

Get a Life!

DOCTRINAL ELEMENT

Issue Night

TOPIC

Sanctity of Human Life and Abortion

GOAL

The goal is to awaken students to the value of human life, from conception until natural death through an understanding of the biological reality of conception, the Church's responsibility to protect human life and the reality of abortion in our world.

SECONDARY RELIGION GUIDELINES

(II.II.2.a.b.c)

SCRIPTURE

Creation- Gn 1:1, 26-28; Gn 2:7; Gn 5:1-3;

Fertility- Gn 25:21; Gn 29:31; Gn 33:5

Repentance- Ps 51

Children- Ps 127; Ps 139; Jer 1:5

St. John the Baptist- Lk 1:15, 41-44

Key Scripture Passages Relating to the Sanctity of Human Life, CDA Youth Ministry Resource Manual, Chapter 6, pg. 27-28

CATECHISM

Respect for Human Life: 2259-2283

The Human Body: 1004, 2297-2298

Abortion: 2770-2274

GOLDEN THREADS

The Incarnation: The very fact that God became man, in order to redeem fallen humanity tells us that the human person has a particular role in salvation history. Christ himself was conceived in unusual and unexpected circumstances. This “unplanned pregnancy” became the source of our eternal life with God.

The Dignity of the Human Person: The truth of the dignity of the human person is that we were created by God in his image and likeness, given freedom of our will from God, and we are given grace from God so that we can freely choose life in him and join him in eternity. We are then called to treat all persons with dignity, with the belief that Christ is in each person, and when we are called to love all, as our brothers and sisters, as our very selves, as we are all one body of Christ.

ANNUAL THEME RELEVANCE

Built on Christ. We are called to follow Christ, which is not an abstract or purely spiritual reality. It is done through our bodies, our actions and words. Human life is a gift that is given in order to be lived as members of the body of Christ in order that we can give our lives back to our heavenly Father. This is built upon a life centered in the Gospels and bringing Christ into the world through our works and bodily presence.

PROCLAMATION

Human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception. From the first moment of his existence, a human being must be recognized as having the rights of a person - among which is the inviolable right of every innocent being to life. (CCC 2270)

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The Church has always, and will always teach that abortion is a moral evil in each and every instance. (CCC 2271)

Formal cooperation in an abortion constitutes a grave offense....the Church attaches the canonical penalty of excommunication to this crime against human life. (CCC 2272)

The Church desires to show mercy and healing through the grace of the sacrament of reconciliation. (CCC 2272)

The Gospel of life is at the heart of Jesus' message. Lovingly received day after day by the Church, it is to be preached with dauntless fidelity as "good news" to the people of every age and culture. *Evangelium Vitae, 1*

“Therefore, by the authority which Christ conferred upon [all popes] Peter and his Successors... I declare that direct abortion, that is, abortion willed as an end or as a means, always constitutes a grave moral disorder, since it is the deliberate killing of an innocent human being.” *Evangelium Vitae, 62*

Abortion cannot be allowed and is wrong in every circumstance, including to save the life of the mother. (“No circumstance, no purpose, no law whatsoever can ever make licit an act which is intrinsically illicit, since it is contrary to the Law of God which is written in every human heart, knowable by reason itself, and proclaimed by the Church.”) *Evangelium Vitae, 62*

MEDIA SUGGESTIONS

Movies

- “Bella”
- “Juno”
- “Butterfly Circus” (short film)
- “The Human Experience” (Grassroots Film not yet released)
- “Horton Hears a Who”
- “August Rush”
- “Finding Nemo”
- “In the Womb” by National Geographic is an amazing look at the biology of conception and the development of the embryo. [You might need parental permission to show the video.](#)

Songs and Music Videos

- Gianna Jessen (Abortion survivor and speaker. There are two parts to the video.)
 - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kPF1FhCMPuQ>
- Catholic Vote – (Adoption Ad with famous people)
 - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oIBZ-kJ6XAc&feature=related>
- Spirit Juice Studios
 - http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VRL-cnOEUYQ&feature=player_embedded
- “Can I Live” by Nick Cannon (About abortion)
 - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vdOCwd9EttE>
- “Happy Birthday” by Flipsyde (About abortion)

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- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C5f9-b-Zfnw>
- “The Call” by Matt Kennon (About suicide attempts and abortion attempts.)
 - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YK3zs7EV6Tk>

Websites

- United States Catholic Conference of Bishops- www.usccb.org/prolife
- The Holy See- www.vatican.va
- Claire Culwell – abortion survivor, <http://claireculwell.com/>
- Gianna Jessen – abortion survivor, <http://www.giannajessen.com/>
- www.Abortionblackout.com - Abortion statistics
- www.toomanyaborted.com - Issue of abortion in black community
- www.theradiancefoundation.org – Foundation by Ryan Bomberger promoting adoption and life.
- Catholic Diocese of Arlington- <http://www.arlingtondiocese.org/>
- Virginia Catholic Conference- <http://www.vacatholic.org/>
- National Committee for Human Life Amendment- <http://www.nchla.org/>
- Family Research Council- <http://www.frc.org/>
- National Catholic Register- <http://www.ncregister.com/>
- Guttmacher Institute - <http://www.guttmacher.org/sections/abortion.php>
- Resources on women who regret their abortion: www.silentnomoreawareness.org

OTHER RESOURCES

- *Respect for Unborn Human Life: The Church’s Constant Teaching*, CDA Youth Ministry Resource Manual, Chapter 6, pg. 23-24
- *Selected Quotes from Church Documents: On the Importance and Priority of Defending Innocent Human Life*, CDA Youth Ministry Resource Manual, Chapter 6, pg. 25-26
- *Key Scripture Passages Relating to the Sanctity of Human Life*, CDA Youth Ministry Resource Manual, Chapter 6, pg. 27-28
- *A Matter of the Heart: On the 30th Anniversary of Roe vs. Wade*, USCCB, November 12, 2002
 - <http://www.usccb.org/prolife/heart.shtml>
 - (En Español) <http://www.usccb.org/prolife/heartspanish.shtml>
- *Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities: A Campaign in Support of Life*, USCCB, November 2001
 - <http://www.usccb.org/prolife/pastoralplan.shtml>
- *Living the Gospel of Life: A Challenge to American Catholics*, USCCB, November 1998
 - <http://www.usccb.org/prolife/gospel.shtml>
 - (En Español) <http://www.usccb.org/prolife/vivirelevangeliodelavida.pdf>
- 25th Anniversary of Roe v. Wade, *Message to Cardinal Bernard Law*, Pope John Paul II, December 29, 1997
 - <http://www.usccb.org/comm/archives/1998/98-010a.shtml>
- *Light and Shadows: Our Nation 25 Years After Roe v. Wade*, USCCB, November 12, 1997
 - <http://www.usccb.org/prolife/tdocs/lighshad.shtml>
- *Faithful for Life: A Moral Reflection*, USCCB, September 1995
 - <http://www.usccb.org/prolife/tdocs/FaithfulForLife.pdf>

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- *Evangelium Vitae: On the Value and Inviolability of Human Life*, Pope John Paul II, March 25, 1995
 - <http://www.usccb.org/prolife/tdocs/evangel/evangeli.shtml>
 - (*En Español*) http://www.vatican.va/edocs/ESL0080/_INDEX.HTM
- *Resolution on Abortion*, USCCB, November 7, 1989
 - <http://www.usccb.org/prolife/tdocs/resabort89.shtml>
- *Donum Vitae: Instruction on Respect for Human Life*, Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, February 22, 1987
 - <http://www.usccb.org/prolife/tdocs/donumvitae.shtml>
 - (*En Español*)
http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cf_aith_doc_19870222_respect-for-human-life_sp.html
- *Declaration on Procured Abortion*, Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, November 18, 1974
 - <http://www.usccb.org/prolife/issues/abortion/DeclarationonProcuredAbortion.pdf>
 - (*En Español*)
http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cf_aith_doc_19741118_declaration-abortion_sp.html
- *Excerpts from Human Life in Our Day*, NCCB, November 16, 1968
 - http://www.usccb.org/prolife/issues/abortion/excerpts_human_life.shtml
- *Excerpts from Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, Second Vatican Council, November 7, 1965
 - http://www.usccb.org/prolife/issues/abortion/excerpts_church_modern.shtml

GATHER

Icebreaker: *Guess that baby!*

Have teens bring a baby picture of themselves. Arrange the pictures on a table. Have a contest to see if they can guess who is who. The one who guesses the most correctly is the winner. Follow the contest by having teens go around and share about one of their earliest memories, or what they know about the details of their birth and infancy.

Opening Prayer

Psalm 139

You formed my inmost being; you knit me in my mother's womb.

I praise you, so wonderfully you made me; wonderful are your works! My very self you knew; my bones were not hidden from you, When I was being made in secret, fashioned as in the depths of the earth. Your eyes foresaw my actions; in your book all are written down; my days were shaped, before one came to be. How precious to me are your designs, O God; how vast the sum of them! Were I to count, they would outnumber the sands; to finish, I would need eternity. If only you would destroy the wicked, O God, and the bloodthirsty would depart from me! Deceitfully they invoke your name; your foes swear faithless oaths. Do I not hate, LORD, those who hate you? Those who rise against you, do I not loathe? With fierce hatred I hate them, enemies I count as my own. Probe me, God, know my heart; try me, know my concerns.

EXPLANATION

(The topic of abortion can be very tense and divisive. As you present to the teens, it might be helpful to juxtapose messages from the culture that devalue human life, with messages that support the dignity of human life. Using a story from the news, popular song, movie clip,

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television show (shows on teen pregnancy) either pro-life or anti-life, might be a great opening for a critical discussion. Invite students to analyze the main message of the media and look at both sides of the message.)

Let's look at some of the mixed messages that we get from our legal system. First, did you know that if you kill a pregnant woman, you are convicted of a double homicide? On the other hand, you can go to federal prison if you kill any of the following animals in Virginia: a gray bat, a northern flying squirrel, a humpback whale, or a bald-eagle. However, in Virginia it is legal to have an abortion in all three trimesters of pregnancy. You can have an abortion in the third trimester (25 weeks – premature babies have been able to survive as young as 22 weeks). Now does that make any sense to you at all? It is pretty clear that we have our priorities mixed up!

Now that we have looked at some of the messages from our culture, we need to look at what our faith teaches us. The Catholic Church has been, and always will be, clear on our responsibility to protect all human life from conception until natural death. Life issues are very tough to talk about because they are intimate, sensitive and very personal. The chances are pretty high that most of us in this room know someone who has had an abortion. Have you ever thought that you might even have cousins, aunts, uncles or other family members who are missing at family events because of abortion? If, as statistics say, 1/3 of all women in our country are likely to have an abortion by the age of 45, and that 1 in 5 pregnancies end in abortion, there is a significant possibility that we are missing family members. We know people who have had abortions; they are good people, people we love. No parent wants to kill their child. So what happens to make them choose abortion? Why do women choose abortion? Why would men support or encourage an abortion? *(Take a minute to illicit some feedback from the teens.)*

Does anyone here know what the Catholic Church says about abortion? *(Pause for answers)* What are some of the situations that you have heard of as to why a man would encourage a loved one to have; or a woman would choose to have an abortion? *(Allow teens to answer.)* Sometimes it is fear of being a parent or what other people might say. It may be fear of the future or how their life might change. Sometimes a lack of money or work and therefore no way to financially support a baby contributes to their decision. Sometimes the parents are very young and don't want to miss out on future opportunities. Regardless of the reasons people give, choosing an abortion most likely is accompanied by fear, anger, guilt, and other negative feelings. Why then would the Church be against abortion if it might help people or take away these possible feelings? Is the Church trying to make people suffer? Does the Church want to ruin lives?

NO! Obviously the Catholic Church does not want to ruin people's lives. In fact, it wants just the opposite! The Church wants to give people life to the fullest. Look at how profound our understanding of human life is! Human life is not only created by God, but we actually are made in the image of God (Gn 1:27). Part of the gift of being an image of God is to be a co-creator with him as he commands us to "be fertile and multiply" (Gn 1:28). The Catholic Church actually upholds the truth that life is sacred because it is a pure gift from God, and in fact, is one way we participate in God's love. Each conception brings a unique and unrepeatable human being into the world – never can the same body and soul be repeated! Even if we are not sure about the "creation story" or how human beings came to be in the world, we cannot deny that the fact that God himself came to earth in the form of a male

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infant, in the person of Jesus Christ, born of a woman. That alone should tell us that the human body and soul has a value and dignity beyond our understanding.

How often do we think about the miracle of our conception and birth? The fact that each one of us is sitting here is a one in 200 million chance! At the moment of our conception, we got 23 chromosomes from each of our parents. Think about the way you look right now. What types of characteristics were determined at the moment of your conception? (*Answers: sex, facial features, body type, color of hair, eyes, skin, laugh; even parts of our personality were determined! Ask them whose eyes, nose, laugh, etc., they have.*)

Let us play a quick game and see how many facts about prenatal development you know the answers to. (*Offer to give out a “prize” for the correct answers or divide the group into teams and offer something to the winning team.*)

Facts of Life Quiz (*remind teens that this is measured in days or weeks in the womb*)

1. When did my heart start to beat? *24 days*
2. How old was I when I could first feel pain? *9 weeks*
3. How many weeks old was I when my brain, eyes, jaw and arms were showing signs of development? *6 weeks*
4. How many weeks old was I when my elbows and fingers were evident, and I began making my own blood? *8 weeks* (this is the point when most abortions take place, 62% of abortions occur)
5. What age could I get a finger print check? *10 weeks* (of course that would be messy and awkward since you are still in your mother)
6. What age was I when I could start to suck my thumb? *12 weeks*
7. When could my parents find out if I was a boy or a girl so they could paint my room and buy my clothes? (*sex determination as early as 60 days through ultrasound*)

Sometimes we don't focus enough on the biology of life, and the fact that it really is a human being we are talking about when we discuss abortion. We can get caught up in the issue of “rights” and the personal life of the mother, or father, but we often do not spend much time thinking about the unique and unrepeatable person who will never be born.

As we have talked about, men and women choose abortion for many different reasons. How sad that we cannot figure out a better way to help someone who is in a difficult situation. We can create microwaves, ipods, go to the moon and perform heart transplants, but our only solution for an unwanted pregnancy is to kill the baby?!

We need to have courage and talk about these issues in a compassionate and loving way. Just as St. Francis would say, “Preach the Gospel always, and if necessary use words,” we too are called to witness and bring about a change in the world through our actions. There are many holy men and women who have fought for, witnessed to, and given their lives to promoting a culture of life. We have countless saints, named and unnamed, that we can use as role models to teach us about the dignity of the person and the human body. (e.g., Servant of God Pope John Paul II, Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta, St. Maria Goretti, St. Maximilian Kolbe, St. Gianna Molla). St. Francis was particularly dedicated to reminding the world that God came to earth, in the person of Jesus Christ, as a man, in the same manner that we were born. St. Francis was the first to introduce the live nativity, or manger scene. He wanted people to remember that life is a gift from God, as Jesus is a gift for all of us. St. Francis heard the voice of God ask him to “go rebuild my Church.” St. Francis took that literally and started to

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rebuild broken down churches. He soon came to realize that God meant to rebuild the people of the Church. We have that same call! How can we rebuild the culture into a people of life?

We must be an instrument for life! Here are some practical ways we can rebuild a culture of life. First we have to start with transforming our own hearts. We might be called to be an instrument in the lives of others who are in need of help while making a decision about abortion, or helping someone to realize the evils of abortion. Three key ways are:

1. The first priority is to **PRAY!** We know there are different ways of praying, but there are four forms that we use as a way of transforming our hearts and being there for others.
 - a. Adoration – taking time to reflect on the great gift of God and the tremendous love of his son, Jesus Christ, who suffered and died for us.
 - b. Petition – praying for forgiveness for all of the ways that we have hurt others or ourselves because we do not understand the gift of our bodies, of our lives or of hurtful words and actions. Asking for forgiveness for our world which has killed so many innocent victims through abortion, war, abuse and violence.
 - c. Intercession – praying for those making decisions concerning human life such as politicians and government officials. Asking for the strength and courage we need to defend life, to choose life, even if it is a very difficult situation that might bring great suffering.
 - d. Thanksgiving – praying in gratitude for our own lives, our parents and families. Praying also in thanksgiving for those whose lives have been spared and their parents who chose life over death.
2. **EDUCATION** is key in being able to talk about the issue of abortion. Not only is it important to know why the Church defends life, but it is important to be able to talk about it so that people can understand. Take time to read scripture, the Catechism or Church documents and learn to paraphrase or put them into your own words. Learn the facts on abortion and current statistics.

I have another quick quiz for you on statistics of abortion. *Using the following statistics invite the students to guess, (you can even have prizes for those who come closest to the accurate numbers. It might be a way to break into small groups and have them answer as a group.)*

1. How many abortions have there been since 1973, Roe v. Wade? *Over 52 million*
2. How many abortions occur in the United States each year? *1.2 million*
3. What percentage of women have abortions from pregnancies caused by rape or incest, or for life-threatening health reasons? *Less than 1 %*
4. How many abortions occur in the US each day? *Approximately 3600 – that is the same as the number of victims from 9/11 but occurring every day!*
5. How frequently in seconds do abortions occur? *1 abortion every 24 seconds*
6. At what month of pregnancy is it illegal to have an abortion in our country? *Depends on the state, but it is legal to have an abortion even hours before delivery if there is a medical reason*
7. What is the average age of women who have abortions? *24 years old*

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3. **WITNESSING** through our actions is often more powerful than through our words. What are some ways we can witness to life? (*Have teens list some ideas. Here are a few ideas for you to share.*)
- Attend a monthly Respect Life Mass with Bishop Loverde (see Respect Life website for scheduled Masses)
 - Pray the rosary outside of an abortion facility on a Saturday morning
 - Participate in the March for Life, January – www.marchforlife.org
 - Participate in Life Chain – held on Respect Life Sunday in October. www.lifechain.net
 - Participate in 40 Days for Life (occurs bi-annually in Arlington Diocese) www.40daysforlife.com
 - Fundraiser/baby drive for pregnancy crisis center
 - A volunteer day with children or those with special needs

As we come to the end of our night, it is important to remember that there are millions of mothers and fathers out there who have chosen abortion, and are in deep pain because of this choice. We need to be very sensitive to them, and show them love and understanding so that they can turn to Jesus Christ for healing. The Catholic Church desires for each man and woman to know God's loving mercy. We even have a ministry in the diocese that helps mothers and fathers who have aborted their children, it is called Project Rachel. They have retreats and offer counseling for those who want to deal with the psychological pain and spiritual effect that the abortion has had on their lives. It is important to be sensitive when speaking about this issue because we never know what struggles people may be facing due to past choices.

APPLICATION

Activity Option # 1: Thank You Letters for Life

In the Church, or a quiet place for prayer, give the group an opportunity to write a thank you letter in gratitude for the gift of their life. This letter could be in the form of a prayer, to God, or to their parents. It should be a time of reflecting on the gift of being born, how their lives affect those around them, specific traits and talents they have been given. They might want to give it to their parents, or you can invite them to keep the letter and take a look at it every so often.

Spiritual Adoption Program – at the end of the night, invite students to participate in the Spiritual Adoption program and initiate the process through a prayer service. Spiritual Adoption is an opportunity for a prayer warrior to allow God to use you to save the life of one of God's beloved children. It entails praying for a child for a year through the daily recitation of a prayer for the life and protection of the child. The prayer and certificate can be found on: www.hearts4life.org

Activity Option # 2: Action for Life

This would take some preparations and might have to occur at a time other than the meeting. Here are a few ideas:

- Attend a monthly Respect Life Mass with Bishop Loverde (see Respect Life website for scheduled Masses)
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SEND

Summary: What does this have to do with Jesus?

Not only did God create us in his image and likeness, but God so loved the world, that he sent his only begotten Son into the world (Jn 3:16). God humbled himself to become man, born like us, in all things but sin. This very fact should alert us that the human person is remarkable and sacred.

Closing Prayer

God our Father, you lovingly knit us in our mothers' womb. Grant that each human embryo will be respected as a human being, and not dismissed as a product to be manipulated or destroyed. Grant us the courage and conviction to be your voice for our sisters and brothers at the very earliest stages of their development, and for all defenseless unborn children.

Jesus, Divine Healer, foster in those conducting medical research a commitment to finding cures in ways that respect these little ones and all your vulnerable children.

Holy Spirit, grant us the wisdom to develop morally sound treatments for conditions now thought to be incurable. Help us persevere in defending human life while alleviating suffering.

Show mercy to all who have cooperated in killing our tiniest brothers and sisters. Bring them and all who support destructive embryo research to true conversion. Grant them the ability to see the immeasurable dignity of all human beings even in the first days of life.

Father, we ask this in Jesus' name, through the Holy Spirit. Amen

CONSIDERATIONS FOR HISPANIC YOUTH MINISTRY

One of the positive values within the Hispanic culture is the great value of life. U.S. Bishops have spoken in their documents about the respect for life seen in the Hispanic culture and how this value is a gift to the American Catholic Church. Unfortunately, Hispanic females have the highest rate of teenage pregnancy in the U.S. among any other ethnic group. This means that Hispanic youth have a much greater risk of choosing abortion when they do not have a strong support system. The reality of high poverty rates, unemployment, broken families, and lack of medical resources are all reasons why a Hispanic youth might choose to have an abortion. It is suggested that when discussing abortion with Hispanics, the concepts of chastity and abstinence also be discussed. The practice of chastity and abstinence is the best way to prevent Hispanic teen pregnancy and prevent any risk for abortion.

Biography

Sr. Clare Hunter, is a Franciscan Sister of the Eucharist and the director of the Respect Life Office for the Arlington Diocese. Sister Clare has a B.S. in Corporate Communication and Media, from Southern Connecticut State University; a Masters in Theological Studies from the John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family, in Washington, D.C.; a Masters in Education Administration from the University of St. Thomas, in Houston, TX.