





2019-2020 RESPECT LIFE PROGRAM

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LETTER FROM THE CHAIRMAN

of the USCCB Committee on Pro-Life Activities



Secretariat of Pro-Life Activities

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My Dear Friends in Christ:

Each October during Respect Life Month, the U.S Conference of Catholic Bishops launches a new cycle of the Respect Life Program—a year-round, nationwide effort to help Catholics understand, value, and help cultivate respect for human life.

As Chairman of the USCCB Committee on Pro-Life Activities, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for all you do to build a culture of life on a daily basis. Your efforts on behalf of the unborn, the dying, the elderly, the imprisoned, the poor and so many others have a profound impact, both now and in the life to come.

This year's theme, *Christ Our Hope: In Every Season of Life*, is particularly suited for the times in which we live. The attacks against human life seem to grow more numerous and callous by the day. Despite these challenges, we know that Christ has conquered sin and death once and for all. Through our Christian hope in the Resurrection, we are given the grace to persevere in faith. Our sacrifices on behalf of the Gospel of Life can contribute to the redemption of this current culture of death.

During the 2019-2020 Respect Life Program cycle, we also celebrate the 25th anniversary of the papal encyclical *Evangelium vitae* (*The Gospel of Life*), written by St. John Paul II. The Church's teaching on the value and inviolability of every human life remains an indispensable source of truth for all people. As *Evangelium vitae* highlights, "together we may offer this world of ours new signs of hope, and work to ensure that justice and solidarity will increase and that a new culture of human life will be affirmed, for the building of an authentic civilization of truth and love" (EV 6).

We bishops need your help. While there may be opportunities for decisive political action, we know that to build a true culture of life, we must seek to change hearts and minds. And your witness is essential.

It is the vocation of the laity to go out to be as leaven in the world, a light in the darkness. Your daily activities take you to places I cannot go; they bring you to those I will never meet. May you allow Christ to renew and strengthen you, that He may work through you in each moment of every day.

Be assured of my prayers for you and for our common efforts to bring about a world in which every life is cherished. And so together may we "hold fast to the hope that lies before us. This we have as an anchor of the soul, sure and firm" (Heb 6:18-19).

Sincerely yours in Jesus, the Lord of Life,

Most Reverend Joseph F. Naumann Archbishop of Kansas City, Kansas

Chairman, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops

Committee on Pro-Life Activities

RESPECT LIFE PROGRAM

Explanation of Materials

What is the Respect Life Program?

The annual Respect Life Program is a year-round, nationwide effort to help Catholics understand, value, and become engaged with building a culture that cherishes every human life.

Although sponsored by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Respect Life Program is essentially comprised of the efforts of leaders throughout the Church like you—parish priests, staff, and volunteers; teachers and school administrators; diocesan leaders; and so many others.

How do I use these materials?

The Respect Life Program materials are intended to help leaders integrate respect for human life into their respective work and/or ministries. You are encouraged to adapt and build off the provided resources to fit your specific needs.

The annual cycle of the Respect Life Program runs from Respect Life Sunday (the first Sunday of October) through the following September. Specific dates are sometimes suggested, but any of the materials can be used at any time. We also recommend that you build off the 2019-2020 theme, "Christ Our Hope: In Every Season of Life." A reflection unpacking the theme is provided in this resource guide.

"To be truly a people at the service of life we must propose these truths constantly and courageously from the very first proclamation of the Gospel, and thereafter in catechesis, in the various forms of preaching, in personal dialogue and in all educational activity."

POPE JOHN PAUL II (EV 82)



What's new this year?

As Pope John Paul II wrote, "We need to bring the Gospel of life to the heart of every man and woman and to make it penetrate every part of society" (Evangelium vitae 80). Our goal is therefore to help you integrate the Respect Life message into the very life of your parish, school, or ministry. Based on feedback from parishes and dioceses, this year's approach focuses less on developing new materials and much more on using existing resources to build a culture of life.

The **poster** features a bulletin board filled with photos, flyers, and prayer requests that illustrate Christ's presence throughout our lives, especially when human life is most vulnerable. It is designed to serve as a springboard for an interactive parish or school activity, and instructions for doing so are included in the action guide for Respect Life Month.

Five new **action guides** help leaders make connections to Respect Life themes throughout the year by highlighting related annual liturgical celebrations and other calendar observances. The action guides feature sample timelines, activities, announcements, intercessions, homily notes, and more. Further information is provided in the introduction to the action guides on page 9.

Additionally, ten new **bulletin boxes** are provided for use in bulletins, newsletters, social media, and wherever else they would be helpful. These are summaries of longer articles published in previous years and cover a range of topics. Digital files of these bulletin boxes are provided online, and the full-length versions can be either downloaded or ordered in print.

More information: **respectlifeprogram.org**.

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"Hold fast to the hope that lies before us. This we have as an anchor of the soul, sure and firm."

HEBREWS 6:18-19

RESPECT LIFE REFLECTION

Christ Our Hope: In Every Season of Life

From the time we are knit together in our mothers' wombs until we take our final breaths, each moment of our lives is a gift from God. While every season of life brings its own challenges and trials, each season also gives us new opportunities to grow in our relationship with God.

Today the gift of life is threatened in countless ways. Those who are most vulnerable, rather than receiving the protection they deserve, are all too often seen as a burden and as expendable. As new attacks on human life continue to emerge, we can be tempted to despair, but Christ instead offers us unfailing hope.

Hope is not false optimism or empty positivity. Christian hope is something much more profound and goes to the very depths of our identity as followers of Christ.

Hope is the virtue "by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ's promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit" (CCC, 1817).

Like us, Christ entered the world through the womb of a woman. He willingly experienced the fullness of human suffering. He breathed his last on the Cross at Calvary in order that He might save us. Therefore, "God is the foundation of hope: not any god, but the God who has a human face and who has loved us to the end" (*Spe salvi* 31).

Christians know "they have a future: it is not that they know the details of what awaits them, but they know in general terms that their life will not end in emptiness" (SS 2).

For this reason, a woman experiencing a difficult pregnancy can find the strength to welcome her precious child into the world. A man facing a terminal diagnosis can see that the end of his earthly life is only the beginning of eternal life with Christ.

The Church teaches us that "the one who has hope lives differently" (SS 2). Christ's promise of salvation does not mean that we will be spared from suffering. Rather, the promise of salvation ensures that even in the darkest moments of our lives, we will be given the strength to persevere. By virtue of this Christian hope, we can face any challenge or trial. When the seas of life swell and we are battered by the waves, hope allows us to remain anchored in the heart of God. May we hold fast to Christ our hope, from the beginning of life to its very end.





BULLETIN BOXES Article Summaries

Ten bulletin boxes are provided for use in bulletins, newsletters, social media, and wherever else they would be helpful. These are summaries of longer articles published in previous years and cover a range of topics. They are especially helpful for highlighting Respect Life topics when space is at a premium, and each box provides a website where the full version can be read.

Digital files of these bulletin boxes are provided online, and the full-length articles can be either downloaded as double-sided flyers or ordered in print. More information: respectlifeprogram.org/articles.

What to Do When a Friend is **Considering Abortion**

Read the full version at respectlifeprogram.org/l-o-v-e.

When a woman is facing a difficult pregnancy, the reaction of the first person she tells tends to set the tone for her decision-making. How do we respond in a loving way that

is life-affirming for both her and her baby? First, prioritize listening over speaking. Ask her about her Reassure her feelings, thoughts, values, beliefs, that she is and wants. When her story is fully shared, it is your turn to provide factual information, in a loving and caring way. Encourage her.

not alone.

Help her set goals that extend beyond her due date to help her see life beyond her pregnancy. Reassure her that she is not alone, and provide practical support. Pray with her, offering Christ's love at a crucial life-saving and lifedefining moment.

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Seven Considerations While Navigating Infertility

Read the full version at respectlifeprogram.org/navigating-infertility.

We often assume parenthood happens easily after "I do," but for many married couples, it does not. For some, the joy of conception never happens.

Others suffer repeated miscarriages. Still others experience secondary infertility: after giving birth to one or more children, they are unable to have another. If you experience difficulty bringing a child into your family, know that God is with you, and that He has a beautiful plan for you. your life as a married couple.

God is with vou, and **His Church** desires to walk with

You are not alone; His Church desires to walk with you. The full article at the website listed above contains compassionate, practical guidance, intended primarily for married couples struggling with infertility, though others may also find it to be informative.

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10 Ways to Support Her When She's Unexpectedly Expecting

Read the full version at respectlifeprogram.org/support-her.

As a mom who had my first baby in college, I know that an unexpected pregnancy can sometimes bring fear,

shame, and doubt. Perhaps one of your friends has become pregnant unexpectedly. I encourage you to support her in her new journey of being a mother.

Your support may be the only support she receives.

It's okay if you don't know the perfect words to say. Let her know you are there for her, and ask how

you can support her. Assist her in lining up practical help. She may not feel she "deserves" to show happiness; reassure her it's okay (and good) to be happy. Your support might be the only support she receives. You can make a difference in her life. Will you?

*Name changed for privacy. This is a summary of a USCCB Respect Life Program article by the same name and is reprinted with permission. © 2019, USCCB, Washington, D.C. All rights reserved.

Children as Commodities

Read the full version at respectlifeprogram.org/children-commodities.

At seventeen, Natalie* discovered that her parents had contracted with another woman to become pregnant

using her father's sperm and the woman's own egg. Natalie became estranged from her parents, hurt that money, rather than the physical expression of married love, was the context in which she was brought into the world. Since the advent of *IVF* (in vitro fertilization), the floodgates have

Children deserve to be given by God, born of married love.

been opened to bringing about reproduction through egg and sperm donation and surrogate pregnancies. Yet these technologies are fraught with medical, legal, and moral complications. Children deserve to not be created as a product of reproductive technology, but to be given by God, and to be born through married love.

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An Adoption Love Story

Read the full version at respectlifeprogram.org/adoption-love-story.

Having children and raising a family had always been our expectation. We soon learned, however, that our chances

of becoming pregnant were small. It wasn't long before we started talking about the possibility of adoption. I wondered if my heart was big enough to love an adopted child as I would have loved a biological child. But with prayerful discernment, we decided to start the process. On Christmas Eve, Bill* and I left the hospital with Andrew. It didn't take long before there was

We can't imagine loving a child whom we conceived more than we love Andrew.

no doubt in our minds that he was our son, the greatest gift from God! We can't imagine loving a child whom we conceived more than we love Andrew.

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Healing within Marriage from an Abortion

Read the full version at respectlifeprogram.org/healing-in-marriage.

When Susan's* husband, Juan, told her about the abortion he was involved in during college, she finally understood

why he was so depressed and had trouble bonding with their children. The devastation of abortion brings with it many challenges. Often, the people who have participated in an abortion are unaware of the countless ways it is affecting their lives. It is

God's grace can bring true healing.

scary to tell a spouse or fiancé(é) about a past abortion. It requires great trust in that person's love and trust in God. But with the help of an abortion healing ministry, couples can successfully work through abortion-related challenges. God's grace can bring true healing to the relationships of those who trust in His infinite mercy.

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Catholic Considerations for Our Earthly Passing

Read the full version at respectlifeprogram.org/end-of-life-considerations.

We prepare for eternal life by choosing to love and follow God. Our journey with Christ includes equipping our

consciences to make morally good judgments at the end of life. While no summary can substitute for thorough catechesis, one thing is clear: we are entrusted by God with God with the the gift of life. This obliges us to make use of appropriate, effective medical care. The Church affirms

We are entrusted by gift of life.

the inviolable dignity of every person, regardless of the duration or extent of the person's incapacity. Nothing diminishes the sanctity of a person's life, or the obligation to protect and care for it. Those who are sick should not be alone, and, even after death, accompaniment continues by praying for those who have passed.

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Advance Medical Directives: Planning for Your Future

Read the full version at respectlifeprogram.org/advance-directives.

Human life is good and to be protected. All medical decisions ought to reflect this core belief. Yet some

medical and legal documents used to define a patient's future care can be harmful. No matter how well-crafted, they can't predict all the possible scenarios and best courses of action. In each set of circumstances, we need to judge whether a given treatment will provide real benefit to the patient,

The safest option is to designate a health care agent.

without causing harm or disproportionate burdens. The safest option is to designate a health care agent to make decisions if you become incapable of doing so. It's best to appoint a responsible, trustworthy person who understands and shares your Catholic values, and can apply them when the need arises.

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Top Reasons to Oppose **Assisted Suicide**

Read the full version at respectlifeprogram.org/reasonsagainst-assisted-suicide.

Some polls indicate that the public is receptive to assisted suicide. But the same polls show that people's views

shift when they learn about its dangers-especially the dangers for those who are poor, elderly, Assisted disabled, or without access to good medical care. Consider that, in Oregon and California, some patients' health insurance offered to pay for assisted suicide, but not

suicide fosters discrimination.

treatment. And in states where assisted suicide is legal, often no psychiatric evaluation or treatment is required. Additionally, assisted suicide fosters discrimination by creating two classes of people: those whose suicides we spend millions of dollars to prevent and those whose suicides we assist and treat as a positive good.

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How to Build a Culture of Life

Read the full version at respectlifeprogram.org/culture-of-life.

Watching the news and reading the headlines, we may feel helpless seeing the heartbreaking lack of respect for human life. How do we respond? Changing the culture

is a process of conversion that begins in our own hearts. When we encounter Christ, experience His Our mission love, and deepen our relationship with Him, we become more aware of our own immeasurable worth and that of others. His unchanging love is the source of our God-given

field is daily life.

dignity, which, therefore, cannot be taken away. When someone is facing great trials, we need to walk with them on their journey, intercede for them, and be open to sharing Christ's love however He directs. We simply need to follow where He leads.

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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@usccb.org**, or tag us on Facebook (**@peopleoflife**) or Twitter (**@usccbprolife**). *Thank you* for your dedication in building a culture in which every human life is cherished!



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.

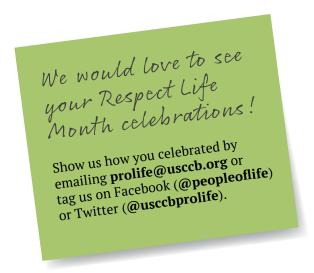
The included sample homily notes tie into the lectionary readings and are provided for use by priests and deacons in preparing their homily for Respect Life Sunday. The Respect Life reflection can also be a source of inspiration. Encourage your local priests to preach about respect for human life by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



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 4 5 66 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 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



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.

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.



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/respectlife-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." 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.

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

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

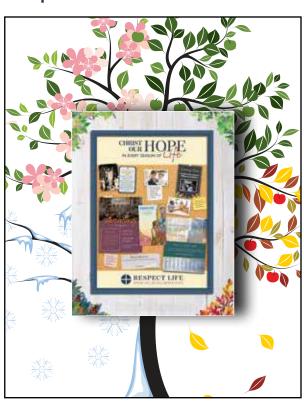
This weekend, we celebrate Respect Life Sunday and kick off October as Respect Life Month. All parishioners are invited to help us celebrate by posting items to our Respect Life bulletin board located in the _____. For more information, stop by the display after Mass or see the bulletin. We will continue 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



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ACTION GUIDE

ANNIVERSARY OF ROE V. WADE: JANUARY 2020

INTRODUCTION

On January 22, 1973, the Supreme Court legalized abortion throughout the United States in its companion decisions *Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Bolton*. Since that time, millions of children have lost their lives and millions of women and families have been wounded by abortion.

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM), no. 373, designates January 22 as a particular day of prayer and penance, called the **"Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children."** The Church directs:

In all the Dioceses of the United States of America, January 22 (or January 23, when January 22 falls on a Sunday) shall be observed as a particular day of prayer for the full restoration of the legal guarantee of the right to life and of penance for violations to the dignity of the human person committed through acts of abortion.

As individuals, we are called to observe this day through the penitential practices of prayer, fasting and/or almsgiving. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops provides resources to help parishes, schools, families, ministries, and individual Catholics participate in this important day of prayer and penance.

In addition, the USCCB also sponsors an annual, nationwide novena called "9 Days for Life," which surrounds the liturgical observance of the Day of Prayer. Each day for nine days, a different intention is featured, accompanied by a short reflection, suggested actions, and related

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

information as we pray for the respect and protection of every human life. In 2020, the novena will take place **Tuesday, January 21 - Wednesday, January 29.**

A sample timeline and activity, homily helps, announcements, 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/january.

SIMPLE STEPS

Here is a list of simple steps that you can use in your parish, school, ministry, or home to assist your efforts to commemorate the anniversary of Roe v. Wade and participate in the Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children. 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. Don't be afraid to get creative!

1. Spread the word!

Include the 9 Days for Life flyer in your bulletins for the weekends of January 11-12 and 18-19, or include the flyer in an email newsletter. 9 Days for Life is designed so that Catholics all across the nation can unite their prayers for life together. Encourage those in your community to sign up so they automatically receive the novena when it begins! Short bulletin announcements for 9 Days for Life are also provided. On the weekend of January 18-19, use one of the sample bulletin announcements for the Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children to inform your community about the observance.

2. Invite others to participate.

Announce 9 Days for Life from the pulpit on the weekends of January 11-12 and 18-19 or during your regularly-scheduled ministry gathering. During the weekend of January 18-19, share about the Church's observance of the Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children, and encourage parishioners to participate by taking up a personal act of prayer or penance. Information on the Day of Prayer can be included during announcements before or after Mass, or even highlighted during the homily. Sample announcements are included to help you invite others to join in these important prayer opportunities.

3. Preach on respect for human life the weekend of January 18-19 and on January 22.

Sample homily helps are provided to aid priests and deacons in preaching on respect for human life in their Sunday homily and to observe the Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children (January 22). Suggested readings for January 22 are also provided in Appendix A in the

back of this resource guide. For more information on this observance, visit **respectlifeprogram.org/january-22**.

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

Sample intercessions are provided for use in the Prayer of the Faithful during Masses the weekend of January 18-19 and on January 22. Schools can use these intercessions to observe the Day of Prayer by praying together at the beginning of class. Families can include these intercessions in their regular prayers in the morning, evening, or before or after a family meal.

5. Share what you're doing.

Use social media to share the daily, 9 Days for Life prayer intentions with the hashtag #9DaysforLife. Highlight parts of each day's reflection that stuck out to you. Other tools will be made available on respectlifeprogram.org/january to help you engage others in building a culture of life. If a group from your parish is praying the novena together, share that on your parish social media pages, and invite others to join you!

We would love to see
how you and your
family, parish, or
school participate!

Email us at prolife@usccb.org or
tag us on Facebook (@peopleoflife)
or Twitter (@usccbprolife).



SAMPLE TIMELINE

January all too often seems to race by before we know it. Returning to our regular schedules after the holidays is never easy. As the New Year unfolds, make a resolution to help your faith community begin the New Year by praying for the protection of human life.

The key to success will be getting an early start and planning ahead. Because the anniversary of *Roe v. Wade* falls during the month of January, much of the planning and preparation needs to take place before or during the holidays. We have provided a sample timeline to help you prepare for the January Respect Life events, taking into consideration the holiday bustle. 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.

SEPTEMBER

S	M	T	W	Т	F	S
		(3)				
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30					

NOVEMBER

S	M	T	W	Т	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

DECEMBER

S	M	T	W	Т	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				

JANUARY

S	M	Т	W	Т	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	

Early September 2019

- ♦ While January may seem like a long way off, between holiday vacations and office closures, you'll need to get started planning for January early. Getting a jump on things will also allow you to be able to enjoy the holidays yourself. Begin by visiting respectlifeprogram.org/january to review and familiarize yourself with the new materials. Download any resources you hope to utilize in January. This can include bulletin announcements, intercessions, the 9 Days for Life novena, graphics, homily notes, and the like. Begin to brainstorm about how you would like to use the provided materials to pray for life in your community.
- Request an appointment with your pastor for later in the month to discuss the Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children and 9 Days for Life.

Mid-September 2019

- Meet with your pastor. Remind him about the upcoming Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children, and let him know about the 9 Days for Life novena, if he is unfamiliar with it. Let him know what resources are available, such as homily notes, liturgical resources, options for readings, and prayer intercessions. Share information with him about 9 Days for Life and any ideas you may have about promoting it in your parish. Request permission for setting up a display table in the vestibule or other visible area the weekend of January 18-19. This will allow you to highlight 9 Days for Life and the Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children when the entire parish community is gathered together. Also, be sure to ask permission for any bulletin submissions you have in mind and for any other special activities you would like to plan. Answer any questions he may have, such as how parishioners can sign up for 9 Days for Life. Most importantly, ask what you can do to help. Sometimes directly sending him resources, such as homily notes, will save him time.
- Following your conversation with your pastor, contact your parish office to open the lines of communication. Share the results of that conversation and what you are requesting from them for observing the Day of Prayer

for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children and participating in 9 Days for Life. Many parishes need content several weeks in advance to be able to include it in the weekly bulletin; ask about bulletin submission policies and deadlines, and share what content you hope to have featured during the month of January. This will help your parish plan ahead and allot the necessary space in the bulletin. Again, most importantly, ask what you can do to help.

Early to Mid-November 2019

- Complete all bulletin submissions for the month of January. This includes the flyer and/or bulletin announcement for 9 Days for Life and the announcement for the Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children. Consider including the short reflection "Living Out Christmas in the New Year" in your bulletin or newsletter the weekend of January 11-12 or 18-19. By completing all this well ahead of time, you'll have all your content submitted before the Thanksgiving break.
- ◆ Start recruiting volunteers to help you staff the table after each Mass the weekend of January 18-19 to help answer questions, share pro-life resources, or assist in other ways. If internet access will be available, you may even want to consider having a computer or tablet available for parishioners to sign up for the novena on the spot at **9daysforlife.com**. This helps ensure that they won't forget before they get home, and they'll automatically receive reminders when the novena begins.

Thursday, November 28, 2019: Thanksgiving

Sunday, December 1, 2019: First Sunday of Advent

First Week of December 2019

Touch base with your pastor to offer further assistance and confirm any plans you may have made. Reconnect with the appropriate parish staff members regarding your bulletin submissions, table display, and any other plans. This is the time to tie up any loose ends, verify that all content has been received, finalize plans, and determine whether there are any follow-up tasks to be completed before the Christmas break.

Monday, January 6, 2020

Begin gathering materials for your table display. Make copies of the 9 Days for Life flyer to have available at the table. For those who may not be able to access the novena electronically, print copies of the novena to have on hand. For tips on setting up a display table, visit **respectlifeprogram.org/january.**

Saturday, January 18, 2020

Set up your table prior to the Saturday Vigil Mass. Coordinate with your team of volunteers to make sure friendly faces are available to share information about 9 Days for Life and the Day of Prayer. Make sure to leave your contact information (email or phone) at the table in case any visitors have questions or need more information while you're not there.

BULLETIN ANNOUNCEMENTS



9 Days for Life

(Suggested Weekends: January 11-12 & 18-19, 2020)

Option 1

Join thousands of Catholics nationwide in the annual Respect Life novena, *9 Days for Life*, Tuesday, January 21 – Wednesday, January 29. Get daily intentions, brief reflections, and more. Sign up at www.9daysforlife.com!

Option 2

Join thousands of Catholics nationwide praying the annual *9 Days for Life* novena, January 21-29. Sign up today at **www.9daysforlife.com!**

Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children

(Suggested Weekend: January 18-19, 2020)

Option 1

This Wednesday, January 22, the Church in the United States observes the annual "Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children." This day is set aside to pray for the legal protection of human life and to do penance for the violations to human dignity through abortion. We are called to observe this day through prayer and penance. More information: respectlifeprogram.org/january-22.

Option 2

Did You Know? This Tuesday, January 22, the Church in the United States observes the annual "Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children." We are called to observe this day through prayer and penance.

respectlifeprogram.org/january-22.

Healing after Abortion

(Suggested Weekend: January 18-19, 2020)

If you or someone you know is suffering after abortion, confidential, compassionate help is available. Visit **HopeAfterAbortion.org**.

PULPIT ANNOUNCEMENTS

9 Days for Life

(Suggested Weekends: January 11-12 & 18-19, 2020)

Option 1

You're invited to join thousands of Catholics nationwide in prayer for the respect of human life during a special novena called *9 Days for Life*. Visit **9daysforlife.com** to sign up to receive daily intentions from January 21st through the 29th.

Option 2

You're invited to join Catholics nationwide in praying for the respect of human life. The annual *9 Days for Life* novena will take place from January 21st through the 29th. See the bulletin for more information.

Option 3

Join Catholics nationwide in a special Respect Life novena called *9 Days for Life* from January 21st through the 29th. Please see the bulletin for more information

Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children

(Suggested Weekend: January 18-19, 2020)

Option 1

Wednesday is the annual "Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children," which Catholics are called to observe through prayer and penance. Please see the bulletin for more information.

Option 2

Wednesday is the annual "Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children." Catholics are called to observe this day through prayer and penance.

INTERCESSIONS

These sample intercessions were written for use during the month of January to help observe the Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children (January 22); however, many can be used throughout the year. These intentions are appropriate for inclusion in the Prayer of the Faithful at Sunday Mass.

They can also be printed in the weekly bulletin, included at a local Respect Life march or rally, featured in email newsletters, shared on social media platforms, or prayed during personal or family prayer times.

For the legal protection of unborn children and for loving support for their mothers before and after their births; *We pray to the Lord*:

May all who suffer from participating in abortion turn to God's loving forgiveness; *We pray to the Lord:*

For public servants:
May God grant them the humility, wisdom, and courage to defend all human life; *We pray to the Lord*:

For our nation:
May God unite us in peace
and respect for each other
and reverence for all human life;
We pray to the Lord:

May friends and families of women with difficult pregnancies provide loving, life-affirming support for both mother and child; *We pray to the Lord:*



HOMILY HELPS



These homily notes are provided to help priests and deacons preach on the Gospel of Life on the Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children (Wednesday, January 22) and the prior weekend (January 18-19).

While the Day of Prayer is observed on January 22, not all parishioners will be able to attend this midweek Mass. Incorporating Respect Life themes in the preceding Sunday Mass homily will allow a greater number in the parish community to be made aware of and participate in this day of prayer and penance called for by the Church.

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 other ministry gatherings.

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time | January 19, 2020

First Reading: Isaiah 49:3, 5-6

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 40:2, 4, 7-8, 8-9, 10

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:1-3 Gospel Acclamation: John 1:14a, 12a

Gospel: John 1:29-34

Today's First Reading speaks of God forming each of us in the womb of our mother. He fashioned human beings in His own image and likeness, and this endows each person with a dignity that no other creature can claim. God has chosen us to be recipients of His unending love and to be a light to the nations. St. Paul tells us in the First Letter to the Corinthians that we are called to be holy, set apart, and sanctified by Christ.

God further elevated the dignity of the human person through the Incarnation of His Son, Jesus Christ, through which "he united himself to all men" (CCC, 432). The Word of God became flesh and dwelt among us. God became one of us—taking on our humanity and sharing fully in our trials and sufferings. Christ came to the earth through the womb of a woman that He might bring about our salvation. For, although God created us in His image and likeness, our first parents chose to disobey Him, who had loved them into existence. They chose to reject the fullness of God's gift of life, and through their disobedience sin entered the world.

Each year on January 22, all dioceses in the United States are called to observe a Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children. January 22 is the anniversary of the 1973 Supreme Court decisions that legalized abortion throughout our nation. Since then, over 60 million lives have been lost. That's more than the size of Italy's population.

This coming Wednesday, we set aside a day of prayer for the full restoration of the legal guarantee of the right to life. It is also a day of penance for violations to the dignity of the human person committed through acts of abortion. We are each called to observe this day through the penitential practices of prayer, fasting and/or giving alms.

The act of abortion rejects God's gift of life. Abortion destroys the life of a child, lovingly knit together in his or her mother's womb, and for someone who has participated in abortion, the loss of a child can form a hole in their heart so deep that sometimes it seems nothing can fill the emptiness. As a human and Christian family, we grieve the loss of so many lives. And yet, even in our grief, we know there is hope.



In the Gospel, John the Baptist sees Jesus approaching and cries out: "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Christ came for the very purpose of redeeming our sins, offering us His forgiveness, and giving us His peace. Jesus comes to free us from the bonds of sin. And there is no sin that is beyond God's mercy. It is never too late to seek the Lord's mercy and healing through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. His greatest desire is to forgive us, pouring out His infinite mercy upon us so that we may be healed. If you or someone you know is suffering after abortion, confidential, compassionate help is available. You can find out more information about the Church's ministry for healing after abortion by visiting hopeafterabortion.com. (That website is listed in this week's bulletin.)

We are all sinners. But with the grace of God, we can be holy. We can be lights to the nations, sharing the truth about the irrevocable dignity of the human person. Where sin abounds, God's grace abounds all the more. Therefore, let us take courage and offer prayer and penance, that all human life would be welcomed in love and protected in law. In all trials, tragedies, and sufferings, *Christ is our hope*.



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Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children | Wednesday, January 22, 2020

First Reading: Genesis 1:1 - 2:2

Responsorial Psalm:

Psalm 139:1b-3, 13-14ab, 14c-15 Second Reading: 1 John 3:11-21 Gospel Acclamation: Psalm 119:88

Gospel: Luke 1:39-56

Today, all dioceses in the United States are called to observe a *Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children*. January 22 is the anniversary of the 1973 Supreme Court decisions that legalized abortion throughout our nation.

The Church sets today aside as day of prayer for the full restoration of the legal guarantee of the right to life. It is also a day of penance for all violations to the dignity of the human person committed through acts of abortion. To help us in this observance, today we celebrate the *Mass for Giving Thanks to God for the Gift of Human Life*. As individuals, we are each called to observe this day through the penitential practices of prayer, fasting and/or almsgiving.

In the First Reading, we hear the beautiful story of creation. We hear how God created the night and the day, the earth and the sky, the land and the waters, and all the creatures of the earth. And God saw that it was *good*.

But creation was not yet complete. Genesis tells us:

God created man in his image; in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

God blessed them, saying: "Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and all the living things that move on the earth."

By creating man and woman in His own image, God endowed the human race with a dignity that no other creature can claim and that can never be taken away. Therefore, human life must be cherished, valued, and protected above all else.

Today's Psalm expounds on that creation story as we are told how God lovingly knits each of us together in our mother's womb. It is ultimately God who forms our fingers and our toes, our hearts and souls. He therefore knows our inmost being and the depths of our hearts. We are *fearfully* and *wonderfully* made by God as the crown of creation. And for this we offer God our praise.



By virtue of this dignity with which we have been endowed by God, we are called to love one another as brothers and sisters. In the Second Reading, St. John recalls the story of Cain and Abel, which comes shortly after the story of creation. This is the first occasion in Scripture in which we see a person take the life of another human being. We are told that Cain allowed his heart to be hardened by anger and jealousy. Sin crept into his soul, preventing Cain from recognizing the dignity of his brother. The story of Cain demonstrates how those who allow sin to find a place in their hearts are blinded to the truth.

Abortion is an example of how we, as individuals and as a society, fail to recognize the dignity of each child, knit within the womb of his or her mother. We allow

our hearts to be hardened to the truth. Our culture either fails to recognize the undeniable humanity of unborn children, who deserve our love and protection, or disregards it.

But the Gospel reveals how we *should* respond to the gift of new life. In the story of the Visitation, we see Mary, an unmarried woman who is newly pregnant with the Infant Jesus, going in haste to the aid of her cousin Elizabeth, who is herself six months pregnant. Luke tells us that at the very moment that Elizabeth heard the sound of Mary's voice, the infant in Elizabeth's womb *leaped for joy*. From the womb of his own mother, John the Baptist recognizes the presence of Jesus, hidden within the womb of Mary. And Elizabeth responds with those familiar and beautiful words: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" Both John and Elizabeth recognize the life hidden within Mary's womb, the one who is their Savior.

This Gospel passage so tenderly illustrates the humanity of all unborn children, created in God's own image and likeness. Every new life should be greeted with the same joyful enthusiasm that led John the Baptist to literally leap in the womb of Elizabeth.

While God's gift of new life is always something to be celebrated, we must also recognize that a pregnancy, especially when unexpected, can bring with it many challenges. Mothers too often find themselves afraid, vulnerable, abandoned, and in need. And God calls us to respond in love. We are called to go in haste, as the Blessed Mother did, to offer expectant mothers the support, encouragement, and love that they deserve. Mary's example should inspire us to serve mothers and families, even amidst our own needs.

On this day, may we join the Church in continued prayer for the legal protection of all unborn children. May we offer penance for all violations against the dignity of human life. In a special way, may we also pray for all women and men who suffer from participation in abortion, that they may find healing, peace, and reconciliation with God.

And may we recommit ourselves to supporting all expectant mothers. May we never fail to set out ... in haste. As the child in Elizabeth's womb leaped for joy, so may our hearts leap with joy at the wonders of new life in every expectant mother.

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SAMPLE ACTIVITY

Order for the Blessing of Pro-Life Pilgrims

In January, many pro-life pilgrims travel to Washington, D.C. for the annual March for Life. You may have a group of pilgrims from your parish or school traveling to this national event. While not everyone is able to travel to the nation's capital, countless local marches and rallies are hosted in cities and dioceses around the country.

Even if your parish does have a group of pilgrims going to the March for Life, you can also research local events so other members of your community can participate in your local area. You may want to consider helping to organize a group to go together. This activity utilizes the *Order for the Blessing of Pro-Life Pilgrims* to send off those in your parish, school, or faith community. Another order for blessing is also available to offer upon their return. A priest or deacon will need to offer the blessing. If the celebration of Mass is preferred as the beginning or end of a pilgrimage, it may be concluded with a blessing of the pilgrims taken from the order of blessings mentioned above.

The Order for the Blessing of Pro-Life Pilgrims can be found at respectlifeprogram.org/january.

Materials

- Copies of the Order for the Blessing of Pro-Life Pilgrims Before Their Journey
- (Optional) Copies of the Order of Blessing of Pro-Life Pilgrims as They Return from Their Journey

Directions

- Find out whether there is a group of pilgrims from your parish, school, or diocese traveling either to the March for Life in D.C. or to another rally or march. If not, check with your diocese to see if any local marches or rallies are being offered.
- 2. Based on what you discover, decide whether you would like to organize a group from your parish or school to participate in a local event. If so, you can plan to meet at the parish or school before your departure and perhaps coordinate a carpool.
- 3. Whether you have a group of pilgrims traveling to Washington, D.C., or to a local march or rally, you can choose to offer the *Order for the Blessing of Pro-Life Pilgrims* as part of an already scheduled event, or you can offer it at a separate time, prior to their departure.

If the departure happens to occur near a regularly scheduled Mass, Holy Hour, or parish event, look into the possibility of connecting the two events to have greater community participation. You may want to include the blessing within the Sunday Mass the prior weekend. Following the Prayer after Communion, the presider invites all the pilgrims to stand, says the prayer of blessing, and then concludes the Mass with the final blessing for the entire assembly. In a school setting, perhaps the entire school can gather at the end of a school day to pray for the pilgrims together. It can be very powerful to include the larger community in this prayerful sendoff.

You might also consider inviting parishioners or fellow students to write down words of prayerful support or prayer intentions for the pilgrims to take with them on their journey. You could set up a table with slips of paper and writing utensils, along with a basket where they could be collected.

Depending on your unique situation, it may be more convenient to celebrate the order for blessing immediately prior to the pilgrims' departure as its own separate event. In this case, make an effort to invite families, friends, and the parish or school community to participate so the pilgrims can still have the prayerful support of their community. Ask a priest or deacon to celebrate the order for blessing before pilgrims board their buses or break up into carpools.





Your parish, school, or community may have multiple pilgrimage groups participating in different ways. Perhaps a group of students is traveling to Washington, D.C., and another group is participating in a local event. You can celebrate the order for blessing separately for these groups, or find a time to bring them all together for the celebration.

The schedule of your priest or deacon may determine how and when the order for blessing is celebrated. When asking for his participation, try to offer multiple options, and be as flexible as possible.

- 4. Once the time and place for the order for blessing has been determined, choose someone to serve as a lector during the celebration. Perhaps you would like to serve in this capacity. Once the lector has been determined, inform the priest or deacon who has been appointed. He may want to offer him or her further instructions or preparations.
- 5. An order for blessing is also available to celebrate the return of pro-life pilgrims. If possible, ask your priest or deacon to celebrate this additional order for blessing when your pilgrimage group(s) return(s) home. This is a beautiful way to welcome them home after a powerful experience.

One Step Further

To take this activity one step further, consider hosting a simple sharing session in which pilgrims can share and reflect on their experiences with the community. You may want to host this immediately upon returning from the pilgrimage, following the *Order for the Blessing of Pro-Life Pilgrims as They Return from Their Journey*.

For example, you might want to offer light refreshments and a quick sharing session with those who attended a local rally or march. If the pilgrimage group is coming back from Washington, D.C., and has had a long or even overnight bus ride, plan the sharing session a day or two later, so pilgrims have time to recover and catch up on sleep.

Depending on the time of day, consider offering light refreshments such as coffee and donuts, sodas and snacks, simple sandwiches, or cheese and crackers. If you would like to share a more substantial meal, consider making it potluck. Invite the pilgrims, their families, and the larger community. Open the gathering with a simple prayer, and then allow for "openmic" time for those who participated to share their experiences and how they were impacted. What struck them the most? What kind of lasting impression has the pilgrimage left on them? How has it made them think about the gift of life and various attacks on it?

Once everyone has had their turn, close the gathering with another brief prayer.



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ACTION GUIDE

SOLEMNITY OF THE ANNUNCIATION OF THE LORD 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF *EVANGELIUM VITAE*: MARCH 25, 2020

INTRODUCTION

The celebration of the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord commemorates the visit of the angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary to inform her that she was to be the mother of our Savior.

After giving her consent to God's word, Mary conceives Jesus in her womb and becomes the mother of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. God becomes incarnate in the womb of a woman, and "the Word became flesh" (John 1:14).

In modern times, this feast day has taken on special meaning in Respect Life ministry. Scientific advances have allowed us to confirm that life begins at conception. This solemnity helps us to recognize the gift of new life from its very beginning. It calls us to reflect on how we are to care for, protect, and welcome new life, as the Blessed Mother did for the Christ child.

In 2020, the Solemnity of the Annunciation also coincides with the 25th anniversary of the papal encyclical *Evangelium vitae* (*The Gospel of Life*). This Church teaching on the value and inviolability of every human life remains an indispensable source of truth

for all people. Written by Pope St. John Paul II, Evangelium vitae was appropriately given in Rome on March 25, 1995.

The encyclical highlights the importance of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Annunciation of the Lord in the Church's efforts to promote and defend human life:

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

The angel's Annunciation to Mary is framed by these reassuring words: "Do not be afraid, Mary" and "with God nothing will be impossible" (Lk 1:30, 37). The whole of the Virgin Mother's life is in fact pervaded by the certainty that God is near to her and that he accompanies her with his providential care.... Mary is a living word of comfort for the Church in her struggle against death. Showing us the Son, the Church assures us that in him the forces of death have already been defeated.¹

To help you celebrate the Solemnity of the Annunciation and Evangelium vitae's 25th anniversary, sample timelines, homily helps, announcements, activities, and more are provided. You are encouraged to adapt these resources as needed to fit your specific parish, school, or ministry. Free downloads and electronic resources can be found at **respectlifeprogram.org/march**.

SIMPLE STEPS

Here is a list of simple steps that you can use in your parish, school, ministry, or home to help in your efforts to celebrate the Solemnity of the Annunciation and the 25th anniversary of *Evangelium vitae*. 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.

1. Prepare through prayer.

The USCCB offers a novena in honor of the Annunciation called "A Heart Open to God's Will." In 2020, this novena will be prayed from March 16 – 24. Invite your parish to join in praying this novena. Highlight the novena in your bulletin on the weekends of March 7-8 and 14-15. Be sure to make copies of the novena available in a prominent place in your parish on the weekends that the novena announcement appears.

(Visit **respectlifeprogram.org/march** to order or download copies of the novena.)

2. Reach out to parents expecting a child.

In honor of the Annunciation, ask your pastor to offer the *Blessing of a Child in the Womb*. Propose the possibility of including this blessing as part of the weekend Masses March 21-22, as not all parishioners will be able to attend Mass on the Solemnity of the Annunciation. Your pastor may prefer to offer the blessing at another time. Once a date and time have been set, invite expectant parents to participate by announcing the blessing from the pulpit and/or including an invitation in the bulletin.

3. Educate and celebrate.

Sample bulletin inserts will be made available to help educate your faith community about *Evangelium vitae* and to help celebrate its 25th anniversary. Homily helps are also provided if your priest would like to highlight the anniversary of this important document in his homily. More resources will be made available online at **respectlifeprogram.org/gospel-of-life.**

4. Pray for expectant parents and unborn children.

Sample intercessions are provided for use during the Prayer of the Faithful during Masses on the weekend of March 21-22 and on March 25. Schools can use these intercessions to mark the Solemnity of the Annunciation by praying together at the beginning of class. Families can include these intercessions in their regular prayers in the morning, evening, or before or after a family meal.



We would love to see how your parish, school, or ministry observed the Solemnity of Annunciation and the anniversary of the Gospel of Life!

Show us how you celebrated by emailing **prolife@usccb.org** or tag us on Facebook (**@peopleoflife**) or Twitter (**@usccbprolife**).

SAMPLE TIMELINE

We have provided a sample timeline* to help you celebrate the Solemnity of the Annunciation and the 25th anniversary of *Evangelium vitae*. 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. More resources are available online to help you celebrate the anniversary of *Evangelium vitae*: **respectlifeprogram.org/march**.

*Because this observance falls near the Sunday of Divine Mercy, the provided sample timelines may overlap. Consider combining tasks; for example, maybe it would be helpful to discuss plans for the Annunciation and the Sunday of Divine Mercy with your pastor during a single meeting. Or, he may prefer separate meetings. Ask what you can do to make the most of your time together. Keep these overlapping timelines in mind when you work with other parish staff and volunteers.

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Monday, November 11, 2019

Request an early-December appointment with your pastor to discuss celebrations for the Annunciation and the 25th anniversary of *Evangelium vitae*. Keep in mind that Advent can be a busy time for parishes, and your pastor may need to push your meeting until after Christmas.

In the meantime, visit **respectlifeprogram.org/march** to review and familiarize yourself with all the resources and materials available to help you celebrate the Annunciation and *Evangelium vitae's* 25th anniversary. (More action ideas and resources for this celebration will be provided online than are included in this specific action guide.) Download any resources you hope to use during the month of March. This would include bulletin announcements, intercessions, homily notes, the *Blessing of a Child in the Womb* and the Annunciation novena, "A Heart Open to God's Will."

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Early December 2019

- Meet with your pastor, and remind him about the upcoming celebration of the Annunciation and share that it also coincides with the 25th anniversary of *The Gospel of Life*. Let him know what resources are available, such as homily notes, prayer intercessions, and the novena. Ask what your parish might do to observe these important celebrations 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. Keep in mind that these observances fall during Lent, which is often a busy time for parishes and priests.
- Following your conversation with your pastor, contact your parish office to open the lines of communication. Share the results of that conversation and what you are requesting to help celebrate the Annunciation of the Lord. Ask about bulletin submission policies. 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.

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available. Again, most importantly, ask what you can do to help. Early January 2020

Following the Christmas and New Year holidays, reconnect with appropriate parish staff and touch base with your pastor to offer further assistance and confirm any plans you may have made. This is the time to determine if there are any follow-up tasks to be completed in the weeks ahead of March 25.

This will help your parish plan ahead and allot the necessary space in

the bulletin. Lent often requires additional bulletin space for special announcements. Contact your parish while there may still be space

If your parish is planning to offer the *Blessing of a Child in the Womb*, be sure to download and/or order a copy for your parish.

Monday, January 13, 2020

Complete all bulletin submissions for the month of March. This includes the bulletin announcements for the novena in preparation for the Solemnity of the Annunciation, information on 25th anniversary of *The Gospel of Life*, and invitations for parishioners to receive the *Blessing of a Child in the Womb*. Begin highlighting these celebrations on bulletin boards, in newsletters, and on social media.

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JANUARY

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Tuesday, February 4, 2020

Reconnect with appropriate parish staff regarding your bulletin submissions. This is the time to tie up any loose ends and verify that all content has been received by those who need it. If you ordered a copy of the *Blessing of a Child in the Womb* for your pastor, check to make sure he has received it. Having these tasks completed before the start of Lent will allow you to enter more deeply into this sacred liturgical season of prayer, penance, and almsgiving.

Wednesday, February 26: Ash Wednesday (Lent begins.)

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Monday, March 16, 2020

Begin praying the Annunciation novena, "A Heart Open to God's Will" individually or in union with your parish, school, or ministry community. Consider sharing parts of the novena on social media each day, encouraging others to join in. Ask that the Solemnity of the Annunciation would touch hearts and open eyes to the gift of every human life.

Wednesday, March 18, 2020

Touch base with your pastor and/or appropriate parish staff one last time to make sure everything is in order. Be sure your pastor has copies of the homily notes, intercessions, and the *Blessing of a Child in the Womb*, if desired. You may be asked to share copies of these with a deacon or sacristan who helps in preparations for the Sunday Mass.

Wednesday, March 25: Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord and the 25th anniversary of Evangelium vitae



BULLETIN ANNOUNCEMENTS

Annunciation Novena

(Suggested Weekends: March 7-8 & 14-15, 2020)

Option 1

Join us in praying a special novena March 16-24 in preparation for the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord on March 25. The Annunciation commemorates the visit of the angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary to inform her that she was to be the mother of our Savior. After giving her consent to God's word, Mary becomes the mother of God. Let us follow the example of Mary and call upon her intercession to help us open our hearts to say "yes" to God! Copies of the novena can be picked up in the [insert location].

Option 2

Join us in praying a special novena March 16-24 in preparation for the Solemnity of the Annunciation. Let us follow the example of Mary and call upon her intercession to help us open our hearts to say "yes" to God! Copies of the novena can be picked up in the [insert location].

Blessing of a Child in the Womb

(Suggested Weekend: March 14-15, 2020)

Option 1

Expectant parents are invited to receive a special blessing for their unborn children in celebration of the Solemnity of the Annunciation. The blessing will be offered during all Masses next weekend, March 22-23.

Option 2

Next weekend, during all Masses on March 22 & 23, expectant parents are invited to join us for a blessing of their children in the womb.

25th Anniversary of Evangelium vitae

(Suggested Weekend: March 21-22, 2020)

Option 1

Did You Know? This Wednesday, March 25, is the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord and marks the 25th anniversary of the papal encyclical *Evangelium vitae (The Gospel of Life)*, written by

Pope St. John Paul II. This document on the value and inviolability of every human life remains an indispensable source of truth for all people. It reaffirms the "greatness and the inestimable value of human life" (EV 2), and addresses present-day legal, ethical, and moral threats to life, including abortion, artificial reproduction techniques, contraception, capital punishment, euthanasia, sterilization, and suicide. More information:

respectlifeprogram.org/gospel-of-life. (Excerpt from *Evangelium vitae* © 1995, Libreria Editrice Vaticana. Used with permission. All rights reserved.)

Option 2

Did You Know? This Wednesday, March 25, is the Solemnity of the Annunciation and marks the 25th anniversary of the papal encyclical *Evangelium vitae* (*The Gospel of Life*), written by Pope St. John Paul II. This document on the value and inviolability of every human life remains an indispensable source of truth for all people. More information: **respectlifeprogram.org/gospel-of-life**.

PULPIT ANNOUNCEMENTS

Annunciation Novena

(Suggested Weekends: March 7-8 & 14-15, 2020)

Option 1

You're invited to join us in a special novena from March 16th through the 24th in preparation for the Solemnity of the Annunciation. The Annunciation commemorates the visit of the angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary to inform her that she was to be the mother of our Savior. Let us follow the example of Mary and call upon her to help us open our hearts to say "yes" to God! Copies of the novena will be available in the [insert location] after Mass.

Option 2

Join us in a special novena from March 16th through the 24th in preparation for the Solemnity of the Annunciation. Let us follow the example of Mary and call upon her intercession to help us open our hearts to say "yes" to God! Copies of the novena will be available in the [insert location] after Mass.

Blessing of a Child in the Womb

(Suggested Weekend: March 14-15, 2020)

Option 1

Expectant parents are invited to receive a special blessing for their unborn children in celebration of the Solemnity of the Annunciation. The blessing will be offered during all Masses next weekend, March 22-23.

Option 2

Next weekend, expectant parents are invited to a receive a special blessing for their child in the womb. The blessing will be offered during all weekend Masses.



INTERCESSIONS

These sample intercessions were written for use during the month of March in honor of the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord; however, many can be used throughout the year. These intentions are appropriate for inclusion in the Prayer of the Faithful at Sunday Mass.

They can also be printed in the weekly bulletin, included at a local pro-life march or rally, featured in email newsletters, shared on social media platforms, or prayed during personal or family prayer

For all expectant mothers:

That the miracle of new life silently growing in their womb

will strengthen in them a commitment to cherish all human life;

We pray to the Lord:

For parents facing an unexpected pregnancy: That they may lovingly accept the precious life God has entrusted to their care;

We pray to the Lord:

For married couples longing for a child: That through the intercession of the Blessed Mother,

they may be given the grace to trust in God's loving plan for their family;

We pray to the Lord:

For those considering adoption: May the Holy Spirit guide their discernment, and grant them the grace to say "yes" to God's holy will;

We pray to the Lord:

For those suffering the loss of a child: May they find healing and peace in Christ's promise of everlasting life; We pray to the Lord:

For all Catholics:

May the incarnation of Christ in the womb of the Virgin Mary strengthen us in protecting God's gift of life; We pray to the Lord:

HOMILY HELPS

These homily notes are provided to help priests and deacons make connections to respect for all human life on the Solemnity of the Annunciation (March 25). Parts of these reflections on the Annunciation can also be included in the homily the weekend prior (March 21-22) to inform the parish community about this upcoming feast day. Brief notes are provided to introduce the congregation to the *Blessing of a Child in the Womb*.

Other ministry leaders can also use these reflections to highlight Respect Life connections elsewhere, such as in a Bible study, in a small group or a faith formation setting, or as part of any other ministry gathering.

Sunday, March 22, 2020 | Fourth Sunday of Lent

First Reading: 1 Samuel 16:1b, 6-7, 10-13a

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 23:1-3a, 3b-4, 5, 6

Second Reading: Ephesians 5:8-14
Gospel Acclamation: John 8:12

Gospel: John 9:1-41 or 9:1, 6-9, 13-17, 34-38

This upcoming Wednesday, the Church celebrates the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord. This celebration commemorates the visit of the angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary to inform her that she was to be the mother of our Savior. After giving her consent to God's word, Mary conceives Jesus in her womb and becomes the mother of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. God becomes incarnate in the womb of a woman and "the Word became flesh" (John 1:14).

In modern times, this feast day has taken on special meaning in the Church's efforts to protect and defend all human life. Scientific advances have allowed us to confirm that life begins at conception. The Annunciation helps us to recognize the gift of new life from its very beginning in the womb. It calls us to reflect on how we are to care for, protect, and welcome new life, as the Blessed Mother did for the Christ child.

In anticipation of this great Marian feast day that highlights the humanity of all unborn children, we will be offering the *Blessing of a Child in the Womb*. All expectant parents will be invited to rise, come forward, and receive this blessing upon their children.

[The Blessing of a Child in the Womb may take place within Mass (after the Prayer of the Faithful), or as an additional solemn blessing at the end of Mass. It may also be given outside the Mass, within the context of a brief celebration of the Word of God, by a priest or deacon.]

Wednesday, March 25, 2020 | Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord (25th Anniversary of *Evangelium vitae*)

First Reading: Isaiah 7:10-14; 8:10

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 40:7-8a, 8b-9, 10, 11

Second Reading: Hebrews 10:4-10 Gospel Acclamation: John 1:14ab

Gospel: Luke 1:26-38

The following sample homily is based on the reflections of Pope St. John Paul II in the conclusion of the encyclical *Evangelium vitae*, nos. 102-105.

Today is the 25th anniversary of the papal encyclical *Evangelium vitae*, also known as *The Gospel of Life*. This document, written by Pope St. John Paul II, reaffirmed the Church's constant teaching on the value and inviolability of every human life. It also addressed modern day threats to life, including abortion, artificial reproduction, contraception, capital punishment, euthanasia, sterilization, and suicide.

Issued 25 years ago today, *The Gospel of Life* was prophetically put forward on this great Marian feast, the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord. Today's celebration of the Annunciation—as recalled in our Gospel reading—commemorates the visit of the angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary to inform her that she was to be the mother of our Savior. After giving her consent to God's word, Mary conceives Jesus in her womb and becomes the mother of God by the power of the Holy Spirit. Christ becomes incarnate in the womb of a woman and the Word is made flesh.

In modern times, this feast day has taken on special meaning in the Church's efforts to protect and defend human life. Scientific advances have allowed us to confirm that life begins at conception. This solemnity helps us to recognize the gift of new life from its very beginning. It calls us to reflect on how we are to care for, protect, and welcome new life, as the Blessed Mother did for the Christ child.

In the conclusion of *The Gospel of Life*, Pope St. John Paul II offers a profound reflection on Mary, the Mother of God and the Annunciation. This homily is based largely on these reflections.

In the story of the Annunciation we see that "the one who accepted 'Life' in the name of all and for the sake of all was Mary, the Virgin Mother; she is thus most closely and personally associated with the Gospel of life. Mary's consent at the Annunciation and her motherhood stand at the very beginning of the mystery of life which Christ came to bestow on humanity."2

Mary, in becoming the Mother of God, becomes the "mother of all who are reborn to life." In a similar way, we also understand the Church to be our mother. By contemplating Mary's motherhood, the Church "discovers the meaning of her own motherhood."4 Mary's experience as the Mother of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, gives us the "model of how life should be welcomed and cared for."5

Like Mary, pregnant with the Christ-child, the Church "bears within herself the Savior of the world." The Church "is called to offer Christ to the world, giving men and women new birth into God's own life." But this great mission of the Church was only made possible by the motherhood of Mary, who bore Christ to the world through her very womb. Mary is therefore the model of the Church.

The motherhood of the Church is only realized through the labor pains of childbirth, meaning that the Church is "in constant tension with the forces of evil"8 and performs her saving mission amid sin, suffering, injustice, and death. But, "like the Church, Mary too had to live her motherhood amid suffering."9 Her own heart

was pierced. Mary's "'yes' spoken on the day of the Annunciation reaches full maturity on the day of the Cross,"10 when Mary gives her Son over to death, and becomes the Mother of the Church.

We know that the life of the Christ-child was threatened long before Calvary. Mary and Joseph had to flee to Egypt to protect the life of the infant Jesus from Herod's plans to kill him. Mary "helps the Church to realize that life is always at the center of a great struggle between good and evil, between light and darkness."11 The vulnerable infant Jesus represents "every person. every child, especially every helpless baby whose life is threatened."12 Because Christ in taking on flesh has united Himself with every human person, we come to understand that "rejection of human life, in whatever form that rejection takes, is really a rejection of Christ"13 himself.

Despite the great number of threats to human life in our world today, we still have hope. St. John Paul II highlights the angel's announcement to Mary, which "is framed by these reassuring words: 'Do not be afraid, Mary' and 'with God nothing will be impossible' (Lk 1:30, 37). The whole of the Virgin Mother's life is in fact pervaded by the certainty that God is near to her and that he accompanies her with his providential care."14 Therefore, "Mary is a living word of comfort for the *Church* [emphasis added] in her struggle against death. Showing us the Son, the Church assures us that in him the forces of death have already been defeated."15 The battle for life has already been won. By his blood, Christ has won salvation for us.

So, we must look to Mary and entrust the cause of life to her tender care and intercession. We are called to be a people of life and for life. We ask that the Blessed Mother would "grant that all who believe in your Son may proclaim the Gospel of life with honesty and love to the people of our time."16

May we answer St. John Paul II's "pressing appeal addressed to each and every person, in the name of God: respect, protect, love and serve life, every human life!" [emphasis added].17

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¹ Pope John Paul II, Evangelium vitae, (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995), 105.

² Pope John Paul II, Evangelium vitae, 102.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁶ Pope John Paul II, Evangelium vitae, 103

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Pope John Paul II, Evangelium vitae, 104

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Pope John Paul II, Evangelium vitae, 105.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Pope John Paul II, Evangelium vitae, 5.

SAMPLE ACTIVITY

Blessing of a Child in the Womb

The Solemnity of the Annunciation is a perfect occasion to offer the *Blessing of a Child in the Womb* to expectant parents in your parish community. The celebration of the Annunciation commemorates the visit of the angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary to inform her that she was to be the mother of our Savior. After giving her consent to God's word, Mary conceives Jesus in her womb and becomes the mother of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

In modern times, this feast day has taken on special meaning in Respect Life ministry. Scientific advances have allowed us to confirm that life begins at conception. This solemnity helps us to recognize the gift of new life from its very beginning. It calls us to reflect on how we are to care for, protect, and welcome new life, as the Blessed Mother did for the Christ child.

Because the solemnity falls on a Wednesday, we recommend that parishes offer this blessing during Sunday Masses the weekend prior in anticipation of this important feast of the Church.

This blessing may take place within Mass (after the Prayer of the Faithful), as an additional solemn blessing at the end of Mass, or within the context of a brief celebration of the Word of God, by a priest or deacon.

You can order a copy of the *Rite for the Blessing of a Child in Womb* from our catalog or at **store.usccb.org**. A free downloadable PDF version and supplemental information can also be found online:

respectlifeprogram.org/blessing-in-womb.

Materials

 Copy of the Rite for the Blessing of a Child in Womb

Directions

- 1. Contact your pastor, and ask if he would consider offering the *Blessing of a Child in the Womb* for expectant parents near the Solemnity of the Annunciation. We recommend including it within the Sunday Masses on the weekend of March 21-22 in anticipation of the solemnity. This allows the greatest number of parishioners to participate and highlights the humanity of all unborn children. You could also consider suggesting just one Mass at which to offer the blessing. However, your pastor may have reasons to offer the blessing at another time to best suit the needs of your particular community.
- 2. If you pastor agrees to offer the blessing, ask whether he needs you to order or download a copy of the Rite of Blessing. Make sure that he receives the materials well in advance. Perhaps he would appreciate you downloading and sending him the PDF version while he waits for the booklet to be delivered.
- 3. Once a date and time for the blessing have been confirmed, plan to announce the opportunity to receive the blessing to parishioners one to two weeks in advance. Use the sample announcements to include an invitation in the bulletin and share it in any announcements before or after Mass. If your parish utilizes any social media platforms, share the news on any relevant social media accounts.
- 4. You may want to consider providing an email address or phone number for RSVPs, so you have some sense for parishioner participation (especially in parishes without many expectant parents). If the blessing will be offered at multiple Masses, consider asking expectant parents who would like to receive the blessing to let you know which Mass they plan to attend.
- 5. During the week in which the blessing is planned, touch base with your pastor once more. *Ask if there is anything you can do to help.*

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ACTION GUIDE

SUNDAY OF DIVINE MERCY: APRIL 19, 2020

INTRODUCTION

Each year, on the Second Sunday of Easter, the Church celebrates the Sunday of Divine Mercy. Mankind's need for the message of Divine Mercy took on dire urgency in the 20th century, when civilization began again to lose the understanding of the sanctity and inherent dignity of every human life.

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

In the 1930s, Jesus chose a humble Polish nun, St. Maria Faustina Kowalska, to receive private revelations concerning His Divine Mercy that were recorded in her Diary. St. Faustina's Diary records 14 occasions when Jesus requested that a Feast of Mercy be observed. On May 5, 2000, five days after the canonization of St. Faustina, the Vatican decreed

that the Second Sunday of Easter would henceforth be known as the Sunday of Divine Mercy.

Since the legalization of abortion in our country, millions of women, men, and families have been hurt by abortion. By the age of 45, as many as 1 in 3 women have had an abortion, and a similar number of men and family members have been involved. Many *inaccurately* believe that abortion is "the unforgivable sin." They need to hear that God forgives *every* sin of a repentant heart, even the sin of abortion.

The Sunday of Divine Mercy provides an important opportunity to share Christ's message of mercy, especially with those who have been wounded by abortion. Resources, including a sample timeline, homily helps, announcements, sample intercessions, activities, and more are provided in this action guide to help you spread the message of Divine Mercy with those most in need of healing. 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/april**.



What is Project Rachel?

Project Rachel is the abortion healing ministry of the Catholic Church in the United States. It is a diocesan-based network of specially trained priests, religious, therapists, and laypersons who provide a team response of care for those suffering in the aftermath of abortion. In addition to referring for Sacramental Reconciliation, the ministry provides an integrated network of services, including pastoral counseling, spiritual direction, support groups, retreats, and referrals to licensed mental health professionals. For more information, contact your diocese or visit **usccb.org/abortionhealing**.

SIMPLE STEPS

Here is a list of simple steps that you can use in your parish, school, or ministry to help prepare for and celebrate the Sunday of Divine Mercy. 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 the needs of your specific community.

1. Share the message of mercy with those suffering after abortion.

Many dioceses offer help for those who are suffering spiritually, mentally, or emotionally after participation in abortion. Ask your diocesan Respect Life director whether your diocese has Project Rachel (or otherwise named abortion healing ministry), and if so, whether they can give you a flyer directing people how to seek that help. (A flyer with individual pull-off tabs featuring the contact information of the ministry is best.)

Hang copies of the flyer in various places around your parish, such as in the vestibule or on a bulletin board. Also, post copies of the flyer in restrooms, especially on the inside of the stall doors in both women's and men's restrooms. Hanging the flyer in discreet places like restrooms allows those interested to privately pull a tab from the flyer. Tear off two or three of the tabs before hanging the flyer to encourage people to take one of the tabs.

2. Highlight the Sunday of Divine Mercy in your bulletin or newsletter.

The Divine Mercy Novena begins on Good Friday, April 10. Print the sample announcement for the novena in your bulletin the weekend of Palm

We would love to see
how you and your
family, parish, or
school participate!

Email us at prolife@usccb.org or
tag us on Facebook (@peopleoflife)
or Twitter (@usccbprolife).

Sunday, April 4–5. The weekend of the Sunday of Divine Mercy, April 18-19, use one of the sample announcements about healing after abortion.

Many of those suffering after abortion *inaccurately* believe that it is "the unforgivable sin." Through our efforts and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, may they come to know that God forgives every sin of those who are sorry, including the sin of abortion.

3. Preach on God's unending mercy the weekend of the Sunday of Divine Mercy.

Sample homily suggestions are provided to aid priests and deacons in preaching on God's desire to forgive our sins and heal our hearts. "General Homily Considerations Regarding Healing after Abortion" are also available as an appendix.

4. Pray for healing during the Prayer of the Faithful.

Sample intercessions are provided for use in the Prayer of the Faithful the weekend of the Sunday of Divine Mercy (April 19). Where appropriate, schools could use these intercessions to observe this great Feast of Mercy by praying together at the beginning of class. Families could include these intercessions in their regular prayers in the morning, evening, or before or after a family meal.

5. Offer a Prayer Service for Forgiveness and Healing.

Contact your diocesan Respect Life director about the possibility of hosting a *Prayer Service for Forgiveness and Healing* at your parish on or close to the celebration of the Sunday of Divine Mercy. Promote the prayer service to parishioners through bulletin and pulpit announcements at Sunday Mass. If your parish already holds a special event for the Sunday of Divine Mercy, you could integrate the prayer service as part of it. Action steps for hosting a prayer service are available at the end of this action guide.

SAMPLE TIMELINE

We have provided a sample timeline to help you prepare for the celebration of the Sunday of Divine Mercy. While these steps apply most directly to a parish coordinator for Respect Life ministry, in whatever capacity you serve the Church, they can help you think about key planning steps. Adapt as needed for your local circumstances.



DECEMBER

S	M	Т	W	Т	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				

JANUARY

S	M	Т	W	Т	F	S
			1	2	3	4
	6					
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

МАРСЫ

S	М	Т	W	Т	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	9					
15	16)	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

APRIL

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		

Monday, December 2, 2019

Request a mid-January appointment with your pastor to discuss the observance of the Sunday of Divine Mercy.

Mid-January, 2020

- ◆ Meet with your pastor, and share the significance of the Sunday of Divine Mercy for healing after abortion. Refer to this action guide's introduction on page 37 in advance if you need some ideas of what to say. Let him know what resources are available, such as homily notes and prayer intercessions. Ask him about hosting a *Prayer Service for Forgiveness and Healing* near the Feast of Divine Mercy. Ask permission for the bulletin submissions you have planned. Also request permission to hang a diocesan Project Rachel Ministry flyer with pull-off tabs containing the ministry's contact information around the parish leading up to, during, and shortly after the observance of the Sunday of Divine Mercy. Most importantly, ask what you can do to help. Lent, Holy Week, and Easter are often the busiest times of the year for priests.
- ◆ Following your conversation with your pastor, contact your parish office to open the lines of communication. Share the results of that conversation and what you are requesting for the observance of the Sunday of Divine Mercy. Ask about bulletin submission policies. 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 for the Sunday of Divine Mercy and allot the necessary space in the bulletin. Lent, Holy Week, and Easter often require additional bulletin space for schedules and announcements. Contact your parish while there may still be space available. Again, most importantly, ask what you can do to help.

Early March, 2020

Recruit any volunteers you may need to help in hosting a *Prayer Service for Forgiveness and Healing*. You may need lectors, musicians, or greeters. Be sure to learn and comply with all parish and diocesan volunteer policies.

Ask local and diocesan prayer networks to pray for the fruitfulness of the prayer service, specifically that the event is well-attended and that those who are in need of God's mercy will be encouraged to seek out help. In addition to seeking God's grace, this will also help spread the word.

Monday, March 16, 2020

Complete all bulletin submissions for the month of April. This includes the bulletin announcement for the Divine Mercy Novena, information on abortion healing for the Sunday of Divine Mercy, and advertisements for the *Prayer Service for Forgiveness and Healing*. Make copies of the prayers for the prayer service (available online). Begin advertising the event on bulletin boards, in newsletters, and on social media.

Tuesday, March 24, 2020

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 by those who need it, confirm with your volunteers, and determine if there are any follow-up tasks to be completed. Having all these tasks completed prior to Holy Week will allow you to fully enter into this special liturgical season and celebrate Christ's Resurrection at Easter!

Friday, April 3, 2020

If you have obtained the necessary permission, hang the Project Rachel Ministry flyer in appropriate places around your parish. Tear off two or three of the tabs from each flyer before putting it up. (This makes it less intimidating for those who want to take a tab to do so.)

Friday, April 10, 2020: Good Friday of the Lord's Passion, beginning of the Divine Mercy Novena

Sunday, April 12, 2020: Easter Sunday, The Resurrection of the Lord

Tuesday, April 14, 2020

Touch base with volunteers and take care of any lastminute tasks.

Friday, April 17, 2020

Check your Project Rachel Ministry flyers located around the parish. Do any need to be replaced? Perhaps most of the pull-tabs have already been removed. Make sure any flyers that need to be refreshed are ready in advance of the Sunday of Divine Mercy.

Sunday, April 19, 2020: Sunday of Divine Mercy

Monday, April 20, 2020

Following the Sunday of Divine Mercy, check your Project Rachel flyers located around the parish. If any are running low on pull-off tabs, hang up replacement flyers in case someone who wanted a pull-off tab didn't get a chance to take one yet.

BULLETIN ANNOUNCEMENTS

Divine Mercy Novena

(Suggested Weekend: April 4-5, 2020)

The Divine Mercy Novena begins on Good Friday, April 10, and concludes Saturday, April 18. In private revelations to St. Faustina, Jesus asked that the Feast of Divine Mercy be preceded by a novena praying for nine intentions with the Divine Mercy Chaplet. The novena can be accessed online at www.thedivinemercy.org/message/devotions/novena.php.

Sunday of Divine Mercy

(Suggested Weekend: April 18-19, 2020)

Option 1

This weekend we celebrate the Sunday of Divine Mercy. God's greatest desire is to forgive us, pouring out His infinite mercy upon us so that we may be healed. Women and men alike who have been involved in an abortion may feel deep grief, guilt, anxiety, depression, broken relationships and a sense of alienation from God and Church. They may experience anniversary reactions to the date of the abortion or what would have been the baby's due date. For anyone struggling with this, the Church cares. It is never too late to seek the Lord's mercy and healing through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Consider confidential, compassionate help from our diocesan abortion healing ministry. It is open to those of any faith or no faith, offering hope and healing to women and men hurting from past abortions. Visit the "Find Help" map on HopeAfterAbortion.org to find the diocesan ministry near you.

Option 2

This weekend we celebrate the Sunday of Divine Mercy. God never ceases offering us His mercy in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. If you or someone you know is suffering after abortion, confidential, compassionate help is available. Visit **HopeAfterAbortion.org**.

Prayer Service for Forgiveness and Healing

(Include in bulletin beginning three weeks before the scheduled event.)

Please join us at [time] on [date] for a Prayer Service for Forgiveness and Healing to pray for all who have participated in abortion. Questions? Contact [name] at [email or phone number].

PULPIT ANNOUNCEMENTS

Divine Mercy Novena

(Suggested Weekend: April 4-5, 2020)

Please join us in praying the Divine Mercy Novena beginning this week on Good Friday. Private revelation holds that Jesus appeared to St. Faustina and asked that the Feast of Divine Mercy would be preceded by this novena. See the bulletin for more information.

Prayer Service for Forgiveness and Healing

(Sunday before the event.)

Please join us at [time] on [date] for a Prayer Service for Forgiveness and Healing to pray for all who have been involved in abortion. See the bulletin for more information.

or

Please join us at [time] on [date] for a Prayer Service for Forgiveness and Healing. We will pray that all those who have been wounded by participation in abortion may find forgiveness and healing in God's tender mercy. See the bulletin for more information.





INTERCESSIONS

These sample intercessions were written for use on the Sunday of Divine Mercy (April 19, 2020); however, many can be used throughout the year. These intentions are appropriate for inclusion in the Prayer of the Faithful at Sunday Mass, but can also be used elsewhere. For example, they could be printed in the weekly bulletin, featured in email newsletters, shared on social media platforms, or prayed during personal or family prayer times.

May all who suffer from participating in abortion turn to the infinite mercy of our Savior and receive His healing, hope and peace; *We pray to the Lord*:

May all who suffer from participating in abortion turn to God's loving forgiveness; *We pray to the Lord*:

For all whose hearts ache from the sin of abortion: That God will soothe and heal them with the balm of his Divine Mercy;

We pray to the Lord:

For men and women afraid to confess their participation in abortion:
May the assurance of God's limitless mercy give them courage to seek forgiveness and healing; *We pray to the Lord*:

HOMILY HELPS

These homily notes are provided to help priests and deacons bring the message of God's infinite mercy to their parishioners. Although heavily drawing from the readings of the Sunday of Divine Mercy on April 19, 2020, these notes can be used at any time—for example, during a *Prayer Service for Forgiveness and Healing*.

A passing reference to abortion allows those in the pews who suffer from their participation in abortion to know God's mercy is available to them. By the age of 45, as many as 1 in 3 women have had an abortion, and a similar number of men and family members have been involved. Many of those present in our parishes inaccurately believe that abortion is "the unforgivable sin." They need to hear that God desires to forgive every sin, including the sin of abortion.

Additionally, "Homily Considerations Regarding Healing after Abortion" can be found in Appendix B or online at respectlifeprogram.org/april.

Other ministry leaders can also use these reflections to help spread Christ's message of Divine Mercy, such as in a Bible study on the weekly Sunday readings, in a small group or a faith formation setting, or as part of any other appropriate ministry gathering.

Sunday of Divine Mercy | April 19, 2020

First Reading: Acts 2:42-47

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 118:2-4, 13-15, 22-24

Second Reading: 1 Peter 1:3-9
Gospel Acclamation: John 20:29

Gospel: John 20:19-31

Each year, on the Second Sunday of Easter—the last day of the Easter Octave—the Church celebrates the Sunday of Divine Mercy. On this day, we contemplate the fullness of the Paschal Mystery—Christ's Passion, death, and Resurrection. The basis of the whole Easter Mystery is the merciful love of God. From the beginning of creation, throughout Scripture, and most perfectly in the life, Passion, death and Resurrection of his Son, Jesus, God has been revealed as love itself. In His infinite love for us, God desires nothing more than to forgive our sins and offer us His mercy.

Our world's need for the message of Divine Mercy took on new urgency in the 20th century. It was during this time that the world witnessed the rise of Nazism and communism and experienced the horrors of the world at war. Civilization was losing the understanding of the sanctity and inherent dignity of every human life.

As these evil ideologies were taking shape, Jesus appeared to a humble Polish nun, whom we know as St.

Maria Faustina Kowalska. As Jesus continued to appear to St. Faustina, she recorded His messages to her in her *Diary*. On one such occasion, Jesus said to St. Faustina:

My daughter, tell the whole world about My inconceivable mercy. I desire that the Feast of Mercy be a refuge and shelter for all souls, and especially for poor sinners. On that day the very depths of My tender mercy are open. I pour out a whole ocean of graces upon those souls who approach the Fount of My Mercy (Diary 699).

Jesus appeared to the humble Faustina and asked that we celebrate the gift of His mercy today. Our celebration of this Easter Octave is a celebration of the mercy and forgiveness that are now available to all of us, by virtue of Christ's Resurrection. We must only run toward the outstretched arms of Christ.

In the First Reading, we are told that the early Church "devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers" (Acts 2:42). Already in these early days of the Church we see that the followers of Christ committed themselves to prayer and participation in the Sacraments. The way they lived out their relationships with Christ helped others to also encounter Him and receive salvation: "And every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved" (First Reading, Acts 2:47).



In order to be saved, we must first admit that we are in need of saving. While God wants nothing more than to give us His mercy, in order to receive it, we have to admit that we are sinners in need of God's forgiveness. We must be willing to look at the ways we have failed to love God and our neighbor, so that God can raise us to the heights of His love through His great mercy.

For, as the psalmist writes, "His mercy endures forever" (Responsorial Psalm, Psalm 118:2). We may often feel that we are unworthy of God's love and mercy. We can fool ourselves into believing that God's mercy is for everyone else. We might believe the lies of the Evil One as he tries to convince us that our sins are too great, that our sins are unforgiveable. But God desires to take the greatest of sinners and transform them into the greatest saints. No sin is beyond His mercy. He makes "all things new" (Revelation 21:5).

Let us recall the words from the Second Reading that tell us God, "in his great mercy gave us a new birth to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you" (1 Peter 1:3-4).

No matter how we have failed, the Resurrection of Christ is an assurance of *hope*. Christ's mercy is constantly available to us, if only we reach out in faith and confidence.

In the Gospel, we hear the story of Jesus' appearance to the disciples after His death. Jesus comes to them and exposes the wounds of His hands and His side the wounds He endured for our salvation. And as the Resurrected Lord stood in their midst, the first words He spoke to them were, "Peace be with you" (John 20:19).

Many of these disciples had abandoned Jesus during His Passion. During Christ's moment of greatest need, they scattered, leaving Jesus alone in His sacrifice. Many might think what the disciples had done was unforgiveable. Yet Jesus appears to them and offers them His *peace*. And then He breathed on them and gave them the power to forgive sin, to extend His own mercy.

Now, Thomas was not present when Jesus appeared, and he refused to believe the disciples when they told him the Lord had appeared to them. Thomas needed to see to believe, and so Jesus returned and revealed himself eight days later, on the Octave of Easter. Jesus showed Thomas His hands and His side, saying, "do not be unbelieving, but believe" (Gospel, John 20:27).

How often have we doubted the Lord like Thomas? How often have we hidden in fear, unable to bear the shame of our mistakes and failures? What sins have we painfully buried in our hearts rather than exposing them to the healing light of God's mercy? Have we failed to confess and seek reconciliation for sins of adultery, violence, hatred, or participation in an abortion? Have we rejected the Church's teachings on contraception, sexuality, or marriage? Have we hardened our hearts, giving ourselves over to envy, greed, or dishonesty?

No sin is unforgiveable, and no sinner is beyond redemption. We have all failed and are in need of God's mercy. It is for this very reason that Christ suffered, died, and rose again. Christ came to offer us His infinite love and mercy, and we can receive it in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

When we enter the confessional and seek God's forgiveness, in a way, Christ breathes on us as He did the disciples, wiping away our sins and offering us His peace. We don't need to hide in fear or shame. Christ's mercy is freely given to a repentant heart. He will reveal to us the saving wounds of His hands and feet. He will take away our pain and replace it with His peace. And as we receive the gift of His Divine Mercy, may our hearts cry out with the joyful words of Thomas, "My Lord and my God!" (Gospel, John 20:28). May we "not be unbelieving, but believe" (Gospel, John 20:27).

St. John Paul II, who canonized St. Faustina, said in his 2001 homily for the Sunday of Divine Mercy, "Divine Mercy! This is the Easter gift that the Church receives from the risen Christ and offers to humanity." Today we celebrate that Easter gift of God's unending, merciful love for all his children. This is at the heart of the Gospel. Let us never fail to seek the mercy that God desires to freely give us. Jesus, we trust in you.

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SAMPLE ACTIVITY

Prayer Service for Forgiveness and Healing

This activity utilizes the *Prayer Service for Forgiveness and Healing* to join together in praying that all who have been wounded by participation in abortion may find forgiveness, peace, and healing in God's tender mercy. By the age of 45, as many as 1 in 3 women have had an abortion, and a similar number of men and family members have been involved. Too often, those who have been involved in abortion suffer alone in silence for years.

This prayer service can be combined with a regularly scheduled parish event, such as a regular Holy Hour, or planned as a supplemental activity. A priest or deacon will need to lead the prayer service.

Materials

 Copies of the Prayer Service for Forgiveness and Healing (respectlifeprogram.org/april).

Directions

(This action guide's sample timeline includes dates for most of the following.)

- 1. Contact your pastor to ask if your parish can host a *Prayer Service for Forgiveness and Healing* sometime near the Sunday of Divine Mercy.
- 2. After the event has been approved and a date and time have been determined, begin advertising the prayer service. Include announcements in your bulletin and email newsletters and share on any relevant social media accounts.
- 3. Recruit volunteers to help you host the prayer service. You may want to have lectors, musicians to offer an opening hymn, and greeters to hand out programs. Ask the priest or deacon celebrating the prayer service if they have any requests to ask of the volunteers and if you can assist them in any way.
- 4. Make copies of the program. Extend individual, personal invitations to parishioners. A personal invitation is often the most effective way to encourage attendance.

- 5. Before the event begins, pray that the prayer service will open hearts to seek God's mercy. Pray for the healing of all those who have been wounded by abortion. Entrust the event to the Holy Spirit.
- 6. Consider making promotional materials for Project Rachel Ministry (or other name of your diocesan abortion healing ministry) available in discreet locations around the parish for those who may be seeking help after abortion. You might also consider putting the ministry's contact information on the back of the program.

One Step Further

Your parish may also want to celebrate this great Feast of Mercy and the conclusion of the Octave of Easter by hosting a Eucharistic Holy Hour for the Sunday of Divine Mercy. A template is available online and includes prayers, options of readings, and intercessions.

Download at respectlifeprogram.org/april.

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ACTION GUIDE

MOTHER'S DAY: MAY 10, 2020

INTRODUCTION

Mother's Day is a wonderful opportunity to highlight the beautiful vocation of motherhood and the gift of life. It calls us to cherish the gift of life that we receive from our mothers and to pray for all women to whom God has entrusted life in a very special way. As we pray in thanksgiving for the gift of all mothers, we also specifically remember mothers experiencing difficult pregnancies and pray they may find support and encouragement in choosing life for their children.

While Mother's Day is not a liturgical or Catholic observance, many parishes still take advantage of this holiday to honor and pray for mothers. The month of May has traditionally been dedicated to Mary, Mother of Jesus. Mother's Day provides an opportunity to pray for mothers while honoring and seeking the intercession of Our Blessed

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

Mother. It is a fitting day to ask God's special blessing on all mothers. (The *Book of Blessings* contains various options.) If expectant mothers are present in the congregation, Mother's Day is also an opportune time to make use of the *Rite for the Blessing of a Child in the Womb*, which offers blessings for the mother and her unborn child. (See the action guide for the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord for sample announcements and other ideas for using the rite.)

In our efforts to celebrate the vocation of motherhood, it is also important to remember that Mother's Day can be a difficult holiday for many people: couples struggling with infertility; parents who have lost a child; those who have lost their own mothers; couples longing to welcome a child through adoption; and women and men who have been wounded by participating in abortion. The included homily notes provide considerations for honoring mothers while showing sensitivity and compassion to all who find this holiday particularly challenging.

A sample timeline, announcements, activity, and more are provided to help you observe Mother's Day. You are encouraged to adapt the following resources as needed to fit the needs of your specific parish, school, or ministry. Free downloads and additional electronic resources can be found at **respectlifeprogram.org/may**.

SIMPLE STEPS

Here is a list of simple steps that you can use in your parish, school, ministry, or home to help celebrate Mother's Day. 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.

Consider how your parish can observe Mother's Day.

Many parishes already have some observance of Mother's Day. It may be a special blessing, a reception after Mass, or a May Crowning of Our Blessed Mother. Find out whether your parish already has any plans or regular traditions. Review the Respect Life resources available for Mother's Day such as the *Spiritual Bouquet to Our Blessed Mother* activity that appears later in this action guide and the *Rite for the Blessing of a Child in the Womb* (available by visiting **respectlifeprogram. org/blessing-in-womb)**. Prayerfully consider which activities may work best in your parish, and if there is a way to complement or integrate with your parish's regular observances.

2. Meet with your pastor.

Schedule a time to meet with your pastor to discuss possibilities for observing Mother's Day in your parish. Express your desire to use this holiday to highlight the gift of life and the beauty of the vocation of motherhood. Explain what ideas you have prayerfully considered, and ask what may be most appropriate for your parish. Be open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and your pastor throughout your conversation.

3. Make necessary preparations.

Once you have determined how your parish will celebrate Mother's Day, begin making the appropriate plans and preparations. This could include scheduling bulletin announcements, gathering materials, assembling a team of volunteers, and more. See the following *Sample Timeline* for more detailed steps.

4. Pray for all mothers and all those who find Mother's Day challenging.

No matter how your parish has decided to observe Mother's Day, prayer should be the basis of everything we do. As you plan and prepare, remember to lift up in prayer all mothers and to offer thanksgiving for the gift of human life. We also know that Mother's Day is often a difficult holiday for many, including those who have lost a child, those who have lost or are estranged from their own mothers, and those who are struggling or unable to have a child. Pray that they may be filled with the Lord's peace and comforted by His love on what is often a challenging day.

In addition to being a time to celebrate the gift of fatherhood, Father's Day (June 21, 2020) is another important opportunity to highlight respect for human life.

Supplementary resources will be made available to help you celebrate this holiday in your parish, school, or ministry. Sample intercessions, a bulletin reflection, and more will be posted at respectlifeprogram.org/fathers-day.



SAMPLE TIMELINE

We have provided a sample timeline to help you prepare for the celebration of Mother's Day. While these steps apply most directly to a parish coordinator for Respect Life ministry, whatever your role serving the Church, they can help you think about key steps for planning ahead.



FEBRUARY								
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23	24	25	26	27	28	29		

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APRIL							
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26	27	28	29	30			

	MAY						
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(10)	11	12	13	14	15	16	
17	18	19	20	21	22	23	
24	25	26	27	28	29	30	
31							

Early to mid-February, 2019

- Meet with your pastor to discuss options for highlighting the precious gift of life as part of the observance of Mother's Day. Let him know what resources are available, such as the homily helps and sample intercessions that follow later in this guide. Ask him to consider offering the Blessing of a Child in the Womb in addition to other special Mother's Day blessings. Share with him your ideas for offering a spiritual bouquet to Our Blessed Mother (sample activity at the end of this Mother's Day action guide). Request permission for any bulletin submissions you have in mind, as well as permission to set up a table in the vestibule or other gathering area. Most importantly, ask what you can do to help and whether there's any other information he would like you to provide.
- ◆ Following your conversation with your pastor, contact your parish office to open the lines of communication. Share the results of the conversation with your pastor and what you are requesting for the observance of Mother's Day. Find out bulletin submission guidelines and deadlines; what the parish hours will be during Holy Week (April 5-11) and Easter Week (April 12-18); and when the bulletin for the weekend of April 25-26 will be assembled. This information will help you determine the best date to follow up with your bulletin submissions. Many parishes need content several weeks in advance to be able to include it in the weekly bulletin. Find out what else the parish staff needs from you and when they need it.

Early March, 2020

Once you have received the appropriate approvals and permissions, begin gathering materials for the spiritual bouquet. Research what options you may have for purchasing flowers at an affordable price, and compare the information against your budget. Keep in mind that flower options and prices may change based on the season.

Mid-March

Begin to recruit volunteers to help you facilitate the spiritual bouquet. Volunteers will be needed to staff the table after each Mass the weekend of Mother's Day, May 10. Other volunteer tasks might include picking up or transferring flowers to the parish or preparing materials.

Late March

Send the bulletin and pulpit announcement submissions you hope to have featured. This will help your parish plan and allot the necessary space.

Friday, April 10: Good Friday of the Lord's Passion, beginning of the Divine Mercy Novena

Sunday, April 12: Easter Sunday, The Resurrection of the Lord

Tuesday, April 14 (subject to change, depending on parish office hours during Easter Week)

Reconnect with appropriate parish staff regarding your bulletin and pulpit submissions, and make sure they have received all the materials needed, including the spiritual bouquet announcements and the *Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Life*. If you have obtained permission from the pastor, make arrangements to set up a table in the vestibule or other gathering area on Mother's Day weekend.

Wednesday, April 15 (subject to change, depending on parish office hours during Easter Week)

Touch base with your pastor to offer further assistance and to confirm any plans you may have made, such as the spiritual bouquet or the *Rite for the Blessing of a Child in the Womb*. Make sure he has everything he needs, such as pulpit announcements or a copy of the rite.

Sunday, April 19: Sunday of Divine Mercy

Late April

With your volunteers, prepare all the spiritual bouquet materials except for the flowers.

Saturday, May 9

Gather with your volunteers to set up the table prior to the vigil Mass. Keep the flowers in a safe area. Consider allotting a certain number of flowers for each Mass, and setting out each allotment just prior to each Mass. This will help ensure that you don't run out of flowers before the final weekend Mass. Remember that some Masses have higher attendance than others, and plan accordingly.

Saturday, May 9 and Sunday, May 10

Help participants complete the spiritual bouquet following each Mass. Depending on how you have

planned to complete and/or adapt this activity for your parish, specific logistical steps will vary. (See the sample activity at the end of this Mother's Day action guide for various options for doing this activity.) After the final Sunday Mass, break down the table, and clean up any leftover materials. The spiritual bouquet can remain in place for the next 1–2 weeks.

Sunday, May 24

Clear away the spiritual bouquet, and remove any leftover vases.

BULLETIN & PULPIT ANNOUNCEMENTS

If you are using the Rite for the Blessing of a Child in the Womb, see the action guide for the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord for sample announcements and other ideas.

Bulletin Announcements

(Suggested Weekends: April 25-26 & May 2-3, 2020)

On Mother's Day weekend, please join us in offering a Spiritual Bouquet to Our Blessed Mother. Following each Mass, parishioners will be invited to write down their prayer intentions and offer them to Our Lady along with flowers of thanksgiving for her motherly love and intercession. [To cut the cost of providing flowers, consider adding: "If you would like to participate, please bring a flower with you to Mass that/next weekend."]

As we celebrate the gift of mothers and honor Our Blessed Mother, we also recognize that Mother's Day can be a difficult holiday for many. We hope this spiritual bouquet provides an opportunity to pray for the intentions brought to your heart by Mother's Day.

Pulpit Announcements

(Suggested Weekend: May 2-3, 2020) Option 1

Next weekend after each Mass, please join us in offering a spiritual bouquet to Our Blessed Mother. All are invited to write down a prayer intention and offer it to Our Lady with a flower of thanksgiving for her maternal care. Please see the bulletin for more information.

Option 2 (if you are **not** providing flowers) (Suggested Weekend: May 9-10, 2020)

After Mass, please join us in offering a spiritual bouquet to Our Blessed Mother. All are invited to [insert location of the table with the supplies], where there are pens and paper for you to write down a prayer intention. You can then present your intention to Our Lady by placing it in the basket at sinsert designated Marian statue, icon, or painting and location]. If you brought Our Blessed Mother a flower, you can offer it to her in thanksgiving for her maternal care by placing it in the vase located [insert location]. [Consider adding: "For those who did not bring a flower, a limited supply is available near the pens and paper."

As we celebrate the gift of mothers and honor Our Blessed Mother, we also recognize that Mother's Day can be a difficult holiday for many. We hope this spiritual bouquet provides an opportunity to pray for the intentions in your heart today.

Option 3 (if you **are** providing flowers) (Suggested Weekend: May 9-10, 2020)

After Mass, please join us in offering a spiritual bouquet to Our Blessed Mother. All are invited to *[insert location of the table with the supplies]*, where there are pens and paper for you to write down a prayer intention. There are also flowers for you to offer to Our Lady in thanksgiving for her maternal care. After writing down your intention, take a flower, and present both to Our Blessed Mother at [insert designated Marian statue, icon, or painting and location].

As we celebrate the gift of mothers and honor Our Blessed Mother, we also recognize that Mother's Day can be a difficult holiday for many. We hope this spiritual bouquet provides an opportunity to pray for the intentions in your heart today.



INTERCESSIONS

These sample intercessions were written for use on Mother's Day (May 10, 2020); however, many can be used throughout the year. These intentions are appropriate for inclusion in the Prayer of the Faithful at Sunday Mass. They can also be printed in the weekly bulletin, featured in email newsletters, shared on social media platforms, or prayed during personal or family prayer times.

For all mothers:

That they may be supported and encouraged in their special vocation of love; We pray to the Lord:

That all might treasure and support God's plan for life and love; We pray to the Lord:

For all mothers:

That their children will honor their many sacrifices by lives of service and virtue;

We pray to the Lord:

For mothers facing unexpected pregnancies: That they may find strength and courage in the example of our Blessed Mother; We pray to the Lord:

For all mothers awaiting the birth of their children:

That the Lord protect them and bring their babies to safe delivery;

We pray to the Lord:

For all married couples struggling to have a child: That the Lord grant them peace as they hope for the gift of a son or a daughter; We pray to the Lord:

For all those longing to welcome a child through

May the Lord guide their journey to parenthood and grant them peace along the way;

We pray to the Lord:

For mothers who mourn the loss of a child: That they may find peace and consolation in the hope of eternal life;

We pray to the Lord:

HOMILY HELPS

These homily helps, rather than providing specific points based on the readings of the day, are structured to provide background and considerations for preaching with sensitivity and compassion on Mother's Day (May 10). While we should always celebrate the vocation of motherhood and thank God for the gift of life brought forth through mothers, it is also important to acknowledge the challenges of those who find this annual observance painful. Other ministry leaders can also keep these considerations in mind when planning events, activities, or communications in observance of Mother's Day.

Sunday, May 10, 2020 | Fifth Sunday of Easter (Mother's Day)

First Reading: Acts 6:1-7

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 33:1-2, 4-5, 18-19

Second Reading: 1 Peter 2:4-9
Gospel Acclamation: John 14:6

Gospel: John 14:1-12

Background

Mother's Day is a wonderful opportunity to highlight the vocation of motherhood and the gift of life entrusted to mothers by God in a very special way. While Mother's Day is not a liturgical or Catholic observance, many parishes still take advantage of this holiday to honor and pray for mothers. It is a fitting day to ask God's special blessing on those who bring forth and nurture human life. (The Book of Blessings contains various options.) If expectant mothers are present in the congregation, Mother's Day is also an opportune time to make use of the Rite for the Blessing of a Child in the Womb, which offers blessings for the mother and her unborn child.

In our efforts to honor and offer thanksgiving for all mothers, it is also important to remember that Mother's Day can be a difficult holiday for many people, such as women who are struggling with infertility, those who have lost or are estranged from their mothers, and mothers who have lost one or more children through miscarriage, abortion, or some other way.

Considerations

Some considerations are provided to bear in mind as you honor mothers while showing sensitivity and compassion to all who find this holiday especially challenging.

- During your homily, you may want to take a moment to acknowledge that this is difficult day for many people. Those struggling with feelings of loss, emptiness, or loneliness on this holiday can often feel overlooked. This simple gesture can communicate a sense of understanding and recognition for what they are going through.
- Invite the congregation to pray for mothers as well as those who find this holiday to be painful: those who have lost a child; those who have lost their mothers; those struggling to conceive a child; and those waiting to welcome a child through adoption, among others.
- Consider utilizing the provided sample intercessions in the Prayer of the Faithful. Some pray for mothers, while others focus on those who may find Mother's Day difficult. Addressing both is a beautiful way to celebrate motherhood, while also extending compassion and solidarity. It is especially important to acknowledge those for whom Mother's Day is hard if you plan to offer a blessing for mothers following the Prayer of the Faithful or as a solemn blessing at the end of Mass.
- Some women are called to the vocation of motherhood physically and biologically, while others answer God's call as spiritual mothers.
- Reaffirm the goodness and gift of the vocation of motherhood. The incredible bond between mother and child is truly a gift from God to be celebrated.
- Consider highlighting the role the Church plays as our Mother and the role of our Blessed Mother in our lives.
 The Church and Our Lady can offer maternal comfort to those who are struggling and inspiration to mothers.

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SAMPLE ACTIVITY

A Spiritual Bouquet to Our Blessed Mother

May has traditionally been observed as a month dedicated to Mary, Mother of God. It is also the month in which we celebrate our earthly mothers through the observance of Mother's Day.

Mother's Day provides a beautiful opportunity to pray for all mothers, including those facing an unexpected pregnancy. However, it can be a difficult holiday for many, including those struggling with infertility, those who have lost children, and those who have lost their own mothers.

This activity seeks to lift up the many intentions laid on our hearts by the observance of Mother's Day and offer them to Our Blessed Mother, during the month honoring her. It also provides a way to give thanks for her maternal love and care for us. On the weekend of Mother's Day, parishioners are invited to write a prayer intention on a slip of paper and offer it, along with a flower whenever possible, to Our Lady. While there are many options for adapting or carrying out this activity, the purpose is to present a spiritual bouquet to Our Lady, by placing the intentions and flowers beneath a statue, icon, or image of the Blessed Mother.

When the activity is complete, you will have a spiritual and physical bouquet of prayer intentions and thanksgiving offered at the feet of Our Lady. This offering can remain for the next week or two and serve as a visual reminder of the powerful intercession and love of Mary, Our Mother.

While the following directions describe completing this activity within a parish, this can be easily adapted for use in a school, ministry, or family.

Materials:

- *Flowers of various varieties
 (inexpensive options often include carnations, daisies, and alstroemeria, among others)
- Buckets to store the flowers in water
- Small note cards or slips of paper
- Pens
- Vases of water
- Designated statue, icon, or image of the Blessed Virgin Mary
- Copies of the Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Life (optional, respectlifeprogram.org/may)
- Crayons or markers (optional)

Directions:

- 1. Use the included sample bulletin announcement the weekend before Mother's Day to invite parishioners to participate in the upcoming activity. (Be sure to submit your bulletin announcement request well in advance to ensure space is available.)
- 2. Gather your materials. Flowers can often be obtained in bulk through a local wholesale florist or wholesale chain. Your parish may have already established connections due to ordering flowers throughout the year. The size of your parish, school, or community will determine how many flowers you need to purchase. To help keep needed quantities lower, ask that each participant use only one flower. You could also consider asking parishioners to bring their own flowers, perhaps supplying only a small number if any for those who forget to do so.
- 3. Pre-cut notecards or small slips of paper.

*If your parish or community is unable to afford flowers, this activity can still be completed without them! Simply have parishioners place their written intentions in a basket before the designated statue of Our Lady. Or, you could consider providing crayons or markers and suggesting participants draw a flower next to their intention. This adaptation cuts costs and encourages participants' creativity! Another option would be to invite parishioners to bring their own flowers. If you do have some access to or money for flowers, you could provide a limited number on a first come, first serve basis for those who forget to bring one.

- 4. Place vases filled with water near the statue, icon, or painting of Our Lady that will serve as the center of the spiritual bouquet.
- 5. Set up a table outside the church or in the vestibule (with the necessary permission obtained). Place the pens and slips of paper on the table. Set the flowers in buckets of water to the sides of the table or behind it. If there is room on the table, provide copies of the *Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Life* for participants to pray together before the image of Our Lady or to take home with them to pray. (The litany can be found by visiting **respectlifeprogram.org/may**.)
- 6. At the end of each Mass, invite parishioners to participate in the spiritual bouquet using one of the sample pulpit announcements.
- 7. Arrange for volunteers to staff the table following each Mass. They can help pass out materials, answer questions, and assist younger participants in writing their intention. Direct participants to where they can present their intention to Our Lady.
- 8. Your bouquet should grow physically and spiritually after each Mass. Allow the flowers to remain for next week or two to serve as a reminder of the intentions entrusted to the intercession of Our Lady and in thanksgiving for her maternal care. Encourage parishioners to also pray for the intercessions placed under her care.

Ideas for Adaptation

Because each parish varies widely, you may need to adapt or change this activity to fit your specific needs. Think about the layout of your church building, the location of an appropriate Marian image, the schedule of Masses, and any other factors that may affect or be affected by this activity.

For example, depending on the space available in your parish vestibule, you may want to conduct the activity outside to help with the flow of foot traffic after Mass. If your parish has a Marian statue outside, consider offering the spiritual bouquet there. This will eliminate the need for parishioners to exit and re-enter the Church. Some parishes have Masses scheduled very close together, so moving outside can also help assure the next Mass is not disrupted or delayed.

You could also consider integrating this activity into regularly scheduled events like a May Crowning, or adapting it into a longer service by including a Eucharistic procession. You might ask participants to form a line to present their prayer intentions and flowers to Our Lady one by one. Or, you could encourage people to pray a moment in the pews before approaching and let the foot traffic flow organically.

The purpose of this activity is to seek the intercession of Our Blessed Mother for all the intentions brought to our hearts by the observance of Mother's Day, as well as to thank her for her motherly love for us. Assess what works best for your circumstances, and make adaptations or changes as needed!

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One Step Further

Print the Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Life in your parish bulletin for Mother's Day weekend or as individual copies. This is a beautiful prayer invoking Our Lady's intercession and can be found by visiting respectlifeprogram.org/may. Those who are unable to participate in the spiritual bouquet can take this home to seek the intercession of Our Lady throughout the month.

We would love to see how your parish or community offered a spiritual bouquet to Our Blessed Mother!

Share examples with us by emailing **prolife@usccb.org**, or tag us on Facebook (**@peopleoflife**) or Twitter (**@usccbprolife**).



APPENDIX A

DAY OF PRAYER FOR THE LEGAL PROTECTION OF UNBORN CHILDREN (JANUARY 22)

Liturgical Resources

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM), no. 373, designates January 22 as a particular day of prayer and penance, called the "Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children":

In all the Dioceses of the United States of America, January 22 (or January 23, when January 22 falls on a Sunday) shall be observed as a particular day of prayer for the full restoration of the legal guarantee of the right to life and of penance for violations to the dignity of the human person committed through acts of abortion. The liturgical celebrations for this day may be the "Mass For Giving Thanks to God for the Gift of Human Life" (no. 48/1 of the Masses and Prayers for Various Needs and Occasions), celebrated with white vestments, or the Mass "For the Preservation of Peace and Justice" (no. 30 of the Masses and Prayers for Various Needs and Occasions), celebrated with violet vestments."

The "Mass for Giving Thanks to God for the Gift of Human Life" is included in the Roman Missal, Third Edition. It was created specifically for the needs of the United States and may be used for occasions to celebrate the dignity of human life.

Choices of Readings: January 22, 2020

On January 22, the celebrant may use the readings of the day, any readings from the "Mass for Giving Thanks to God for the Gift of Human Life," (Lectionary for Mass Supplement, nos. 947A-947E), or any readings from the "Mass for Peace and Justice" (Lectionary for Mass, vol. IV, nos. 887-891).

Readings of the Day (January 22, 2020)

First Reading: 1 Samuel 17:32-33, 37, 40-51 Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 144:1b, 2, 9-10

Gospel Acclamation: Matthew 4:23

Gospel: Mark 3:1-6

Mass for Giving Thanks to God for the Gift of Human Life

The readings listed in nos. 947A-947E are as follows:

947A - Old Testament

◆ First option: Genesis 1:1−2:2

Second option: 2 Maccabees 7:1, 20-31

Third option: Isaiah 49:1-6

947B - New Testament

♦ First option: Romans 11:33-36

Second option: Ephesians 1:3-14

♦ Third option: Ephesians 3:14-21

Fourth option: Colossians 1:12-20

♦ Fifth option: 1 John 3:11-21

947C - Responsorial Psalm

♦ First option: Psalm 8:4-5, 6-7, 8-9

Second option: Psalm 139:1b-3, 13-14ab, 14c-15

947D - Gospel Acclamation

First option: Psalm 119:88

Second option: See John 6:63c, 68c

♦ Third option: See John 17:17b, 17a

947E - Gospel

First option: Matthew 18:1-5, 10, 12-14

Second option: Mark 9:30-37

Third option: Luke 1:39-56

♦ Fourth option: Luke 17:11-19

♦ Fifth option: Luke 23:35-43

♦ Sixth option: John 1:1-5, 9-14, 16-18

Seventh option: John 6:24-35

APPENDIX A

CONTINUED

Mass for Peace and Justice

The readings listed in nos. 887-891 are as follows:

887 - Old Testament

First option: Isaiah 9:1-6

Second option: Isaiah 32:15-18Third option: Isaiah 57:15-19

888 - New Testament

First option: Philippians 4:6-9

Second option: Colossians 3:12-15

Third option: James 3:13-18

889 - Responsorial Psalm

First option: Ps 72:2, 3-4ab, 7-8, 11-12, 13-14

♦ Second option: Ps 85:9 and 10, 11-12, 13-14

• Third option: Ps 122:1-2, 4-5, 6-7, 8-9

890 - Gospel Acclamation

First option: Matthew 5:9

Second option: John 14:27

891 - Gospel

First option: Matthew 5:1-12a

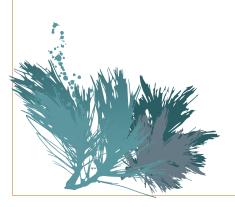
Second option: Matthew 5:38-48

Third option: John 14:23-29

• Fourth option: John 20:19-23



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APPENDIX B

HOMILY CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING HEALING AFTER ABORTION

Archbishop Naumann, Archbishop of Kansas City, Kansas, and Chair of the USCCB Committee on Pro-Life Activities, explains that, before preaching on abortion, he asks those present who have been involved in abortion to pray for him:

- that his words of mercy might give consolation and an encouragement to those in need of healing;
- that his message might prevent others from experiencing the pain of abortion in their lives;
- that those in need might have the courage to ask for help.

General Points to Consider

- Acknowledge the loss of those who have experienced abortion. It may be the first time anyone has acknowledged their child's loss and their own grief and pain. A simple statement like "I'm sorry for your loss" can open hearts.
- Invite the congregation to pray for those they may know who have had an abortion.
- Remind people of the boundless mercy of God and encourage them to approach the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
- Many wrongly believe that abortion is "the unforgivable sin." They may be longing to hear that God desires to forgive every sin of those who are sorry, even the sin of abortion.
- While respecting confidentiality, tell a story of healing from your own experience, or go to the Project Rachel Ministry national website page "Your Stories" for some sample stories. (Visit hopeafterabortion.org, then look under the upper tab "Your Own Words.") The "Healing" quotations, in particular, may be helpful and encouraging.
- ◆ If available, mention that the diocesan abortion healing ministry, most often called Project Rachel, offers confidential help for women, men, grandparents, and other family members and friends who may have been involved in an abortion. Include contact information in the bulletin, the vestibule and church restrooms. Or simply invite those who seek healing to call you or another priest in the coming week. (Though some may prefer to pursue healing opportunities outside of their own parish, for confidentiality).
- Close on a positive note of hope and healing.

Additional Points to Consider

- Abortion is a difficult topic that may stir up unpleasant emotions or trigger very painful wounds. Be prepared for the fact that some may cry or even leave. Tears are often part of the healing process. Your words may be a pivotal moment in the painful, but ultimately restorative process of healing.
- Be aware of your audience. By the age of 45, as many as 1 in 3 women have had an abortion, and a similar number of men and family members have been involved.
- An elderly congregation may often include those wounded by abortion decades ago, even before abortion was legalized. Some wait to confess an abortion as they near death.
- Consider a message that is sensitive to children present in the congregation.
- Be mindful that abortion is often tied to national or local politics. Stay away from discussions on policies or legislation when focusing a homily on abortion healing.
- Every homily that mentions abortion should include the message that there is hope and healing after involvement with an abortion. This is particularly important around January 22 and *Roe v. Wade* commemoration events.
- If you are convinced that in your situation it is better not to specifically bring up abortion, you may still reach those suffering after abortion by preaching about mercy. You might speak of a lasting wound or recurring guilt and remind congregants that Jesus came to heal sinners, that God loves them infinitely, and no sin is too big for God to forgive. Or mention abortion among a list of other serious sins that many may believe are "unforgiveable."

For more information on abortion healing resources, contact your diocesan abortion healing ministry or visit www.HopeAfterAbortion.org (Spanish: www.EsperanzaPosAborto.org).

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