin board. You'll want to ensure there is still blank space to post other items. These embellishments will just help illustrate the "seasons" of life highlighted by the theme.
4. Hang the poster in the center of the bulletin board. Now you're ready to start adding your unique items!

Example



iStock.com/nevodka; iStock.com/TatianaDavidova; iStock.com/PixelEmbargo; iStock.com/monkeybusinessimages; iStock.com/Yevhenii Dubinko; iStock.com/sezer66; iStock.com/ninotchka. Models used for illustrative purposes only. Photos used with permission. All rights reserved. Copyright © 2019, USCCB, Washington, D.C. All rights reserved.