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# NEBRASKA CATHOLICS FOR LIFE

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Volume 7, Issue 2

"Pray

Think

Act"

December 2008

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## *A Note from Greg*

The outcome of this year's election will undoubtedly create serious new challenges to the pro-life movement. Many existing federal and state pro-life laws are in jeopardy if President-elect Barack Obama follows through on his campaign promises.

Many pro-lifers have expressed discouragement in the face of this outcome. My response is to remind everyone that our Lord defeated death once and for all. Death cannot triumph over life. Yet, evil still exists and must be opposed, so our Lord asks us to fight the fight—faithfully and persistently. Sometimes we will be blessed with victories and sometimes we'll be challenged with set backs. We must never give in to discouragement or cynicism; these are tools of the devil used to tempt us to give up the fight.

Therefore, it is critically important that we turn discouragement and all negative energy into positive action to oppose the dismantling of existing pro-life laws. This will include prayer, fasting and massive grass-roots action to urge our elected officials to protect *all* human life from conception to natural death (see "Fight FOCA Postcard Campaign" under ACTION).

So be confident in the assurances and hope of our faith and continue to join me as we "pray, think, and act" to bring about a civilization of life and love. And may you and your loved ones have a most blessed Christmas.

Greg Schleppenbach, State Director  
Bishops' Pastoral Plan for Pro Life Activities

## **PRAY**

"Certain kinds of demons do not leave but by prayer and fasting." Mt. 17:21

### **A Prayer for Elected Officials**

As our new President, Congress and Nebraska Legislature begin their service please offer this prayer daily for their intention. Pope John Paul II offers this prayer to Mary ("a sign of sure hope and solace") at the end of his encyclical "The Gospel of Life".

O Mary, bright dawn of the new world,  
Mother of the living,  
to you do we entrust the cause of life:  
Look down, O Mother,  
upon the vast numbers of babies to be born,

of the poor whose lives are made difficult,  
of men and women who are victims of brutal violence,  
of the elderly and the sick killed by indifference or out of misguided mercy.  
Grant that all who believe in your Son [especially our elected officials]  
may proclaim the Gospel of life with honesty and love to the people of our time.  
Obtain for them the grace to accept that Gospel as a gift ever new,  
the joy of celebrating it with gratitude throughout their lives  
and the courage to bear witness to it resolutely,  
in order to build, together with all people of good will, the civilization of truth and love,  
to the praise and glory of God,  
the Creator and lover of life.

Other prayer resources:

<http://www.usccb.org/prolife/liturgy/index.shtml>

<http://www.priestsforlife.org/prayers/index.htm>

Many other prayers are available by web searching "pro-life prayers"

## **THINK**

### **Respect for Unborn Human Life: The Church's Constant Teaching**

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states: "Since the first century the Church has affirmed the moral evil of every procured abortion. This teaching has not changed and remains unchangeable. Direct abortion, that is to say, abortion willed either as an end or a means, is gravely contrary to the moral law" (No. 2271).

In response to those who say this teaching *has* changed or is of recent origin, here are the facts:

- ☒ From earliest times, Christians sharply distinguished themselves from surrounding pagan cultures by rejecting abortion and infanticide. The earliest widely used documents of Christian teaching and practice after the New Testament in the 1st and 2nd centuries, the *Didache* (Teaching of the Twelve Apostles) and *Letter of Barnabas*, condemned both practices, as did early regional and particular Church councils.

☒ To be sure, knowledge of human embryology was very limited until recent times. Many Christian thinkers accepted the biological theories of their time, based on the writings of Aristotle (4th century BC) and other philosophers. Aristotle assumed a process was needed over time to turn the matter from a woman's womb into a being that could receive a specifically human form or soul. The active formative power for this process was thought to come entirely from the man – the existence of the human ovum (egg), like so much of basic biology, was unknown.

☒ However, such mistaken biological theories never changed the Church's common conviction that abortion is gravely wrong at every stage. At the very least, early abortion was seen as attacking a being with a human destiny, being prepared by God to receive an immortal soul (cf. Jeremiah 1:5: "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you").

☒ In the 5th century AD this rejection of abortion at every stage was affirmed by the great bishop-theologian St. Augustine. He knew of theories about the human soul not being present until some weeks into pregnancy. Because he used the Greek Septuagint translation of the Old Testament, he also thought the ancient Israelites had imposed a more severe penalty for accidentally causing a miscarriage if the fetus was "fully formed" (Exodus 21: 22-23), language not found in any known Hebrew version of this passage. But he also held that human knowledge of biology was very limited, and he wisely warned against misusing such theories to risk committing homicide. He added that God has the power to make up all human deficiencies or lack of development in the Resurrection, so we cannot assume that the earliest aborted children will be excluded from enjoying eternal life with God.

☒ In the 13th century, St. Thomas Aquinas made extensive use of Aristotle's thought, including his theory that the rational human soul is not present in the first few weeks of pregnancy. But he also rejected abortion as gravely wrong at every stage, observing that it is a sin "against nature" to reject God's gift of a new life.

☒ During these centuries, theories derived from Aristotle and others influenced the grading of penalties for abortion in Church law. Some canonical penalties were more severe for a direct abortion after the stage when the human soul was thought to be present. However, abortion at all stages continued to be seen as a grave moral evil.

☒ From the 13th to 19th centuries, some theologians speculated about rare and difficult cases where they thought an abortion before "formation" or "ensoulment" might be morally justified. But these theories were discussed and then always rejected, as the Church refined and reaffirmed its understanding of abortion as an intrinsically evil act that can never be morally right.

☒ In 1827, with the discovery of the human ovum, the mistaken biology of Aristotle was discredited. Scientists increasingly understood that the union of sperm and egg at conception produces a new living being that is distinct from both mother and father. Modern genetics demonstrated that this individual is, at the outset, distinctively human, with the inherent and active potential to mature into a human fetus, infant, child and adult. From 1869 onward the obsolete distinction between the "ensouled" and "unensouled" fetus was permanently removed from canon law on abortion.

☒ Secular laws against abortion were being reformed at the same time and in the same way, based on secular medical experts' realization that "no other doctrine appears to be consonant with reason or physiology but that which admits the embryo to possess vitality from the very moment of conception" (American Medical Association, *Report on Criminal Abortion*, 1871).

☒ Thus modern science has not changed the Church's constant teaching against abortion, but has underscored how important and reasonable it is, by confirming that the life of each individual of the human species begins with the earliest embryo.

☒ Given the *scientific* fact that a human life begins at conception, the only moral norm needed to understand the Church's opposition to abortion is the principle that *each and every human life has inherent dignity, and thus must be treated with the respect due to a human person*. This is the foundation for the Church's social doctrine, including its teachings on war, the use of capital punishment, euthanasia, health care, poverty and immigration. Conversely, to claim that some live human beings do *not* deserve respect or should *not* be treated as "persons" (based on changeable factors such as age, condition, location, or lack of mental or physical abilities) is to deny the very idea of *inherent* human rights. Such a claim undermines respect for the lives of many vulnerable people before and after birth.

**For more information:**

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Declaration on Procured Abortion* (1974), nos. 6-7; John R. Connery, S.J.,

*Abortion: The Development of the Roman Catholic Perspective* (1977); Germain Grisez,

*Abortion: The Myths, the Realities, and the Arguments* (1970), Chapter IV; U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops,

*On Embryonic Stem Cell Research* (2008); Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae* (1995), nos. 61-2.

**Virtue Media Television Ads**

Last year's effort was highly successful raising nearly \$230,000 throughout Nebraska (including \$21,000 from the Knights) which paid for roughly 9500 pro-life television ads reaching most of the state. More than 1.2 million Nebraskans saw these pro life ads at least 6 times including 99 percent of the young women in the most vulnerable age groups. The result was 580 responses from abortion-vulnerable women and 1120 responses from post-abortive mothers.

Building on this success, the Bishops of Nebraska gave their blessing to conducting this project again this year. Like last year, parishes in the Lincoln and Grand Island Dioceses presented this project at Masses in October; parishes in the Archdiocese of Omaha will do so in January.

Donations from Lincoln and Grand Island are down significantly from last year (likely due to the poor economy). If you'd like to make a year-end donation to this project send your check to Virtue Media, P.O. Box 2145, Gilbert, AZ 85299-2145.

**ACT**

☒ **FIGHT FOCA POSTCARD CAMPAIGN**

On the weekend of January 24/25, Nebraska parishes will be joining parishes throughout the nation in a postcard campaign urging Congress to oppose the radical Freedom of Choice Act and any other attempts to overturn existing pro-life laws and policies. Parish pro-life coordinators may need extra help in implementing this critically important project.

☒ **ONE ROSE ONE LIFE**

The Knights of Columbus sponsor this annual appeal to raise funds for pro-life organizations and activities throughout Nebraska. The Bishops' Pastoral Plan for Pro Life Activities is one of the major recipients of these funds. This appeal is scheduled for the weekend of January 24/25 but this could vary from parish to parish. Please give generously to this appeal.

☒ **ATTEND THE WALK FOR LIFE/VIGIL MASS**

The annual Walk for Life and Vigil Mass will be held on Friday and Saturday, January 30/31. See enclosed flier for details. Copy and distribute the flier. Organize a van or bus load of people to attend this important and powerful witness for life.

# EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

## Pro Life Apologetics

- ☒ **Pro Life 101: A Step-by-Step Guide to Making Your Case Persuasively**  
Stand to Reason (\$7.00); 1-800-273-2766,  
www.str.org
- ☒ **Pro Life Answers to Pro Choice Arguments**  
Life Cycle Books (\$11.95), 1-800-214-5849,  
www.lifecyclebooks.com

## Stem Cell Research and Cloning

- ☒ **Stem Cell Research: Finding Cures We Can All Live With** (15 min. DVD, \$9.95)
- ☒ **On Embryonic Stem Cell Research**  
(Brochure of 2008 Bishops' Statement, \$12.00/pk of 25)
- ☒ **Stem Cell Research and Human Cloning**  
(Bulletin insert, Q & A format, \$10.00/100)
- ☒ **Stem Cells and Hope for Patients**  
(Brochure, \$21.50/100)

USCCB Publishing, 800-235-8722,  
www.usccbpublishing.org (click on "Life Issues and Relationships" and then "Pro-Life")

Bishops' Pastoral Plan for Pro Life Activities  
Affiliate: Nebraska Catholic Conference  
215 Centennial Mall South, Suite 410  
Lincoln, NE 68508-1813

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

## Pro Life Material Vendors

- ☒ **Heritage House, 1-800-858-3040;**  
**www.HH76.com**
- ☒ **U.S. Bishops' Pro Life Office, 1-866-582-0943;**  
**www.usccb.org/prolife**

NOTE: Those without internet access can obtain online materials from Greg Schleppebach's office

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