



Secretariat of Pro-Life Activities

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Your Eminence/Excellency:

A few months ago, I shared an early release of some of our Respect Life materials that could be used immediately to invite Catholics to serve moms in need. (To be clear, a diocese or parish does not have to be in the process of launching the “[Walking with Moms in Need](#)” process to make use of the materials.)

The resources included a new poster, prayer card, reflection, flyer, graphics, bulletin inserts, and prayer guides (available in English and Spanish at respectlife.org/called-to-serve).

There is still time to order the poster and prayer card for use during Respect Life Month in October. Simply use [this form](#) to place an order and receive the discount that is available only to dioceses.

Additionally, a second set of materials is now available online at www.respectlife.org/respect-life-month to help your diocese and parishes observe Respect Life Month.

These include the [perennial Respect Life Month action guide](#), as well as new graphics, [homily considerations](#), leaders’ toolkits, and a recorded webinar of USCCB staff going through the materials.

If you or your staff have any questions, Anne McGuire (amcguire@usccb.org) in the Secretariat of Pro-Life Activities would be happy to assist you.

Thank you for your care of those who are most vulnerable and for your defense of human life.

Fraternally in Christ,

Most Reverend William E. Lori
Archbishop of Baltimore
Chairman, Committee on Pro-Life Activities





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HOMILY CONSIDERATIONS

The Church's Commitment to Mothers in Need

These homily considerations are designed to help priests and deacons address the important, sensitive topic of abortion with clarity and authentic compassion that affirms the dignity both of women and of their children.

Context

- Right now, Catholics are hearing about abortion in the media much more than previously. However, the perspective taken by the media is often sensationalized, inaccurate, and misleading. Unless pastors speak about the value of human life from the pulpit, Catholics might never hear of the Church's teaching and why this teaching is both pro-woman and pro-life. It is very important that pastors accept the responsibility to address this important issue. If certain approaches are used, speaking about abortion from the pulpit can be a positive and healing experience.
- The pro-life position is often inaccurately portrayed as being merely anti-abortion, not caring about women and their children past the time of birth. This false narrative, perpetuated by the media and others, is often ingrained in our own parishioners, whether consciously or not. And some may even misperceive the Church as sharing this approach. Many are completely unaware of the countless ministries and agencies in the Church that support women, children, and their families throughout the stages of life. Priests can help rectify this by sharing about the Church's beautiful "yes" to women and motherhood, and her beautiful ministries of service.
- Research shows that when Catholics who are personally conflicted about the Church's teachings on abortion and the sanctity of human life learn about the many ways the Church supports women, their opinion of the Church improves significantly. While they may originally see the Church's approach to the subject of abortion as rigid, harsh, or divisive, messages of compassion, support, and understanding can also help shift their views.
- No matter how courts or legislatures treat abortion in the future, the Church's *pastoral* response will continue to focus on the needs of women facing unexpected or challenging pregnancies. We must and will answer Pope Francis' repeated challenge to go to the margins and bring help to those in need.

General Considerations

- Consider 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. Sadly, these numbers generally remain consistent for both Catholics and non-Catholics alike. Always strive to approach this topic in a spirit of compassion. Every homily that

mentions abortion should include the message that God offers forgiveness, hope, and healing after participation in an abortion.

- Women and couples considering an abortion are almost always deeply conflicted. Most experience a very deep and real anguish in contemplating a decision with such lasting consequences. Many are subject to poverty or abuse, a life-limiting pre-natal diagnosis, or pressure or coercion from family, friends, or medical professionals. Be careful to avoid inadvertently implying that you fully understand what a woman or couple considering abortion is going through. So many feel, however erroneously, that their *only* choice is to have an abortion. What is needed in all such situations **is a compassionate witness** to love and life, **sharing the life-giving options** that are available through the Church and in their community. Storytelling is also powerful. If you can, share how women or couples in difficult circumstances have received what they needed to welcome new life (remembering to change identifying details out of respect for their privacy).
- Large numbers of Catholics feel personally and religiously conflicted about the Church's teachings regarding human life and abortion; however, they also desire to resolve that tension. Research shows that those who experience this conflict want Church leaders to address this struggle and help them reconcile their feelings with the Church's teachings. Acknowledging those who do not fully embrace these teachings and providing opportunities for questions and deeper conversation can help those who are conflicted to reach greater understanding and acceptance of the Church's teachings.

History of Service

- The Catholic Church has a long history of service to those who are most vulnerable and remains the largest private provider of social services in the United States. Through the sacrificial efforts of faithful Catholics, the Church serves millions through diocesan ministries and agencies, Catholic hospitals and healthcare systems, immigration clinics, shelters, and Catholic schools and parishes.
 - For example: Church ministries like Catholic Charities serve women and their children long after they are born, offering comprehensive social services to those in need.
- The Church in the United States has countless ministries dedicated to helping mothers facing challenging pregnancies and those who may struggle to care for their children after they are born. From religious communities to pregnancy care centers and parish-based ministries, the Church consistently bears witness in word and deed to the beauty and dignity of *every* human life—both *mother* and *child*.
 - For example: The Sisters of Life are a growing religious community of women who, by their way of life, bear witness to the beauty and dignity of every human life. The Sisters welcome pregnant women into their homes and provide life-changing material and spiritual resources to women in crisis.
- In recent years, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has launched a rapidly growing pastoral initiative called *Walking with Moms in Need*. This nationwide, yet parish-based, effort helps open the eyes of Catholics to the needs of pregnant and parenting mothers in their local communities. *Walking with Moms in Need* is a way that parishes can respond to Pope Francis' challenge to be "islands of mercy in a sea of indifference."¹ It enables parishioners to know these mothers, to listen to them, and,

along the way, to help them obtain the necessities of life for themselves and their children. (Learn more at WalkingWithMoms.com.)

- The [bishops have committed the Church](#) in the United States to redoubling its efforts to accompany and support those facing unexpected or difficult pregnancies and those who need help during the early years of parenthood. This includes advocating for legislative and public policy efforts supporting mothers, as well as increasing its own already significant ministries serving mothers.
- Neither does the Church abandon women and men who have chosen abortion and then find themselves in spiritual, emotional, and psychological turmoil. Remind the congregation that no matter how serious the sin, God offers forgiveness. Many who have participated in abortion believe they have committed the “unforgivable sin.” Your preaching can be a unique channel of God’s mercy for them, inviting them to the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Compassionate ministries like Project Rachel Ministry offer hope, healing, and spiritual renewal to women and couples who suffer after participating in abortion. (Learn more at HopeAfterAbortion.org.)
- In all these ways and more, the Church seeks to bring light, healing, and hope, thus witnessing to the beauty of life, and proactively building a culture of life. Our loving defense of the most vulnerable—the unborn—continually overflows into love and respect for their mothers and families, and for all those whose life, dignity, and freedom are violated by injustice and indifference. The Church must work to build a society that looks to the future with hope, a society where a woman is never forced to choose between her future and the life of her child.

Church Teaching:

- Woman's ability to nurture and bring forth new life is a special gift to her from God.
- The Blessed Virgin Mary underwent many trials in bringing Christ into the world and caring for him, including poverty, misunderstanding from the people closest to her, and sometimes even danger. Yet God was with her always. In the Blessed Virgin Mary, greatest among creatures, God has elevated and sanctified the vocation of all mothers.
- All mothers can turn to God for His help, and He will never leave them nor forsake them.
- Every child is a blessing from God, regardless of the circumstances of his or her conception. *All* human life is sacred.
- God has a plan for *every* person – every mother, and every pre-born child.

Responding after *Dobbs*

- While we are grateful for the Supreme Court’s *Dobbs* decision that overturned *Roe v. Wade*, we know that abortion still remains legal in most areas of the country. Yet, this is an historic step forward.
- We thank God that more lives can be saved in this new era, and we pray that our elected officials will now enact laws and policies that promote and protect the most vulnerable among us. Our thoughts are with the little ones whose lives have been taken. We mourn their loss, and we entrust their souls to God, who loved them from before all ages and who will love them for all eternity. Our hearts are also with every woman and man who

has suffered grievously from abortion; we pray for their healing, and we pledge our continued compassion and support. As a Church, we need to serve those who face difficult pregnancies and surround them with love.

- Catholics must give a clear and united witness in both word and action that our society and laws can and must protect and care for *both* women and their children. As a matter of fundamental justice, we must work to protect in law the lives of the unborn, society's most vulnerable and defenseless members. *And* we must redouble our efforts to accompany women and couples who are facing unexpected or difficult pregnancies, offering them loving and compassionate care. Initiatives such as *Walking with Moms in Need* provide the opportunity for parishes to concretely discern how to better support those in need.

¹ Pope Francis, [Lenten Message](#) © 2015, Libreria Editrice Vaticana. Used with permission. All rights reserved.