

persons have access to the basic needs necessary to sustain life and that each person receive the dignity and respect due to one made in the image of God. "What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, 'Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?" (Jas. 2:14-16).

Realizing the sanctity of human life, we affirm the rights of the unborn. Moreover, every child born has the right to be loved. The right to be loved and respected is implicit in God's gift of life and is explicit in the act of God's love to all beings. The right to birth, care and dignity applies to all humanity. Especially is this so for the disabled, the disadvantaged and the elderly.

The dignity of life requires a recognition of worth, space for being, substance for living and opportunity for knowing and reflecting about God. Freedom for religious instruction, experience and practice is a requisite for the context of life lived in gratitude and dignity.

The sense of worth requires the opportunity to choose and develop inherent skills, the education and training to perfect one's abilities, and an arena to perform one's vocation and meaningful productive tasks. The dignity and worth of life require full equality for all persons in every arena of life. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). Discriminatory acts involving ethnicity, class, religion and gender are divisive to humankind and sinful in the sight of God. (See the pamphlet on Racism in this series.) Worship is a primary way we celebrate life. "Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth" (Ps. 100:1). Gratitude to God is an appropriate and fulfilling response for the gift of life. In our thanksgiving to

God, we recognize God as the source and purpose of life itself. "Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs" (Ps. 100:2).

Study Question:

From what you have read here, how can you help others to see new areas of challenge and actions to protect, enrich and preserve life?

My answer: _____

Suggested Reading

Moltmann, Juregen. *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*, translated by Margaret Kohl. Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1992.

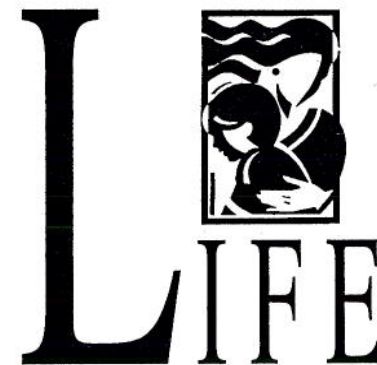
"In the Service of Life." *Instrumentum Laboris*. The Pontifical Council for Family Life, 1992.

"Critical Issues: What the Bible Teaches About Abortion." Pamphlet. The Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, Nashville, Tenn.

"Respect Life Program Packet." National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, DC.

"Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities: A Reaffirmation," 1985. National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, DC.

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LIFE

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I. The Creator of Life

All life is from God. God is the maker and sustainer of all living things. "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters" (Ps. 24:1-2, NIV). (All verses hereinafter are taken from the New International Version.) Life is God's first gift to all that is. The Lord of life enables all things that are. Eternal life through Jesus Christ is God's highest and final gift to God's creation. "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10b).

Humans are the crown of God's creation and are those uniquely made in God's image. "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:27). The Creator has commissioned men and women as stewards of God's creation. "God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground'" (Gen. 1:28). We hold this stewardship as a sacred trust, even those who do not acknowledge God, nonetheless, are recipients of life and are

responsible for the gift of life and for the preservation and conservation of the world (see pamphlet on Environment in this series).

Study Question:

In what ways are we obliged to act as stewards of all God's creation?

My answer: _____

II. Humans as Life Givers

God, the giver of life, gave to humankind the crown of creation, the ability and responsibility to procreate. "God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it'" (Gen. 1:28). Human sexuality is a creative gift from God. This holy gift enables people to give life to others, parent to child. By the proper use of sexuality, others are given their gift of life. By selfish misuse of sexuality, life is withheld from those who might have had life. By distorted uses of sexuality, others are robbed of a sense of dignity and are used or abused in such ways that they are diminished as persons. By violent and lustful misuse of the sources of life, people violate the image of God in themselves and their victims. The ability to procreate must be seen as a grace-gift and be used in the context of love and fidelity. When the procreative gift of producing life results in the coming to being of new life, the emerging life should be nurtured, nourished and protected. Sexuality is important to all persons and is a strong impetus to the sublimation and enrichment of life through service and regard for the well-being of all humans and the environment in which we live.

Those who receive God's gracious gift of

eternal life are particularly obliged and challenged to nurture, protect and preserve life. "The Lord answered, 'Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give their food allowance at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns'" (Luke 12:42-43). We discern God at work in the marvels of creation. "When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?" (Ps. 8:3-4). We revel in the redemptive purpose of God as found in sacred scripture. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). We reflect on life from both the experiences of our lived reality in the world and from our sense of the ideal reality expressed in scripture. "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28).

Study Question:

How do such issues as abortion, child care, divorce and concern for the aged and infirm relate to the issues above?

My answer: _____

III. Gifts for Living

God gives the gift of life and the ability to produce and care for life. In addition to these gifts, God has given to persons abilities, skills and the capacities to sustain and enlarge life. Genesis 4:21 tells of three brothers: Jabal (the farmer), Jubal (the musician), Tubal-cain (the tool-maker).

These figures represent humanity's God-given abilities which make life possible (food), which make life livable (tools and technology), and which make life enjoyable (the arts). Christians must realize, and help others to do so, that all of our abilities and possibilities in the human community are life-giving gifts from God. All of life is lived in the light of God's presence and because of God's gifts, which sustain and nourish life. The ability to sustain the fullest forms of life, life in the body of Christ, are grace-gifts of the Holy Spirit for the upbuilding of the community and the enrichment of all life. In one place Paul numbers these gifts: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23). In another place (1 Cor. 13:13) the three primary gifts are freely given. They are faith, hope and love. God's gifts for life are freely given. "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights . . ." (Jas. 1:17). We need to receive the gift of life and the gifts for life gladly; we need to use them; we need to share them.

Study Question:

With what particular gifts has God blessed you and how are you able to use them for others at work and at home?

My answer: _____

IV. The Quality, Protection and Dignity of Life

Therefore, the quality of life is a central concern for the Christian community. Issues of faith and practice include the preservation of life and the protection of life. These affirmations involve special concerns that all