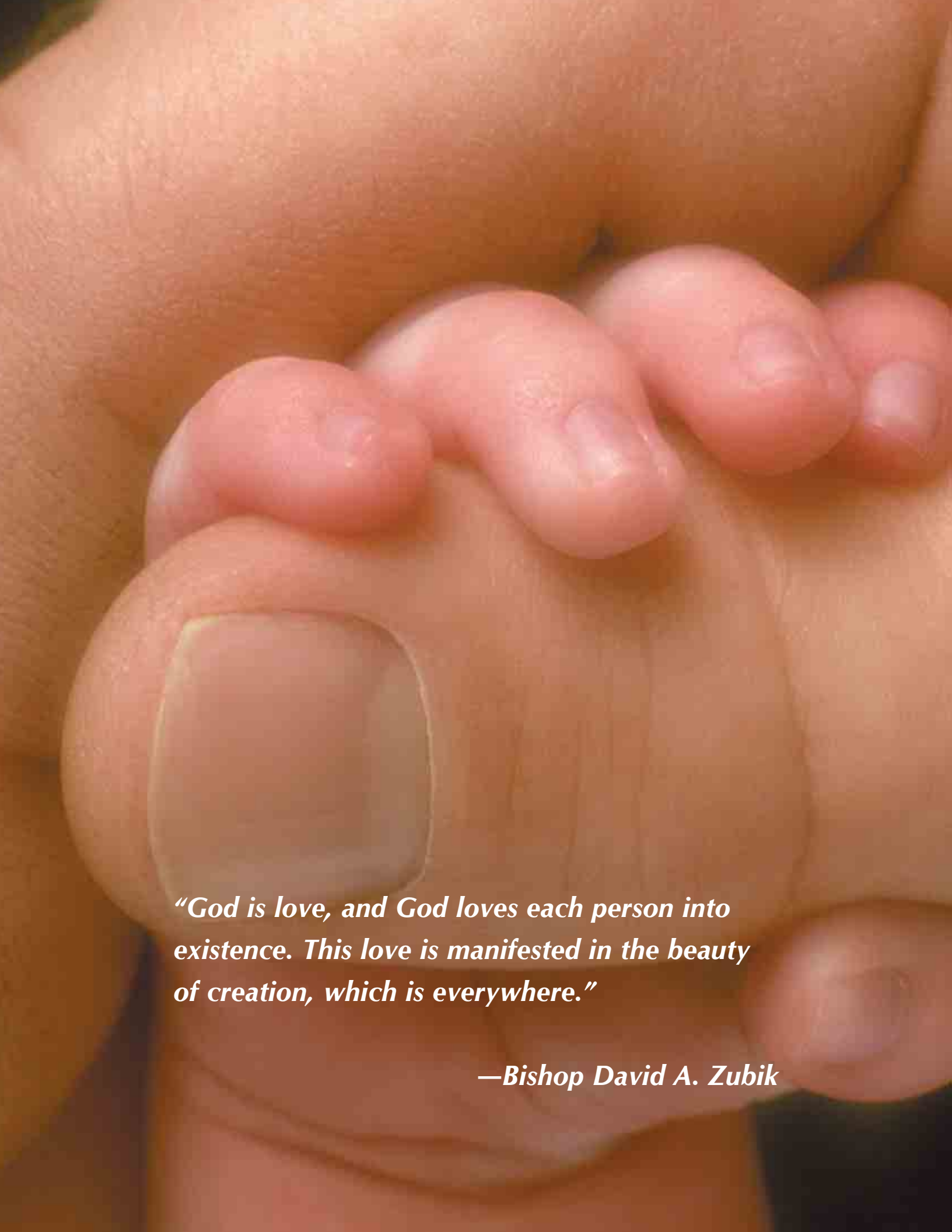


The Church Living!



**A PASTORAL LETTER
TO THE CHURCH OF PITTSBURGH**
Most Reverend David A. Zubik, M.S. Ed., D.D.
Bishop of Pittsburgh



“God is love, and God loves each person into existence. This love is manifested in the beauty of creation, which is everywhere.”

—Bishop David A. Zubik



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1. *The Church Living!* Most assuredly the Church is living and especially so in standing up for the Gospel of Life! And why is this proclamation so important to the Church? As the Body of Christ, the Church is to reflect clearly the mind and the heart of Jesus: “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10). And the message of Jesus truly is the fulfillment of the message of the Father through Gabriel to Mary: “You shall conceive and bear a Son and give Him the name Jesus” (Luke 1:31).

2. Since becoming your shepherd now two years ago, I have written you two pastoral letters.

3. The first, *The Church Alive*, was meant to be a reflection of who we are as the Body of Christ and how we come to be believers alive in the faith through the Eucharist (the Holy Mass); catechesis (studying to know what is important in our faith tradition); evangelization (sharing the faith with others); formation (the delicate but essential task of putting belief into action); and stewardship (using the many gifts God has given us as servants of others in the example of Christ).

4. In my second pastoral letter, *The Church Sharing*, you and I had the chance to ground the contemporary world financial crisis on the foundation of

Jesus’ life and teaching, invitation and expectation, that we truly be servants to each other, selfless stewards of our possessions, and sisters and brothers to each other in the name of and with the heart of Jesus Himself.

5. In this, my third pastoral letter to you, the faithful of the Church of Pittsburgh—to my brother deacons, priests and bishops; to the wonderful laity, married and single; and to the cherished women and men in consecrated life—I address a topic so sacred it comes from the hands and the heart of God. At the same time, it is so undervalued, misunderstood and abused in the world in which we live. It is the gift of LIFE itself.

6. From the Chair of Peter in Rome, the pulpits in every church in Pittsburgh, God’s very act of creation, and the procreative love of wife and husband, we learn of the sacred blessing of human life. Human life is a blessing from the first moment of conception to the last breath of natural death. Whether it is admitted or not, the desire for life is as rich and as real as every breath you and I take. So many experiences, exceptional and common, confirm this truth.

7. On Friday, September 14, 2001, a few minutes before noon, I was working at my desk in the Diocesan Pastoral Center in Pittsburgh. Sister

Margaret Hannan, my co-worker at that time in administration of the diocese, came into my office and turned my attention to Third Avenue, five stories below. The street was jammed with people—thousands of people—who wanted to get into noon Mass at Saint Mary of Mercy Church but couldn't. The church, too, was jammed with people. The events of the previous Tuesday—the infamous 9-11—continued to bring people to their knees. I quickly grabbed my trusty Bible, went down to the crowd, and began an impromptu prayer service for people hungering and thirsting for God at a time when so much life was threatened and so much hope was lost.

8. Since that day, I've pondered much why it is that only after extraordinary tragedies and inexplicable events many come to a greater need for God and a deeper appreciation of life and living itself, rather than having a consistent embrace of life each day.

9. The Catholic Church in its official teaching proclaiming the Gospel of Life is often falsely portrayed as setting up roadblocks to human activity rather than shedding light on the human condition. One author insulted the Church, calling her "Dr. No" as she shares her moral beliefs. Obviously, there is great misunderstanding about the Gospel of Life. Clearly, there is a need to see the Church through the lens of who the Church really is—the Body of Christ as *The Church Living!* "I am the Resurrection and the Life," says the Lord (John 11:25).

10. In order for the Church to teach clearly and accurately, the Church must recognize and embrace her sacred duty as *The Church Living* both to all its members and to the world-at-large. As Pope John Paul II wrote in his encyclical by the same name: "The Gospel of Life is not for believers alone. It is for everyone. The issue of life and its defense and promotion is not a concern of Christians alone" (#101). How important it is to start at the beginning.

11. God is love, and God loves each person into existence. This love is manifested in the beauty of creation, which is everywhere. This love is given shape and form in the history of the Jewish people, God calling them as "His own," freeing them from slavery, promising them a land on which to live in freedom, and bringing Himself to them in an unending covenant. God gave His people the Ten

Commandments as a blueprint for building a moral and joy-filled relationship with Himself and with all peoples. God wanted them to see that their life—that the life of all persons on earth—is sacred.

12. In Jesus Christ, the fullness of God's love is revealed. The love that Jesus pours out in His ministry, and in the giving of His very life on the cross, flows from the intimate union of love with His Father. It is the same love the Holy Spirit pours out upon the Church. *The Church Living* is a sign of the powerful dimension of love within every human heart—love that wants and needs to connect with God and the world. The Church, which Pope John Paul II called "an expert in humanity," proclaims a vision of the world in which people may live in peace, freedom and truth.

13. The *Compendium of Social Doctrine of the Church* summarized this starting point for the Gospel of Life:

On the one hand, God is seen as the *origin of what exists*, as the presence that guarantees to men and women organized in a society the basic conditions of life, placing at their disposal the goods that are necessary. On the other hand, he appears as the *measure of what should be*, as the presence that challenges human action—both at the personal and at the social levels—regarding the use of those very goods in relation to other people (#20).

14. I am reminded of a very poignant story of a "head hunter" who had to work very hard just to make ends meet for his wife and children. Now, he was not an ordinary corporate head hunter. He worked for a service organization whose goal it was to find a suitable place in the world for young women and men who grew up impoverished. In meeting this challenge, he often had to travel over a tri-state area to offer his services. On one such trip via train, he happened to be sitting next to a woman who was famously wealthy. He asked her, "What is it like to go into a store knowing you can buy anything you want?" She replied, "Oh, you get used to it." She then asked him a similar question: "What is it like to go into a store knowing you can't buy everything you want?" He likewise answered, "Oh, you get used to it!"

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15. He expressed the wish that they could trade places with each other for just one day.

16. The rich woman then talked about her life: “Millions of dollars, yes; two bitter divorces that left me hurt and bitter, yes; never knowing who was your friend, yes; never knowing who cared about you as a person or who was there because they wanted some of your money, yes.”

17. The man then shared something of his life: “What it was like working in the ghettos with young people hungry for opportunity, yes; helping them get into college and vocational schools, yes; helping them to get their lives moving, yes; what it was like to pray with my family, yes; to have children who ran to greet me when I got home from a trip, yes; to be loved as a daddy and a hubby, yes.”

18. When he finished, the rich woman said that she would give everything she had to be in the head hunter’s shoes. They both fell silent! It was clear to both which one of them was truly rich.

19. God has brought us into existence, invites us to reflect on His gift of life and respond in a manner that reflects His loving actions.

20. The giftedness of God’s creation is expressed in a particular way in the who and the what of the human person. Woman and man are created in the image of God, with priceless dignity and worth that can never be taken away. Woman and man are created by God and in relation to Him and to one another. Woman and man are social in nature, reflective of the Holy Trinity—God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. God created woman and man with freedom, with intelligence, with self-awareness, to seek the truth, beauty and goodness that are the ultimate destiny of God’s creation. Woman and man

are challenged to work together in solidarity with one another according to God’s plan and in God’s ordering of society.

21. This positive and joyful vision of humanity comes from God Himself, the Creator of all. As we reflect on God’s gift of all life, and especially human life, we begin to see the endless challenge of promoting, protecting and sharing that great gift.

22. It is important to understand that this vision of the human person comes from God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is this vision, moral at its core, which directs our actions and behaviors toward all that is right and good. At the same time, this vision of humanity is to be seen in the natural law, using human reason to understand its core. The revelation of God’s gift of life leads us toward the ultimate good—the destination of God’s Kingdom in heaven and of life eternal. Each life is intended by God to be lived as the ticket to heaven.

23. As a first grade student back in 1955, I learned this truth in a much simpler manner from my teacher, dear

Sister Estelle, and the *Baltimore Catechism*. “Who made you?” To which we learned the singularly profound answer: “God made me!” This was followed by Sister’s and the *Catechism*’s next question: “Why did God make you?” to which she taught us: “To know, love and serve God in this life so that I can be with Him forever in the next.”

24. From this answer comes the absolute truth that God is love and that He has created all existence out of His love. Through His word, the Holy Bible, God teaches us that the human person is not only a creature of God. Each woman and man is created “in the image of God.” This is what distinguishes the human person from all other creatures. Every human being



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has dignity as a person, like the Holy Trinity; every human being is capable of knowing self, like the Holy Trinity; every human being has the ability to give freely of self, like the Holy Trinity; and every human being can enter into communion with other persons, like the Holy Trinity. God places human beings at the summit of all creation. In the words of God Himself, we all are “the apple of His eye” (Deuteronomy 32:10). In turn, human beings are stewards of all that God has made, not to destroy or damage, not to hoard or waste, but to treat and share in a manner which reflects God’s given goodness.

25. This inherent dignity of life is integral to each human being from the first moment of conception until the last breath of natural death. It cannot be removed by law or edict. Even the reality of sin, which manifests itself in every human person, does not diminish human dignity and worth. Remember Jesus’ story from Luke’s Gospel about the prodigal son—he was loved without measure by the father!

26. Human dignity is both personal and social. Each and every person is a creature of God and thereby lives in relation to all other persons. This social aspect of each human person is also inherent in our own being and needs to be respected, not ignored. Human beings seek their fulfillment to do the will of God when they live in and build up the world as the Kingdom of God, based on the virtues of justice, respect and freedom.

27. With this foundation of our creation by God in love, it is incumbent on us to identify, to name threats to human life in our world today, to call it as it is. Only by appreciating the inestimable value of each and every person can we understand the evil of these threats, and summon the willpower to address and overcome them. “The roots of the contradiction

between the solemn affirmation of human rights and their tragic denial in practice lies in the notion of freedom which exalts the isolated individual in an absolute way, and gives no place to solidarity, to openness to others and service of them” writes Pope John Paul II in *The Gospel of Life* (#19).

28. Prime among threats are those which take innocent human lives. These include *abortion*, which is the deliberate killing of a human being before birth; *euthanasia*, which is the putting to death of those who are sick, disabled or dying; *genocide*, killing off an entire group of people; *murder*, willingly snuffing out another’s life; *cloning*, using science to replicate life; the *destruction of human embryos*, for medical research where the end can never justify the means; unjust killing in wars; capital punishment. Other threats include economic inequality; prejudice and bigotry; human trafficking; prostitution and pornography; and a litany of other insults to and assaults on the absolute value of human life and the inestimable dignity of the human person.

29. Several years ago, when I was the Bishop of Green Bay, I celebrated the Mass of the Lord’s Supper on Holy Thursday in the local prison. As part of that sacred day, I observed Jesus’ washing the feet of His disciples by washing the feet of twelve prisoners. I learned from the warden directly before the Mass that each prisoner was in fact convicted of murder. As I washed and kissed each prisoner’s foot, as I looked at their faces—each of them, all of them—had tears streaming down their cheeks. That day, if never before, some of them came to know the absolute value of human life, especially their own, and the inestimable dignity of the human person, particularly their own.



As Pope John Paul II wrote:
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 believers alone. It is for everyone.
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 and promotion is not a concern of
 Christians alone.”

30. How much our society has been introduced to the opposite, the disregard for human life and the very limited view of the human person. Our American society has felt the destructive effects of legalized abortion for almost four decades and, in certain states, the effects of legalized physician-assisted suicide as well. It is not just the sheer volume of lives destroyed, more than 40 million over these last four decades. It is also the damaging effect on human consciences. If public policy permits the killing of innocent human life in the womb, what else, or who else, will the law permit citizens to destroy? Physician-assisted suicide, though done in smaller numbers, especially weakens the moral fabric of society by allowing members of a profession whose vocation is healing to put to death lives they are entrusted to save.

31. *The Church Living* has adopted the language of human rights to indicate in a detailed manner how human dignity and the worth of each life must be preserved. One of the most comprehensive lists of human rights in the Church's teaching is given in Blessed Pope John XXIII's encyclical, *Pacem in Terris* (#11-27). The first right presented in this list is the right to life, from conception to natural death. The right to life is the condition for the exercise of all other rights. In this regard, acts of abortion and euthanasia are always wrong and must be condemned in the strongest terms.

32. But the Church doesn't stop there. The right to life leads to understanding many other rights which promote full human growth and development, not only for this world but for the life hereafter. Paramount among these is the right to religious freedom. This asserts that people are to be free from coercion—from individuals, social groups, or governments—so that no one is forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs.

33. As to *The Church Living*, it is the responsibility of each of us to use our voices to speak out against abortion, euthanasia and all of the aforementioned realities that betray God the Creator and fracture the order and purpose of His creation.

34. During his 2008 visit to the United States, our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, addressed this challenge as he was welcomed on the South Lawn of the White House:

Freedom is not only a gift, but also a summons to personal responsibility. Americans know this from experience. The preservation of freedom calls for the cultivation of virtue, self-discipline, sacrifice for the common good and a sense of responsibility for the less fortunate. It demands the courage to engage in civic life and to bring one's deepest beliefs and values to reasoned public debate. In a word, freedom is ever new.

35. Likewise, in his second encyclical, *Spe Salvi*, Pope Benedict makes the similar point when he writes, "Freedom is a challenge held out to each generation and it must constantly be won over for the cause of good" (#24).

36. Pope John Paul II makes the same point in his encyclical *Centesimus Annus* when he writes, "In a world without truth, freedom loses its foundation, and a democracy without values can lose its very soul" (#46).

37. The Vatican Council Fathers, in their document *Gaudium et Spes*, also make the point that the Church is convinced "that faith sheds new light on all things and that the Gospel reveals the noble vocation and sublime destiny of every man and woman" (#10).

38. In addition, human rights provide a framework to fulfill the most basic needs for human beings to live and grow. The USCCB 2007 document, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, groups these public policy issues under four categories: human life, family life, social justice and global solidarity. These issues include (but are not limited to) working to avoid war and promote peace, opposition to the death penalty, support for marriage as a lifelong commitment between one man and one woman, jobs for all who can work with a living family wage, affordable and accessible health care as a fundamental human right, and addressing the scandal of worldwide poverty and underdevelopment.

39. No one Christian, no one citizen, can address all of these issues. Yet the entire Church community, *The Church Living*, is concerned when any threat to human life is promoted or practiced in our country or anywhere else in the world. My brother bishops, speaking as a body, stated, "Defending human life,

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building peace, combating poverty and despair, and protecting freedom and human rights are not only moral imperatives—they are wise national priorities that will make our nation and world safer” (*Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, #88).

40. Believing in all of these profound truths, where do we go from here? As your bishop, I have tried in this pastoral letter to teach what the Church has always taught: God has created the world and us in love; we have responsibility for this gift of life using wise stewardship; human sin has led to direct attacks on human life, preeminently through abortion and euthanasia; all of us are called to support the right to life and all human rights which lead to full human flourishing. We are called to be *The Church Living!*

41. But it is not enough that I teach, whether through this pastoral letter or in my regular *Pittsburgh Catholic* column “Bridging the Gap,” or from the pulpit. You and I together are called to be stories of the pro-life movement in action and as *The Church Living!* Each and every Catholic has the responsibility of educating his or her self in this very important teaching of our faith. Each and every Catholic can gladly share support for life teachings over the kitchen table, across neighborhood fences, in the workplace, in friendly conversations and most especially in frequent personal and communal prayer. Each and every Catholic has to put The Gospel of Life into practice in his or her own life.

42. *Priests and deacons* have the responsibility of proclaiming the Gospel of life in their preaching and teaching. Moreover, they likewise encourage support for parish Respect Life and Social Justice committees, Catholic charitable organizations, and ecumenical and interfaith social concern efforts.

43. *Parents and grandparents* need to find age-appropriate ways of communicating God’s creation of the world in goodness, the value and worth of every human being, the reality and sadness of human sinfulness and the redemptive power of Christ’s life.

44. *All adults* have the lifelong responsibility to form their consciences, embracing truth and goodness, deepening their understanding of the Church’s teachings and fostering a spirituality rooted in the Eucharist and a love that knows how to sacrifice.

45. *Catechists* are to be trained, knowledgeable and effective in their ministry with students, presenting the message of Christ’s love and salvation as the Church intends.

46. *Young people* need to make use of the grace of the sacraments, healthy friendships, and Church social groups to live chaste, loving lives. They need to resist our culture’s pressure to hedonism, selfish individualism and rampant relativism. By reflecting on their baptism and confirmation, they have the opportunity to do volunteer acts of service, and consider undertaking careers in which they put into practice the *Church Living!*

47. *Public officials* must avoid the sad and morally bankrupt positions that prevent the protection of human life. Rather, they must support the dignity of all persons, whatever their age, race, gender, stage of development, or citizenship status. Whether in the legislative, executive or judicial branch of government, public officials who wish to honor their identity as Catholics are called to live by the same Church teachings as the rest of the faithful, and work for the defense of human life and protection of the weak and vulnerable.

48. In all of these instances and more, I wish to emphasize the promotion of a culture of life, The Gospel of Life, and the role of everyone in the



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Church—clergy, religious and laity—as *The Church Living!*

49. Sometimes there is the mistaken impression that the protection of unborn life and full human dignity or lack thereof is limited only to the law. Certainly the 1973 Supreme Court decisions *Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Bolton*, and the legal permission they gave to kill human life in the womb, are crimes against humanity. Legalized abortion is a horrible blotch on American history, equal to, if not greater than, the horrific legal protection of slavery in the past. We can only work harder, speak louder and pray more fervently that these decisions will be reversed and legal protection restored to human life at all stages, before **and** after birth. But that is only the first step.

50. Much more is needed than simply legal protection against abortion and euthanasia. All Catholics, and all persons of good will, must promote a full and complete vision of the human person with its personal and social dimensions. This means:

- building a culture of life by eradicating bigotry and hatred on every level of human interaction;
- building a culture of life by lessening poverty and the conditions that lead to it;
- building a culture of life by recognizing those who have sacrificed their very lives in the service of others;
- building a culture of life by appreciating all the stages of life, most especially that of the senior population;
- building a culture of life by working to fashion an economy where all people have the necessities of human life and care and where racism, sexism and ageism are no longer tolerated;
- building a culture of life by backing away from steps that lead to unnecessary and unjust war;
- building a culture of life by refusing to endorse state-sponsored capital punishment as an answer to violent crime;
- building a culture of life by respecting the sacredness of all vocations—the single life, the consecrated life, the ordained life and especially the timeless institution of traditional marriage between one woman and one man;
- building a culture of life by emphasizing that marriage is not only a commitment between husband and wife, but a covenant with God

that means so much more than merely living together;

- building a culture of life by understanding the sacredness of human sexuality and rejecting the exploitation of pornography in all its insidious forms;
- building a culture of life by recognizing that strong families are central to a strong society;
- building a culture of life by treasuring religious freedom as a basic right;
- building a culture of life by respecting the natural process of dying;
- building a culture of life by recognizing the value of lives lived for others—such as volunteers, generous benefactors, teachers and the unsung faithful witness of married couples and parents;
- building a culture of life by strengthening the care of persons who have disabilities and need our support, and learning from the giftedness of life itself;
- building a culture of life by working against the insidious schemes that promote human trafficking;
- building a culture of life that decries the sexualization of the young through near promiscuous entertainment, and against the exultation of violence, especially in video games and other media;
- building a culture of life that rejects the hedonistic practice of polyamorous relationships;
- building a culture of life by using mass communication and the storytelling arts to articulate the values of the natural moral law and our Judeo-Christian heritage;
- building a culture of life that reverses a buy-in to artificial contraception and sterilization;
- building a culture of life by offering reconciliation and healing to women and men who have participated in abortions, and have come to understand and seek God’s mercy and forgiveness for the tragedy of their acts.

51. The Church’s promotion of the Gospel of Life also can be a starting point for cooperation and dialogue with sisters and brothers in other Christian churches, members of the Jewish and Muslim faiths, and all people of good will. Pope Benedict makes this point ever so powerfully and effectively in his latest encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate*:

Fruitful dialogue ... constitutes the most appropriate framework for promoting fraternal collaboration between believers and non-believers in their shared commitment to working for justice and the peace of the human family. ... For believers, the world derives neither from blind chance nor from strict necessity, but from God's plan. This is what gives rise to the duty of believers to unite their efforts with those of all men and women of good will, with the followers of other religions and with non-believers, so that this world of ours may effectively correspond to the divine plan: living as a family under the Creator's watchful eye (#57).

52. Such dialogue, done with civility and public respect, promotes a "social charity" which can lift up the universal need to defend the dignity of all persons, promote peace, and struggle against the miseries of our world.

53. The responsibility to carry out these very lofty goals lies especially with the entire Church, *The Church Living!* The Gospel of Life is a rich and wonderful vision of human beings, created in love by God, scarred by sin but redeemed by Christ. The Gospel of Life is also a call to put into action its principles and values. The bishops of the Catholic Church, as successors of the apostles and in communion with the Holy Father, the Bishop of Rome, continue to proclaim the Gospel of Life and Catholic social moral teaching in its fullness. This pastoral letter is but one expression of that teaching.



Mary, the Mother of Jesus Christ and Mother of the Church, said "yes" at the Annunciation to the plan of God's love that she bear in her body the world's Savior, through the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit.

54. But words on a page need persons to make real the truth of this good news. This is *The Church Living!* Here is where we all as Church come to the fore. The Gospel of Life must permeate the building, organization and functioning of every aspect of society. By means of their work in the world, the lay faithful express their baptismal vocation to holiness. The work of the laity in the world is the place where God desires good to happen and where this work continues. By means of preaching, teaching and example, the clergy exemplify the truth of the Gospel of Life as well. The entire Church needs and depends upon the clergy and the laity alike to stand up for and live the Gospel of Life.

55. *The Church Living* proclaims, advances and defends the Gospel of Life in the education of children and adults; in the world of work; in the judicial, executive and legislative branches of government; in military and public safety; in national and international agencies promoting justice and charity; in healing professions; in research and the arts; and most especially in the family. In all these social situations, and many more, all the faithful—married, single, consecrated and ordained—have the obligation to defend human life.

56. In my first pastoral letter, I urged the Church of Pittsburgh to be alive in our faith in Jesus Christ. In this pastoral letter, I likewise challenge all the faithful, all members and communities in the Church, to promote in countless creative ways the defense of human life and the building up of a civilization of love.

57. Let me conclude by turning to two dear patrons of the Gospel of Life.

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58. Saint Joseph is that just man, worker of wood and stone, Guardian of the life of the Redeemer of the world and loving teacher of the young Jesus. He is the just and humble husband of Mary, full of love for her who was called to be the Mother of the Savior. He, too, is also the patron of all workers and the Church Universal. He is central to *The Church Living!*

59. Mary, the Mother of Jesus Christ and Mother of the Church, said “yes” at the Annunciation to the plan of God’s love that she bear in her body the world’s Savior, through the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit. The cover of this pastoral letter makes vivid that life-giving moment. She was wife, mother, widow and attentive listener to the Word of God. In her song of joy to the living God, the *Magnificat*, she praises the One “who casts down the mighty from their thrones and raises up the lowly, fills the hungry with good things and sends the rich away empty, scatters the proud and shows mercy to those who fear Him” (cf. Luke 1:50-53). Mary is, in fact, the most liberated of all persons. Free of all sin and self-centeredness, she protects all who defend human life

and is a model of self-sacrificing love. She is central to *The Church Living!*

60. May these patrons, Joseph and Mary, guard and direct all our actions to live in our time the Gospel of Life as we, like them, seek to be *The Church Living!*

61. Yes, Joseph, the Patron of the Church, and Mary, the Mother of the Church, invite you and me to be as are they, *The Church Living!*

62. Grateful for our belief that “Nothing is Impossible with God,” I am

Your brother in Christ,

Most Reverend David A. Zubik
Bishop of Pittsburgh

October 17, 2009
Saint Ignatius of Antioch, Bishop and Martyr
Respect Life Month

Questions for Discussion

1. “Whether it is admitted or not, the desire for life is as rich and as real as every breath you and I take,” Bishop Zubik writes. “So many experiences, exceptional and common, confirm this truth” (6). How have your own experiences confirmed the value of life?
2. The story about the encounter between a man and a wealthy woman (14-18) provides important insights about what makes someone truly “rich.” How has God enriched you?
3. “As we reflect on God’s gift of all life, and especially human life, we begin to see the endless challenge of promoting, protecting and sharing that great gift,” the bishop writes (21). What are the challenges that you face in promoting, protecting and sharing life?
4. The bishop compares the Holy Trinity to human life: “Every human being has dignity as a person, like the Holy Trinity; every human being is capable of knowing self, like the Holy Trinity; every human being has the ability to give freely of self, like the Holy Trinity; and every human being can enter into communion with other persons, like the Holy Trinity” (24). Does this comparison invite you to think differently about yourself and your relationship with God? How?
5. “Each and every person is a creature of God and thereby lives in relation to all other persons,” the bishop writes. “This social aspect of each human person is also inherent in our own being and needs to be respected, not ignored” (26). How can we respect the personal and social aspects of the human person?
6. How does the Church’s emphasis on both the right to life and the right to human flourishing help us to respond to the threats to life today?
7. “The preservation of freedom calls for the cultivation of virtue, self-discipline, sacrifice for the common good and a sense of responsibility for the less fortunate,” writes Pope Benedict XVI. “It demands the courage to engage in civic life and to bring one’s deepest beliefs and values to reasoned public debate” (34). How can we be more courageous in the defense of life—in regard to abortion and euthanasia and everywhere the dignity of the human person is threatened?
8. “Each and every Catholic has the responsibility of educating his or her self in this very important teaching of our faith,” the bishop writes (41). How can you educate yourself and form your conscience regarding the Church’s social teaching?
9. How can you—whether you are a priest, deacon or religious, a parent or grandparent, an adult Catholic, or a young person—put the Gospel of Life into practice?
10. “I ... challenge all the faithful, all members and communities in the Church, to promote in countless creative ways the defense of human life and the building up of a civilization of love,” Bishop Zubik writes (56). What are creative ways that you, your parish and your community can help to build a civilization of love?