

## Why is the Catholic Church such a strong voice for life?

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* puts it this way:

“ Human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception. From the first moment of his existence, a human being must be recognized as having the rights of a person—among which is the inviolable right of every innocent being to life...”<sup>1</sup>



“ Since the first century the Church has affirmed the moral evil of every procured abortion. This teaching has not changed and remains unchangeable. Direct abortion, that is to say, abortion willed either as an end or a means, is gravely contrary to the moral law...”<sup>2</sup>

“ We are the *people of life* because God, in his unconditional love, has given us the Gospel of life ... and we are called to act accordingly.”

Saint John Paul II  
*Evangelium Vitae*, 79  
1995

People of  
*Life*

*People of Life* is the pro-life action campaign of the Catholic Church in the United States, under the direction of the USCCB Secretariat of Pro-Life Activities.

**USCCB Secretariat of Pro-Life Activities**  
3211 Fourth Street, N.E.  
Washington, DC 20017-1194  
202-541-3070  
[www.usccb.org/prolife](http://www.usccb.org/prolife)

- 1 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 2270.
- 2 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 2271.
- 3 *The Didache*, by Charles H. Hoole, [1894], at [sacred-texts.com](http://www.sacred-texts.com).  
<<http://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/did/did03.htm>>
- 4 Translated by S. Thelwall. From *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 3. Edited by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885.) Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight.  
<<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0301.htm>>.
- 5 Charles H. Hoole, 1885 translation  
<<http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/barnabas-hoole.html>>
- 6 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Declaration on Procured Abortion*, (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1974), no. 11.
- 7 Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae*, (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995), no. 28.
- 8 *Ibid*.

*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, second edition © 2001 LEV-USCCB. Used with permission. Excerpts from *Declaration on Procured Abortion* © 1974, *Evangelium vitae* © 1995, Libreria Editrice Vaticana. Used with permission. All rights reserved. Models used for illustrative purposes only. Cover photo via Twenty20 / 5byseven. Inside photo via Twenty20 / crystalmariesing. Photos used with permission. All rights reserved. Copyright © 2018, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, D.C. All rights reserved.

The Catholic Church  
*is a Pro-Life Church*



All persons, not just Catholics, can know from scientific and medical evidence that what grows in a mother's womb is a new, distinct human being. All persons can understand that each human being merits respect. At the very least, respecting human life excludes the deliberate and direct destruction of life.

Throughout her rich tradition, the Catholic Church has always been pro-life. As Saint John Paul II reminded us, we believe that "all human life is sacred, for it is created in the image and likeness of God." Aborting an unborn child destroys a precious human life which God has called uniquely into existence.

Our Faith also obliges us to follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, who spoke and acted strongly and compassionately in favor of the most despised and vulnerable persons in society. Jesus touched lepers, spoke with prostitutes, and showed mercy and tenderness to the sick, the poor and children.

Our society has many vulnerable persons including women in difficult pregnancies as well as unborn children whose lives may legally be ended at any time during pregnancy,

*The DIDACHE 2<sup>nd</sup> Cent.*

**"You shall not commit murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not corrupt the young. You shall not commit fornication. You shall not steal. You shall not kill an unborn child or murder a newborn infant."**<sup>3</sup>

and for any reason. In following Jesus Christ, Catholics have a responsibility to speak and act in defense of these persons. This is part of our special care for the poor and powerless.

*TERTULLIAN 3<sup>rd</sup> Cent.*

**"For us, killing and murder forbidden once and for all, it is not permitted to destroy what is conceived in the mother's womb. To hinder the birth of a child is a faster way to murder. It makes little difference whether one destroys a life already born or prevents it from coming to birth. It is a human being, for the whole fruit is already present."**<sup>4</sup>

## The Church's mission to defend

human life applies over the entire course of life, from conception to natural death. And so the Catholic Church has defended human rights and conducted international relief and development efforts. Catholic hospitals and other healthcare facilities form the largest network of private, not-for-profit healthcare providers in the United States. Our Catholic charitable organizations provide countless social services to all Americans, regardless of race, creed or national origin.

The Catholic Church strives to be a prophetic voice, speaking out to protest injustices and indignities against the human person. We will continue in this work, whether our words are popular or unpopular.

Since its beginning, the Church has maintained a firm and clear teaching on the sacredness of human life. Abortion was rejected in the earliest known Christian manual of discipline, the Didache.

Early Christian fathers likewise condemned abortion as the killing of innocent human life. A third century Father of the Church, Tertullian,

*The Letter of BARNABAS*

*2<sup>nd</sup> Cent.*

**"You shall not murder a child by abortion, nor kill it after birth."**<sup>5</sup>

called it "accelerated homicide." Early Church councils considered it one of the most serious crimes. Since that time, science has only further confirmed the humanity of the child growing in his or her mother's womb. Church teaching continues to insist, to the present day, that a just society protects and cares for life before as well as after birth.

## DECLARATION ON PROCURED ABORTION, 11

*Congregation for the*

*Doctrine of the Faith, 1974*

**"The first right of the human person is his life. He has other goods and some are more precious, but this one is fundamental - the condition of all the others. Hence it must be protected above all others."**<sup>6</sup>

## Saint John Paul II challenged us:

"We find ourselves not only faced with but necessarily in the midst of this conflict: we are all involved and we all share in it, with the inescapable responsibility of choosing to be unconditionally pro-life."<sup>7</sup> As a people who believe in life, how are we responding to this challenge?

## EVANGELIUM VITAE, 28

*1995*

**". . . we are facing an enormous and dramatic clash between good and evil, death and life, the 'culture of death' and the 'culture of life'. We find ourselves not only faced with but necessarily in the midst of this conflict: we are all involved and we all share in it, with the inescapable responsibility of choosing to be unconditionally pro-life."**<sup>8</sup>