

PROGRAM MODELS

Introduction

Since 1975, the *Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities* has served as a blueprint for building a vibrant culture of life within the Catholic community, so that Catholics can in turn contribute to the transformation of all of society including its laws. Crucial to the success of this “great campaign for life” is the untiring commitment of pastors and lay parish leaders—a commitment rooted in the love of Christ and nurtured in prayer and the sacraments—to convey the Gospel of Life in word and action to all in the parish community. It is in parishes, not in malls, movie theaters or public schools, that the seeds of the Gospel of Life can be planted, then nurtured and tended, so that they will bear fruit in service and prophetic witness to a world that sees death, rather than love, as a solution to economic and social problems.

Opposition to abortion and other direct threats against life are not optional for Catholics or peripheral to our beliefs. In their recent statement *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, the U.S. bishops explained that

[9.] *The Church’s obligation to participate in shaping the moral character of society is a requirement of our faith. It is a basic part of the mission we have received from Jesus Christ. ... Christ’s love for us lets us see our human dignity in full clarity and compels us to love our neighbors as he has loved us. ...*

10. *What faith teaches about the dignity of the human person and about the sacredness of every human life helps us see more clearly the same truths that also come to us through the gift of human reason. At the center of these truths is respect for the dignity of every person. This is the core of Catholic moral and social teaching. Because we are a people of both faith and reason, it is appropriate and necessary for us to bring this essential truth about human life and dignity to the public square.*

In the 2001 Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities, the U.S. bishops also stressed that “actively promoting a renewed respect for human life is the responsibility of every Catholic,” and adding that “**the parish pro-life committee assists in a special way by helping to make the parish a center of life, a place where parishioners understand the issues and the importance of meeting the needs of those who are most vulnerable**” (emphasis added).

Let us dedicate this Pauline year to a reinvigorated evangelization of the Gospel of Life, beginning in our parish pro-life committees. The demands and distractions of today’s world provide a ready excuse for many to be uninvolved in parish activities, much less parish leadership. Too often, the result is that a heavy burden falls on a persevering few who are necessarily limited in what they can accomplish. We encourage pastors to personally invite volunteers from diverse parish groups to be new members of the parish pro-life committee—from the various men’s and women’s groups, youth groups, the parish liturgy committee, from the parent-teacher organization, CCD staff, as well as medical and other professionals in the parish community. If everyone does his part, together we can help build a civilization of life and love!

NOTE: Some of the suggested activities may require several months’ planning.

A CALENDAR FOR LIFE

October 2008

October 5 – Respect Life Sunday

- Distribute this year’s Respect Life Program flyer – *Hope and Trust in Life!* – at all Masses.
- Be sure the vestibule pamphlet rack is stocked with copies of the six Respect Life Program pamphlets.
- Several weeks prior to October 5, investigate what events or public observances of Respect Life Sunday will be held in your diocese – a special Mass celebrated by your bishop, Life Chain (see www.lifechain.net), Walk/Run for Life, a conference on life issues – and encourage parishioners to attend through a parish bulletin notice and flyers. Arrange for car pooling and baby-sitting.
- Hold an afternoon “Living Rosary for Life” on the parish/school grounds. (See *October 7*.)
- Publicize and hold a diaper drive to benefit your local pregnancy help center.

October 7 – *Our Lady of the Rosary*

Hold a “Holy Hour for Life.” Two models are available at www.usccb.org/prolife/liturgy/holyhourforlife.shtml. Include a “Rosary for Life” on the Luminous Mysteries (www.usccb.org/prolife/liturgy/rosariesforlife.shtml).

Weekend of October 18-19

- Have voter registration materials and absentee ballots available outside Church entrances, along with copies of “Conscience and the Catholic Voter” by Bishop William E. Lori from this year’s Respect Life Program packet.
- Coordinate with your parish KofC Council, men’s and women’s groups to host dessert/coffee and speaker on Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship, a statement by the USCCB (November 2007). Distribute the handout, “The Challenge of Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship” (www.faithfulcitizenship.org).

November 2008

November 1-2 – Feast of All Saints/ All Souls

- Dedicate a Monument to the Unborn on your parish grounds. A blessing service can be found at www.usccb.org/prolife/liturgy/blessings.shtml.
- Set aside an alcove or corner of the church for a memorial to children who have died before birth, with a statue of the Blessed Mother holding the Christ Child, votive candles, and a Book of Remembrance (such as the *Book of the Innocents*, available from USCCB Publishing, where parents and other family members can memorialize deceased children).

Later in the month –

- Invite a Catholic physician or bioethicist (your diocesan pro-life office can recommend one) to discuss Catholic teaching on end of life issues and “living wills” and other forms of advance directives.
- Find out which elderly members of the parish do not have relatives in the area and who may welcome the friendship of an “adoptive” parish family. Invite the coordinator of your parish ministry to the elderly and homebound to speak after Sunday Masses to encourage this rewarding work of mercy.
- Contact your newly elected representatives to congratulate them on their election. Respectfully invite them to dialogue on any of the life issues that may be considered in your state or federal legislature in the upcoming session related to abortion, human embryonic stem cell research, cloning, physician assisted suicide, the conscience rights of doctors and pharmacists, or the death penalty.

December 2008

Advent

Beginning on the weekend of the First Sunday of Advent (Nov. 29-30), place an artificial Christmas “giving tree” in the vestibule of the church, festooned with red, green or gold tags and envelopes addressed to the diocesan Pro-Life/Respect Life office. The tags will identify the pro-life activity which will be helped by the donation to be mailed in the envelopes provided: prenatal and delivery medical care, pregnancy help center needs, Project Rachel ministry, etc.

December 6 – Feast Day of St. Nicholas

- Hold an Advent wreath and Christmas crafts sale to benefit your local pregnancy help center.
- Hold a Christmas recital and carol sing-along to raise funds for parish pro-life activities. Accomplished young musicians of the parish can be invited (in October) to audition to perform Christmas tunes or their favorite recital pieces. Intersperse solo/duet performances with carols the whole family can enjoy singing.

December 12 – Feast Day of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Patroness of the Unborn

- Invite families with young children to view the DVD “Juan Diego—Messenger of Guadalupe” (available at www.cccofamerica.com/gallery1.htm or call 800-935-2222). Traditional hot chocolate and buñuelos (recipes online for this delicious fried dough topped with cinnamon-sugar) can be served. Distribute to parents a prayer card or flyer with the image of O.L. of Guadalupe and the significance of her image as a pregnant native princess.
- Hold a Vigil for Life on the Nativity of the Lord with Eucharistic Adoration (see www.usccb.org/prolife/liturgy/TwoVigilsforLife.pdf) on the weekend of the Third or Fourth Sunday of Advent and encourage parishioners to sign up for one hour of prayer.

January 2009

January 1, 2009 – Feast of Mary, Mother of God

At Masses on December 27/28, announce that parishioners are invited to take part in “A Novena for Life” from January 1 through January 9. Make copies of the novena available (see www.usccb.org/prolife/liturgy/ANovenaforLife.pdf). The brief daily prayers and reflections can be recited after daily Masses and individually or by families.

January 17-18

- Publicize events that will take place this weekend in observance of the anniversary of the Supreme Court's *Roe v. Wade* decision – a rally at the state capitol, march for life, a special Mass celebrated by your bishop or pro-life conferences.
- An “Order of Blessing of Pro-Life Pilgrims” can be found at www.usccb.org/prolifelliturgy/BlessingProLifePilgrims.pdf to bless those taking part in a pilgrimage to Washington, DC or to your state capital for a state-wide walk/march for life.
- Invite parishioners, through the parish bulletin and a brief word after Masses this weekend, to sign up for e-mail alerts on pending legislative issues. That way one contact person in the parish can quickly communicate *Action Alerts* from the National Committee for a Human Life Amendment (www.nchla.org) and from your state Catholic conference or diocesan pro-life director to impact legislation under consideration. Acquaint them with the great resources available on the NCHLA website.

January 22 – Day of Penance and Prayer

Pursuant to the General Instruction of the Roman Missal, no. 373, January 22 shall be observed as “a day of penance for violations to the dignity of the human person committed through acts of abortion, and of prayer for the full restoration of the legal guarantee of the right to life.”

- Collaborate with the established groups in the parish to host a speaker on an aspect of abortion – the risks of abortion to the mother's physical and mental health, RU-486 abortion, trends in public opinion on abortion, trends in state legislation, or what each of us can do to stop abortion. First-rate resources on fetal development, medical aspects of abortion, STDs, etc. are available from Human Development Resource Council's new Medical Library (www.hdrc.org). Resources on abortion laws and legislative and litigation strategy can be found at www.aul.org (Americans United for Life).
- Raise funds for a pro-life billboard or permanent sign outside your church with a message like “Pregnant? Need help? Call 123-456-7890 for free, confidential counseling.”

February 2009

February 11 – Feast Day of Our Lady of Lourdes and the World Day of the Sick

The National Catholic Partnership on Disability (NCPD) has prepared a variety of suggestions for parishes to be more welcoming to members of the parish community who are sick or have a disability. Study and begin implementing these suggestions during the month of February:

- State the parish's desire to be inclusive to people with disabilities in the mission statement and publicize that statement in bulletins, on letterhead and on the parish web site.
- Identify the parish's ability to meet accessibility needs in census and participant sign-up materials such as: transportation; large-print or audio versions of worship aids or bulletins; assistive listening devices or ASL signing; handrails at steps and ramps; wheelchair seating; elevator; accessible parking, confessionals, and restrooms.
- Welcome, train, and support people with disabilities in liturgical ministries.
- Identify, inform, train and support a parish contact person for people with disabilities. They could be an interested person or someone already knowledgeable in issues of disability through personal experience, as a professional, volunteer or family member. They should serve on the Parish Council to help keep this part of the parish mission a priority in all areas of parish ministry and consideration.
- Provide inservice for parish staff, catechists, liturgical ministers and other parish volunteers on people-first language and how to provide sensitive and dignified support for someone with a disability and their family.
- Survey your “homebound” parishioners to make sure they do not need an accommodation that the parish could make (or already has that they might not be aware of) to be able to attend Mass and other parish functions. Do not assume it is impossible for them to attend Mass and just keep taking Communion to them at home when they may actually be able to attend Mass and other activities at the parish.
- Personally invite parishioners with disabilities to participate in all aspects of the full life of the parish and arrange accommodations to make their participation possible. Ask them what would help them, or make it possible for them, to be part of a ministry or program.

February 21 – last weekend before Ash Wednesday

Host a family-friendly “Mardi Gras” event with a cake walk, bingo, and other games. Colorful streamers, beads and New Orleans jazz playing in the background will create a fun ambience. Proceeds can go to support parish pro-life activities.

February 27 – first Friday of the Lenten Season

Pray the “Stations of the Cross for Life” (see 2008 Respect Life Program Liturgy Guide at www.usccb.org/prolifelliturgy/rlp.shtml).

March 2009

March 19 – Feast of St. Joseph, Husband of Mary

- On Thursday, March 19, or on the preceding weekend, hold a men's dinner with a speaker on the fatherhood of St. Joseph, including his example of the virtue of marital chastity (to which all married couples are called).
- Hold a half-day retreat for husbands/fathers with speakers addressing topics such as the crucial role of fathers in the emotional and spiritual development of their children, protecting children from our pornographic culture (see Mark Houck's "Pornography: What's the Problem" in this year's Respect Life Program), and the impact of abortion on men (see Vincent Rue's "The Hollow Men: Male Grief and Trauma Following Abortion" in this year's Respect Life Program). Invite men struggling with pornography or grief over a past abortion to contact the pastor for reconciliation and counseling, assuring them of God's mercy and the power of His grace to overcome their weakness.

March 25 – The Feast of the Annunciation

- At weekend Masses on March 14/15, publicize and make available the "Novena to the Blessed Mother, Feast of the Annunciation" (see Item #0726, Secretariat of Pro-Life Activities' catalog) to begin the novena on March 16 or 17.
- Have a Holy Hour for Life with Eucharistic Adoration, Benediction, the Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary (www.usccb.org/prolifeliturgylitanies.shtml) and recitation of the Joyful Mysteries of the rosary with pro-life meditations (www.usccb.org/prolifeliturgyrosariesforlife.shtml).
- Christ's Incarnation gives incomparable dignity to every human being from the first moment of life as a one-celled zygote. In collaboration with other groups in your parish, host a speaker to talk about the basic science and morality of human embryonic and adult stem cell research. The June 2008 USCCB statement *On Embryonic Stem Cell Research* (www.usccb.org/prolifelissues/bioethic/bishopsESCRstmt.pdf), "Stem Cells and Hope for Patients" by Maureen Condic, Ph.D. in the 2008 Respect Life Program (www.usccb.org/prolife/programs/rlp/index.shtml), and *Stem Cell Research and Human Cloning: Questions and Answers* (www.usccb.org/prolifelissues/bioethic/stemcell/Q&ABulletinInsert.pdf) are excellent as handouts and vehicles for discussion.

April 2009

April 18 – Eve of Divine Mercy Sunday

Host a half-day conference/retreat on the impact of abortion on women. One talk can address the research findings on the aftermath of abortion. Testimonies can be given by a priest experienced in the Project Rachel ministry and/or a Catholic counselor who has worked with women after abortion, or by a woman who has suffered the loss of a child from abortion (if your diocesan project Rachel office can suggest such a person). Show a DVD such as "Dear Children" or "Beyond Regret" (both available at www.lifecyclebooks.com). Acquaint those in attendance with the personnel and contact information for your local Project Rachel office. Suggested handouts: "Project Rachel: In the Heart of the Church" (Item #0748, Secretariat of Pro-Life Activities), *How to Talk to a Friend Who's Had an Abortion* (Item #0120, Secretariat of PLA), and prayers cards – *Prayer for Healing* and *Trust in God's Mercy* (Item #9911 and #9913, Secretariat of PLA).

April 19 – Divine Mercy Sunday

Hold Eucharistic Adoration and a Holy Hour for Life beginning at 3 PM Sunday. Recite, inter alia, the Chaplet of Divine Mercy and selections from the *Diary* of St. Faustina. Chaplet of Divine Mercy holy cards are available from divinemercyteam@sbcglobal.net or by calling 707-546-4700.

- Place a notice in the parish bulletin, at least monthly if not weekly, inviting those who've been involved in an abortion decision to seek reconciliation and healing through the Church's Project Rachel ministry. The message can be as simple as: "Struggling after abortion? For confidential care call Project Rachel at [phone number]. For women and men."
- With your pastor's permission, place pamphlets and articles on the abortion aftermath (see suggested handouts above and past Respect Life Program articles (2008 catalog, p. 9) in your vestibule pamphlet racks along with business cards providing the name/phone number of your diocesan Project Rachel office.
- Periodically include an intercession for the healing of those who are suffering in the aftermath of abortion among the Prayers of the Faithful.

May 2009

May 9

Hold a half-day conference for moms and their school-aged daughters, beginning with Mass and ending with a potluck luncheon. In between, speakers can address topics such as the dignity of women, the virtue of chastity, how to dress attractively and, at the same time, modestly. Work with the diocesan youth ministry office to bring Pure Fashion to your city (www.purefashion.com).

May 10 – Mother’s Day

Provide roses for all the mothers of the parish to thank them for bringing new life into the world. The cost is defrayed by donation baskets located where roses are distributed, and proceeds can be donated to the local pregnancy help center or diocesan pro-life office.

May 30

The Solemnity of Pentecost on Sunday, May 31 this year takes precedence over the Feast of the Visitation of Mary to her cousin Elizabeth. But there is no better way to celebrate the Visitation than by imitating Mary’s generosity in rushing to help her expectant cousin materially and spiritually. Organize a diaper drive or “baby shower” for your local pregnancy help center.

June 2009

The Solemnity of Corpus Christi

- At Masses on the weekend of May 30/31, publicize and make available copies of “Nine Days for Life,” a novena, to be read on June 2, with meditations on the Eucharist in preparation for the Solemnity of Corpus Christi on June 11 (www.usccb.org/prolife/liturgy/ninedaysforlife.pdf). The novena can be prayed after daily Masses or individually and among families.
- On June 11, following the last midday Mass, conduct an outdoor Eucharistic procession in thanksgiving for God’s having taken on our human flesh to suffer and die for us and for having left us with the most precious gift of his body, blood, soul and divinity in the Eucharist. Conclude with a brief reflection by your pastor or deacon on what the reality of Christ’s Incarnation implies for the dignity and sanctity of every human life.

June 21 – Father’s Day

On Saturday, June 20, hold a potluck picnic with a neighboring parish, with friendly-rivalry sports and games for dads to compete in with their children. Make drawing and craft materials available for younger children to create simple gifts and design their own cards explaining what they love most about their dad. Teens can supervise the craft activities.

June is Abortion Awareness Month in the African American Community. Host a speaker to give a presentation on the impact of abortion on Blacks in the United States and the responsibility of every American to support efforts within the African American community to replace Planned Parenthood clinics and anything-goes sex education with pregnancy help centers and chastity education. Related resources can be found at the end of the 2008 Respect Life Program article by Bishop Martin D. Holley, “A Reflection on the African American Family and the Culture of Life.”

School’s out but that’s no reason to stop reading. Organize weekly summer book clubs for preteens, teens and adults. Choose age-appropriate books on the saints, apologetics, and culture of life issues by Peter Kreeft, C.S. Lewis, and J.R.K. Tolkein among others.

Adults may want to begin their summer book club discussions with Supreme Knight Carl Anderson’s *A Civilization of Love: What Every Catholic Can Do to Transform the World*. Other selections could include *Human Dignity and Bioethics: Essays Commissioned by the President’s Council on Bioethics* and two books exploring the challenges of responding to adverse prenatal diagnoses: *Defiant Birth* by Melinda Tankard Reist and *My Child, My Gift* by Madeline Nugent.

July 2009

While your elected representatives are in their district to attend 4th of July events, take the opportunity to meet them, to thank them for their pro-life votes or encourage them to consider the pro-life position on specific legislation that is pending or likely to be considered in the next session. Follow up with letters recapping what you discussed.

July 25 – *Feast of St. James* is the anniversary of the great (and greatly misunderstood) encyclical *Humane Vitae* (*On Human Life*). Collaborate with other groups in the parish to host a speaker and group discussion on what the Church really teaches about marriage and the transmission of human life. Be sure to show how all the dire prophecies predicted by Pope Paul VI in 1968 of harm to women, families and society have come to pass. *Married Love and the Gift of Life*, a November 2006 statement by the USCCB, would be an ideal handout for further reflection and discussion.

July 26

The Feast of Saints Joachim and Ann, parents of the Blessed Virgin Mary and grandparents of Jesus is normally observed on July 26, which falls this year on a Sunday. Nevertheless, it is a wonderful occasion to honor grandparents for their special gifts. In an April 5, 2008 Address (to Participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Family), Pope Benedict XVI spoke warmly about the important role of grandparents in the family. A passage from this Address can be reprinted in the parish bulletin (see Clip Art quotes). After all Masses, the celebrant may offer a special blessing for grandparents. A bookmark with a Scripture quotation could be given to each grandparent as he or she exits the church. Children enrolled in Vacation Bible School, other summer programs or CCD classes (before they adjourn for the summer), could design and create the bookmarks as a service activity.

August 2009

- Read through the 2009-2010 Respect Life Program materials and contact your diocesan pro-life director to learn of upcoming diocesan-wide plans and events.
- Meet with your pastor and members of the parish's pro-life committee to begin planning for the year.
- Carefully assess the needs of your parish. Take stock of how the parish is doing in meeting the needs of parishioners who could benefit from help from the parish community – the elderly, those with disabilities, young or first-time moms who could use the helping hand/advice of an experienced mother, those who are struggling financially. Develop strategies to attract volunteers to assist in these efforts.
- Assess how well your parish school, CCD, and adult catechesis programs are conveying the teaching of the Church on life issues. Develop specific plans to enhance current efforts.
- Begin long- and short-range planning of activities such as a parish pro-life art and essay contest based on the upcoming Respect Life theme and a 9-week or 9-month spiritual adoption and fetal development awareness program culminating with a “baby shower” of baby items to donate to a local pregnancy help center.

September 2009

September 7 (vigil of the Feast of the Birth of Mary) through September 15 (Feast of Our Lady of Sorrows)

Make available copies of “A Novena to Our Lady of Sorrows: Nine Days for Life” (www.usccb.org/prolifeliturgy/NovenaOurLadyofSorrows.pdf). The novena may be prayed after daily Masses, privately and among families.

September 12-13

- Announce (through flyers in the school and notices in the parish bulletin), art and essay contests open to students in grades K-8 on the 2009 Respect Life theme or other appropriate pro-life theme. Nominal cash or other awards can be given in each category for 1st, 2nd and 3rd place entries. Awards should be announced and winning entries displayed or read at a school assembly. Winners should also be congratulated in the parish bulletin.
- Wash for Life (fund-raiser for teens). Learn more about this annual event at www.washforlife.org.

Later in the month, organize an apostolate to welcome infants to the parish community. Recruit parishioners with skills in sewing, needlework, quilting, knitting or crocheting to make receiving blankets, booties, caps, embroidered bath towels or other items for babies whose parents are preparing for their baptism. A message such as “Welcome to St. Mary’s Parish Family” can be sewn on the item or delivered as a card with the gift box. Gifts will be presented at baptismal preparation classes throughout the year.