



Statement for Respect Life Sunday 2006

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Catholic parishes across the United States are preparing once again to celebrate Respect Life Sunday, falling this year on October 1. This is a time to acknowledge, with gratitude and a profound sense of wonder, the mystery of human life: Because each of us is created, loved and redeemed by God, every human life is priceless, deserving respect and protection.

We pause, too, to thank those who help foster respect for life – in pregnancy care centers, hospices, legislative assemblies, homes, schools and workplaces. Because of their efforts we can point to continuing signs of progress toward a culture in which human life is cherished. Young people are leading the way through their enthusiastic involvement in pro-life education and activism. Equally impressive is the growing number of youth committed to living chastely until marriage, a trend that has contributed substantially to the continuing decline in abortions.

Public sentiment overall is changing as well. Today only a small minority of Americans favors the policy of virtually unlimited abortion imposed on our nation by the U.S. Supreme Court's abortion decisions. Even laws to prevent the killing of children who are already four-fifths delivered have been ruled unconstitutional. The public debate on partial-birth abortion has awakened many Americans to the violence of abortion, and the Supreme Court itself will soon take another look at the issue when it reviews a federal ban on this horrendous practice. Also encouraging for a culture of life is an increased opposition, particularly among committed Catholics, to the use of the death penalty.

These and other signs of progress are true advances. Other recent developments, though hailed as forms of technical progress, are regressive and harmful in their effects on human life.

The RU-486 abortion pill was hailed as a "safe" way to end a pregnancy. But for hundreds of American women, an abortion by this method has meant emergency room visits for blood transfusions, emergency surgery, or treatment for serious, sometimes lethal infections.

Another drug, called Plan B, has been approved by the Food and Drug Administration for "emergency contraception." Yet the prescribing information for pharmacists and physicians admits that the drug may sometimes act by making it impossible for a newly conceived embryo

to survive. The risks to women include a host of bleeding disorders and an increased risk of ectopic pregnancy.

In the field of stem cell research, the genuine and growing promise of treatments using adult stem cells is often downplayed or ignored, while exaggerated or even fraudulent claims are made for avenues that require destroying early human lives. A “Stem Cell Research and Cures Initiative” offered for the November ballot in Missouri makes the usual irresponsible claims for “miracle cures” from embryonic stem cells, and adds its own cynical twist: While claiming to ban human cloning, it would actually elevate the cloning of human embryos for destructive research to the status of a constitutional right.

In 1973 the Supreme Court ignored the facts of human life in the womb, as well as the facts about abortion’s negative effects on women, to find a constitutional “right” to abortion. Today, in the same way, powerful groups in our society would ignore basic facts to promote a narrow and divisive view of the human person – a view in which human life is a mere problem, or even an object of research and exploitation, rather than the divine mystery it truly is. Let us educate and motivate ourselves to ensure that truth – the scientific and medical truth, and the profound truth about the dignity of each human person – will increasingly inform and guide our society’s decisions about human life.

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