

Life Insight

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Statement for Respect Life Sunday October 7, 2007

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Archbishop of Philadelphia
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Since 1972 the Catholic bishops in the United States have set aside the first Sunday in October as *Respect Life Sunday*. On October 7, Catholics will again pray for – and renew their resolve to bring about – a culture of life and an end to the killing of innocent human beings, especially those who are vulnerable due to their age, size, health or dependency.

The theme of the 2007 Respect Life Program – *The Infant in My Womb Leaped for Joy* – calls to mind an extraordinary scene in Luke’s Gospel (1:39-56). Mary, newly pregnant with the Lord Jesus, is visiting her elderly cousin Elizabeth whose son, John, will soon be born. The moment Mary’s greeting reaches Elizabeth’s ears and John’s, the tiny prophet announces to his mother the Messiah’s arrival, as if his entire being were exclaiming: Behold! The Lamb of God! There was no confusion as to what and who were nestled under their mothers’ hearts. Yet 2,000 years later, many well-educated people do not know – or claim they do not know – the truth about human life before birth.

In April the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the federal ban on partial-birth abortion, in an opinion that explicitly recognizes the humanity of unborn children and the grief women experience after abortion. Yet the killing of unborn children at any stage of pregnancy remains legal, provided that the lethal act is performed while the child is mostly inside his or her mother’s body.

In June, President Bush vetoed a bill to fund stem cell research requiring the destruction of human embryos, and directed his administration to investigate alternative means of producing

pluripotent stem cells “by ethically responsible techniques.” Yet some supporters of embryonic stem cell research continue to dismiss concerns about destroying human embryos, because they are “no bigger than the period at the end of this sentence.”

We will not see the day when all human life is respected and defended unless we address a deeper problem. As Pope Benedict XVI has said:

“If truth does not exist for man, then neither can he ultimately distinguish between good and evil. And then the great and wonderful discoveries of science become double-edged: they can open up significant possibilities for good, for the benefit of mankind, but also, as we see only too clearly, they can pose a terrible threat, involving the destruction of man and the world. We need truth” (Homily at Marianzell, Austria, Sept. 8, 2007).

Days after Pope Benedict’s homily, the New Jersey Supreme Court claimed to have no way of knowing the truth about “when human life begins.” Dismissing a lawsuit against an abortion clinic which concealed the truth about abortion from women, the Court claimed there is “clearly no consensus” on whether, as matter of “biological fact,” the unborn child is a “human being.” The Court cited “moral, theological, [and] ideological” disagreement to ignore biological fact. *We need truth.*

Some ethicists suggest that patients who apparently lack conscious awareness – although otherwise healthy and not imminently dying – can be dehydrated and starved to death because their lives are not fully human but “vegetative.” This ignores the insight expressed in 2004 by Pope John Paul II and recently reaffirmed by the Holy See under Pope Benedict XVI, that “the intrinsic value and personal dignity of every human being do not change, no matter what the concrete circumstances of his or her life. *A man, even if*

seriously ill or disabled in the exercise of his highest functions, is and always will be a man, and he will never become a 'vegetable' or an 'animal'." We need truth.

On this Respect Life Sunday, we ask Catholics and all people of good will to witness to the truth about the incomparable dignity and right to life of every human being. This is no sectarian creed. The "recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world" (Preamble, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989). And *that* is the truth.



The Infant in my Womb Leaped for Joy

Christians will immediately recognize in the title a passage from the Visitation scene where, with joy and amazement, Elizabeth greeted her cousin Mary. Through the grace of the Holy Spirit, the moment Mary's greeting reached Elizabeth's ears, she and her unborn child, John, knew they were in the presence of the unborn Lord Jesus and his Blessed Mother. Mary, Jesus and John, the first evangelizers!

How readily today do Christians and others recognize the God-given dignity of human beings when they are hidden in their mothers' womb? Or frozen in tanks at a fertility clinic? Or silently growing in a laboratory dish to the stage at which they are destroyed for their embryonic stem cells? Do we recognize that they are living humans—cherished by God and made in his image—from the first moment of their conception?

In the last half century, science and technology have achieved spectacular progress in treating and curing diseases and conditions which had spelled death to earlier generations. Across the globe, people today are living longer and healthier lives. But advancements in science and technology have not always proceeded with the true good of the human person and human society in mind. There has been too little reflection and public discussion about actions – though undertaken for laudable purposes – that are endangering and taking the lives of countless individuals.

This year's Respect Life Program, with its October 7 "Respect Life Sunday" kickoff, examines a number of ways that modern society falls dangerously short of God's view of human beings as a sign of his love and a trace of his glory. There are many important lessons we can learn from today's unborn evangelizers.

Faced with an adverse prenatal diagnosis, expectant parents often find themselves counseled, even *urged* by doctors to abort their "imperfect" child and try again for a healthy one. Mary Kellett, mother of 11, including Peter who has trisomy 18, writes: "Even though he may never speak a word, Peter has taught us many important lessons about love, sacrifice, compassion, patience, hope and faith. He has transformed the way we look at life. ... These children are teachers of our souls, and society desperately needs the lessons and blessings they bring."

A wide array of assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs) are now employed to produce babies for single people and for couples struggling with infertility. Many people consider ART practices to be "pro-life," but in fact this unregulated industry destroys the lives of far more embryos than are born through its efforts. Helen Alvaré explores the ways in which ARTs commodify children and undermine the family.

Modern methods of contraception are touted as the solution to unplanned pregnancy and abortion. Abortion-supporters in Congress are trying to increase funding for even greater contraceptive access. This approach, of course, has been tried and has failed for over four decades. A recent review of research by pro-choice/pro-contraception experts found that increasing access to contraceptives – even emergency contraceptives – does not reduce rates of unintended pregnancy and abortion. Greater access does, however, substantially increase rates of sexually-transmitted diseases!

Another unintended bad consequence from reproductive "advances" is seen in an article explaining the biology underlying the link between abortion and breast cancer, authored by surgeon Angela Lanfranchi, M.D. Scientists agree that the first full-term pregnancy reduces a woman's breast cancer risk because cells which were once vulnerable to carcinogens are transformed into cancer-resistant cells late in

pregnancy. But aborting a healthy pregnancy before 32 weeks' gestation leaves breasts with almost double the volume of cancer-vulnerable cells than were present before the pregnancy. About 5–10% of women with breast cancer develop it as a result of an abortion.

Other articles in this year's packet address abortion's role in Catholic social teaching, caring for our aging loved ones, and persons with mental illness as bearers of God's image.

Respect Life materials are posted at www.usccb.org/prolife/programs/rlp/index.shtml and can be purchased in print or on a CD by calling toll-free: (866) 582-0943. Pamphlet versions are ideal for parish distribution and pamphlet racks. High School religion and CCD classes, parish women's and men's groups will benefit from studying the topics in greater depth, using full-length versions and inviting a local physician to comment and answer questions.

Learn the truth, share it with others, and help build a culture of life!



“Bella” Opens Nationwide October 26

“Bella” is a simply remarkable film. It has the potential to open hearts to the loving alternatives to abortion and remind our product-driven culture what a priceless gift children are.

“Bella” won the Toronto Film Festival's prestigious “People's Choice Award” and garnered awards at ten other film festivals, but not with the usual formula of nudity, sexuality, vulgar jokes and innuendos, acrobatic fight scenes, car chases or dazzling special effects. In fact, it has none of these elements.

Without a hint of preachiness, the story, which covers one day in the life of a troubled chef and a pregnant waitress, affirms God's most precious gifts to humanity – life and family.

The actors portray ordinary people who, like all of us, display a complex mixture of admirable qualities and slightly less admirable ones. “Bella” is as simple, humble and authentic as its characters. And yet the film deals with profound subjects – the impact of a child's death on the individual responsible for it, what it means to be a family, and how the kindness of one person can

transform many lives. Although tinged with sadness, its undercurrent is the joy of living.

This modest film presents genuine models of friendship, of parenting and family cohesiveness – ideals which used to be the norm, but which today are less evident in American society.

The producers, director and actors have committed their talents to making beautiful films that uplift the human spirit. For that reason, as well as for the artistry and life-affirming message of “Bella,” we encourage readers to see this wonderful film *in the first two weeks of its release*. By doing so, you can help secure the wider distribution and the longer showings “Bella” richly deserves.

Please see “Bella.” You won't regret it.



Reclaiming Fatherhood

Conference in San Francisco, Nov. 28-29, 2007

Pregnancy loss due to abortion has long been recognized in medical and counseling literature as an example of impacted grief – grief that cannot be expressed openly through the normal rituals and behaviors of mourning. A large and growing body of literature today describes the emotional and psychological difficulties many women experience in the aftermath of an abortion, which include depression, anxiety, eating disorders, substance abuse, and suicidal thoughts and attempts. Some of these studies can be found at <http://www.hopeafterabortion.com/hope.cfm?sel=A31Q>.

But very little public attention has been paid to abortion's impact on the fathers of aborted children. In light of the standard pro-choice arguments – It's *her* body, *her* choice, *her* right – many men feel they have no say in the decision. They simply go along with whatever the mother decides, as if she were the only one affected by the decision.

Some men fight to defend the life of their child and feel frustrated and angry that the law and our culture do not recognize their rights as fathers.

Others may actively encourage the abortion, using coercion and even violence to eliminate the child for whom they don't want to be responsible.

Later, some of them may come to regret their selfishness and cruelty.

Obviously, men are spared the direct physical and emotional trauma of an abortion procedure. This distance makes it easier for them to tuck away the event in a mental lockbox, where it can be ignored, for a time, at least by some. But the pain of lost fatherhood never really goes away.

The kinds of reactions a man may experience depend on factors such as his religious beliefs and moral convictions, his relationship with the mother of his child when she became pregnant – whether committed or casual, and his attitude toward the abortion – did he oppose it, actively encourage it, demand it, stand helplessly by or not even know about the abortion until after it happened.

For decades, the Church's Project Rachel ministry has been the means for women, predominantly, to find healing and reconciliation after abortion. Today, however, increasing numbers of men contact Project Rachel offices in the hope that someone can help them make sense out of the loss of their child, their response to the abortion and experiences in its aftermath, and help them be reconciled with God.

Out of public view, mental health professionals have for many years been exploring the experiences of fathers who've lost a child in an abortion. Some have developed successful models of healing and spiritual growth tailored to men.

The Knights of Columbus and the Archdiocese of San Francisco are sponsoring the first conference of its kind where these experts

will present their findings on the effects of abortion on men and the pathways to healing.

The Reclaiming Fatherhood Conference, organized by Vicki Thorn, foundress of Project Rachel, will take place November 28-29, 2007 at St. Mary's Cathedral in San Francisco.

The Conference presents a unique opportunity for those who deal with men in pastoral or clinical settings to learn more about these issues, which have impacted the lives of millions of men.

The following topics will be presented: a review of the research on men and abortion; trauma and abortion; the sociology of fatherhood and abortion; understanding male spiritual growth and the process of healing; why wounded fathers come for help; medicating the pain of lost fatherhood; and, forgiveness therapy with post-abortion men.

More details and on-line registration are available at www.menandabortion.info, or by calling the National Office of Post-Abortion Reconciliation & Healing at 414/ 483-4141.

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