

RESPECT LIFE PROGRAM 2009-2010

PROGRAM MODELS

PRAYER

With your pastor's permission, invite parishioners to take part in the pro-life prayer services and observances described below. Be sure to recruit participants through your parish's Legion of Mary, women's and men's groups, including the Knights of Columbus, and youth and young adult groups. Utilize all the customary means for announcing parish events – the Sunday bulletin, school take-home flyers, bulletin boards, vestibule flyers, parish web page and e-tree.

- Monthly Holy Hour for Life (see 2009 Respect Life Liturgy Guide for a sample Holy Hour). In addition to adoration, benediction, readings from Scripture, and recitation of the rosary, a short catechesis can be given explaining the teaching of the Church on a different life issue each month.
- Distribute copies of the Novena to Our Lady of Guadalupe (see Liturgy Guide) and encourage parishioners to pray this novena from December 4 through her Feast Day, December 12. The novena prayers can be recited together after daily Mass, in classrooms before the lunch or recess break, and be prayed by families at dinnertime.
- A 40-hour prayer vigil before the Blessed Sacrament for an end to abortion, abuse, war, and all forms of violence, can be held quarterly or annually in the parish, beginning with a Holy Hour at 8 PM and ending two days later with Benediction and Reposition at noon. A minimum of two adorers must commit to each hour. Sign-up sheets should include space for phone numbers and e-mail addresses so adorers can be reminded of their commitment shortly prior to the vigil. At the opening Holy Hour, the presider may wish to explain the history of the Christian fast, its spiritual benefits, and its role in the Church. A 24-hour fast by many healthy adult parishioners can greatly multiply the fruits of the 40-hour prayer vigil.
- Organize a parish-wide prayer pledge campaign. Print prayer pledge cards on colored card stock, 8 per sheet. Cut and distribute in pews before Masses. Collect at a "second collection" or in baskets in the vestibule. The cards will read:

"I (We), _____, pledge to pray one rosary or one Chaplet of Divine Mercy each week to join with Christ in protecting the sanctity of human life and to bring a peaceful end to all actions that diminish respect for human life."

You may wish to present the pledges as a gift to your bishop. Be sure to notify the parish in a future Sunday bulletin how many pledges were made and to thank them all for the gift of their time and prayers.

- At least twice a year, invite expectant parents to all attend a designated (regularly-scheduled) Sunday Mass to receive a special blessing. The homily can address the gift of children, spiritual parenthood or the family as domestic Church, for example.
- Hold a diocesan- or deanery-wide Mass for families who have lost a child before or after birth. The homily might discuss the redemptive value of suffering, God's promise of salvation or Divine Mercy. One or two families who have experienced great spiritual growth from their experience may be invited to offer a brief personal witness after Mass. Tokens of remembrance can be given to attendees, such as prayer cards of Jesus or Mary the Consoler, or rosaries/chaplets of the Seven Sorrows of Mary, with instructions for prayer (see, e.g., www.thegrotto.org/rosary_of_the_seven_sorrows.htm).
- As part of your parish's ministry of visiting terminally-ill patients in local hospices, hospitals, and homes, encourage visitors to ask if they might pray the Chaplet of Divine Mercy at the patient's bedside. For, as Jesus promised to St. Faustina: "At the hour of their death, I defend as My own glory every soul that will say this chaplet; or when others say it for a dying person, the pardon is the same. When this chaplet is said at the bedside of a dying person, God's anger is placated, unfathomable mercy envelops the soul, and the very depths of My tender mercy are moved for the sake of the Sorrowful Passion of My Son."
- Encourage your pastor to incorporate in the intercessions at each Sunday Mass, an intercessory prayer for life (see the Word of Life series at www.usccb.org/pro-life/liturgy/wolarchive.shtml).

EDUCATION

The Archdiocese of Minneapolis-St. Paul Office of Marriage and Family Life developed a Respect Life curriculum supplement for Catholic Elementary Schools. The pilot program was launched in 2008 in 12 parish schools. The curriculum consists of grade level themes and age-appropriate lessons as follows: Kindergarten – Celebrate the day you were born; 1st Grade – Unborn babies are special; 2nd – Our Lady of Guadalupe “Patroness of the Unborn”; 3rd – Appreciating people with disabilities; 4th – Appreciating the elderly; 5th – Development of the baby in the womb; 6th – Abortion/Adoption; 7th – Euthanasia; 8th – Genocide. The supplemental lesson plans include multimedia educational material (i.e., books, movies, etc.), along with in-school and take home activities. Each unit has discussion questions and prayers focusing on the topic/ theme of each lesson. Twelve additional schools and 4 CCD programs have asked to be included in this year’s pilot program. Kathy Laird, Director, and Sharon Wilson, Respect Life Coordinator, humbly refer to the curriculum as “a work in progress,” but it sounds like one already worth emulating! Contact Sharon at wilsons@archspm.org or call 651-291-4488 for more information.

Organize a monthly or bi-monthly speaker series, rotating among neighboring parishes. Advertise the events creatively and intensively. Some suggested topics/speakers:

- *Contraception* – a priest or theologian could explain the teachings of the Church on sexuality and contraception; a medical doctor or other expert can discuss the physical, psychological and social side effects of contraceptive use; and a married couple who stopped using contraception could speak about how they came to their decision and how their marriage has improved since using natural family planning.
- *Same-sex “marriage”* – A faithful-Catholic psychologist could discuss same-sex attraction, explaining that, while a disorder, such attraction does not diminish the inherent dignity of the individual; a priest or lay counselor familiar with the ministry of Courage (and Encourage for family members of persons with same-sex attractions) could speak about the Church’s pastoral outreach to Catholics with same-sex attraction; a speaker knowledgeable about Catholic social teaching can show how the issue of same-sex “marriage” differs from other “equal rights” and “social justice” issues, such as racism, women’s rights, and immigration issues.
- *The abortion aftermath* – A priest involved in the Project Rachel ministry can present a reflection on *The Gospel of Life*, section 99 (Pope John Paul II’s “special word to women who have had an abortion”), focusing on God’s infinite mercy, available to us through the Sacrament of Reconciliation; a speaker can discuss the large body of research showing increased levels of anxiety, depression, eating disorders, relationship problems, and suicide among women who have had an abortion; a woman whose abortion wounds are fully healed may volunteer to present her personal story of loss, pain, forgiveness, and new life in Christ.
- *End of life care* – A Catholic bioethicist or teacher of moral theology can present Catholic teaching on end of life care; a faithful-Catholic MD who cares for the terminally ill can offer insight into the provision of nutrition and hydration and explain how medical procedures can be seen as extraordinary (and therefore optional) in some circumstances, but ordinary (morally required) in different circumstances; a faithful-Catholic lawyer can provide an example of a Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care that is consistent with Catholic teaching and with state law.
- *Stem cell research* – A Catholic MD or bioethicist can explain the basics of adult vs. embryonic stem cell research, including how the cells are obtained and used and the remarkable therapeutic successes of adult stem cell treatments in contrast to the inherent risks and failure of embryonic stem cell research; an attorney can summarize the trend in federal and state laws governing human stem cell research and cloning, noting the Bush policy and how that has changed under the Obama Administration; a priest can discuss the inherent dignity of every human life from its earliest stages and why it is morally wrong to take the lives of week-old human beings to search for cures for diseases.
- *Conscience rights* – A priest can explain the teachings of the Church (based on the Catechism of the Catholic Church) on what is our conscience and what we mean by the right of conscience; an expert can illustrate in what ways the right of conscience is under assault today (e.g., state laws mandating employee insurance coverage of contraception); a health care professional can discuss examples of real and potential denials of health care rights of conscience.

Organize a parish study group meeting weekly to discuss Pope John Paul II's *Love and Responsibility* (written before he became pope), his "theology of the body," and Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae Vitae*. See www.affirmlife.com for related study materials from Women Affirming Life, and see www.endowonline.com for materials for study groups and classes on this and many other topics of interest to lay Catholic women.

Many people think that abortion is justifiable to end the life of a child with disabilities because they assume the child will have to endure a life of hardship and suffering. Fortunately, there are hundreds of examples of heroic men and women born with a disability, or who became disabled in childhood or later in life, who show us that life is always worth living and that the human spirit can triumph over any adversity. These people have achieved great things in their lives by their faith and their will to overcome the challenges they faced. Sponsor a contest for students in the upper grades of the parish school and in CCD classes to write a short biography of a famous person who overcame physical limitations to become a great athlete, political figure, musician, scientist or success in another field. The biography, preferably with photos, should be accompanied by a short personal essay on why in particular the chosen hero has inspired the student. The best bio/essays can be read at an assembly, with awards for the first place winner and runners-up.

Sr. Colleen Ann Nagle, FSE, director of the Pro-Life Activities Office of the Diocese of Grand Rapids, Michigan organizes an annual two-day weekend program at the Franciscan Life Process Center in Lowell, Michigan (which she also heads). A team of presenters introduce *Humanae Vitae*, explain the psychological dynamics of male and female and the theology of the body. Other presenters are married couples who can speak through personal experience about the issues of contraception, infertility, surgical sterilization and reversals, abortion, and NFP. An attorney addresses the legal aspects of life issues beginning with *Roe v. Wade*. For more information about this program, contact Sr. Colleen at cnagle@dioceseofgrandrapids.org or 616-551-5633.

Dr. Marcella Colbert, Director of the Respect Life Office of the Diocese of Galveston-Houston, developed an 11-week curriculum leading to a "Certificate in Life, Justice & Peace" for all parish workers for Life, including Respect Life Coordinators, Gabriel Project Coordinators, sidewalk counselors, and all who work for policy and legislative change for life-supporting legislation. A deep understand-

ing and inculcation of Church teachings on the dignity of the human person, moral formation, grace and virtues, family and community, the lay vocation, life issues and more, enables individuals to become authentic and effective apostles of the Gospel of Life. For more information, contact Dr. Colbert at 713-741-8728 or mcolbert@archgh.org.

PASTORAL CARE

Pastoral Care of Couples Experiencing Infertility

Begotten, Not Made: Pastoral Care for Couples Experiencing Infertility. Both a "Priest's Guide" and a "Couple's Manual" are available in this program developed by Steven Bozza, available from the Family Life Institute. The manuals explain moral teachings on dealing with infertility and are designed to aid pastors and diocesan family life offices in counseling infertile couples. For more information on how to start this program in your diocese contact Steven Bozza, Director, Office of Family Life/Respect Life, Diocese of Camden (New Jersey) at sbozza@camden-diocese.org or call (856) 583-6116. To order the manuals, visit www.familylifeinstitute.org.

Pastoral Care to Abortion-Minded Women

Beth Burgess, of the Diocese of Mobile, Alabama, formed "Hope Bearers," a seminar and support group for those involved in pastoral care/sidewalk counseling of abortion-minded women. Volunteers learn to replace the protest atmosphere outside clinics with a calm and helpful presence, encouraging thoughtful dialogue with women seeking abortion. They learn about the many pastoral ministries of the diocese (which has raised the activation rate from 15-20 regulars to almost 200 volunteers) and receive a booklet that contains, among other things, state and federal laws dealing with public demonstrations and picketing. The number of children and mothers who have been saved from abortion has quadrupled, according to one long-time clinic prayer warrior. Contact Beth Burgess at 251-434-1550 or bburgess@cssmobile.org for more information.

Pastoral Care in the Aftermath of Abortion

"An Afternoon of Prayerful Remembrance," is a program developed by Theresa Bonopartis, founder of Lumina/ Hope & Healing after Abortion, and The Sisters of Life. The program includes moving testimonials of individuals affected by abortion -- a counselor, friend, mother, father, sibling, grandparents of the aborted child, and others -- intercesso-

ry prayers, a talk on God's unfathomable mercy, Eucharistic Adoration, Mass, and opportunities for confession. It is designed to raise awareness of the profoundly negative impact of abortion on individuals and on society and to comfort all present by the realization of God's merciful love and His eagerness to forgive every sin that burdens a sorrowful heart. Those interested in presenting this program in their diocese or parish may contact Theresa Bonopartis for additional information: 877-586-4621 or lumina@postabortionhelp.org.

PUBLIC ADVOCACY/PARISH AND GRASSROOTS ACTIVATION

Mary Ellen Pellegrino, Director of Pro-Life and Social Ministries for the Diocese of Greensburg, Pennsylvania doubled the number of active parish volunteers in less than a year. She first mailed surveys to identify contacts for the distribution of information on various issues. Follow-up phone calls and e-mails increased the response level. As she presented talks to parishes and to various Catholic groups on Faithful Citizenship throughout the election year, she collected more phone numbers and e-mail addresses. From these, Mary Ellen was able to set up issue-oriented e-mail groups/networks. At the same time, the diocesan communications department was revamping its web design and Mary Ellen was able to snag pages where she can post legislative alerts, general information, and invite e-mail inquiries from web visitors. For additional information, contact Mary Ellen Pellegrino at 724-837-0901 or mpellegrino@dioceseofgreensburg.org.

Like many diocesan pro-life directors, Laurie Edwards, Respect Life Coordinator for the Diocese of Belleville, Illinois, faces the challenge of a very widespread diocese, in her case the southern third of Illinois. The solution for disseminating information and materials quickly, for teaching and networking across a large geographic area has been an active web presence with a twist. The Belleville Respect Life Office holds "Virtual Events" allowing on-line conversations or week-long blogs on various topics. The topic of a week-long discussion in the summer of 2008 was *Humanae Vitae*. In June 2009, a week-long discussion was held on the aftermath of abortion and post-abortion healing. There's also a "Youth for Life" component on the website with a monthly drawing in which young people become eligible by completing a task on the site – reviewing a brochure or commenting on a video clip, for example. Contact Laurie Edwards at 618-235-9601, ext. 133 or ledwards@diobelle.org for further information.

The Diocese of Trenton, New Jersey set up a cool, interactive pro-life website apart from the official (and typically more sedate) diocesan site: www.respectlifetoday.com. Its vibrant colors, contemporary look and simplicity are geared to attract college-aged and younger people. It is home to videos, campaign outreach materials, a quarterly newsletter, educational resources, news and events. In a special section designed specifically for youth, pro-life art, poetry and essays are posted. They can also e-mail sensitive questions to the moderator. Contests, such as the Loving Life Logo Contest, are used to generate interest in the site. In the first contest in November 2008, over 76,000 votes were cast. The winning logo is featured on many of the site's promotional materials. A blog was launched in the summer of 2009. For further information, contact Rev. Ian Trammell, Respect Life Coordinator, Diocese of Trenton, at 609-406-7400 ext. 5559 or itramm@dioceseoftrenton.org.

Most dioceses organize pro-life youth rallies around Respect Life Sunday or the January 22nd anniversary of the Supreme Court's abortion decisions. The Archdiocese of Washington, D.C. has greatly expanded the impact of their annual event. Working with successful youth ministers and Catholic high school teachers, the Washington pro-life office provides catechetical materials and resources to youth ministers and teachers to prepare students prior to the event about *Roe v. Wade*, the teachings of the Church on the sanctity of human life, fetal development, and more. Young people are encouraged to be more than active participants; they are invited to lead as well: the best short student "testimonials" giving witness to life are presented at the rally; photo and video montages are presented showing students' pro-life efforts over the last year; and students lead a rosary that has included pro-life meditations written by a high school student. Contact Christa Lopiccolo, Executive Director, Office for Life Issues, 301-853-5318 or clopiccolo@adw.org.