



DIOCESE OF RALEIGH

Office of the Bishop

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

On October 7th, the Catholic Church throughout our country observes Respect Life Sunday. The theme for this year is taken from the Gospel of Luke: “*The Infant in My Womb Leaped for Joy*” (Luke 1:44). This remembrance of the encounter between the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Elizabeth celebrates how all human life, through the wonder of the Incarnation, stirs with the dignity of the Lord. So we must also *leap for joy* when we come into the presence of Jesus and his most precious gift, the gift of human life.

Sadly, that is not always the case. Well over *one million* children are aborted each year. This figure demonstrates that too many people forget an eternal truth: *only God is the Lord of all life; only He begins it and only He ends it!* How important it is, then, for us to continue the thirty-five year tradition in our Church of pausing on the first Sunday in October to mark our belief in the sacredness of every human life, from the moment of conception to natural death.

As followers of Jesus Christ, the Source of Life, we must be vigilant in our efforts to eradicate abortion. We cannot despair, and we must never lose heart. Most especially, we must pray fervently and daily for the end of abortion. May I ask that as an individual or as a family you pray the rosary on October 7 for this special intention? Our prayer must also lead to action. In word and in deed, we must boldly defend the unborn, the most vulnerable and defenseless. We must write to our legislators; we must make our voice heard in peaceful ways and use public opportunities such as the Raleigh March for Life (January 12, 2008) and the Annual March for Life in Washington, DC (January 22, 2008) to show our solidarity with our brothers and sisters committed to the protection of human life.

In addition to our work on behalf of the unborn, our respect for life must also be demonstrated in the deep concern we show for the terminally ill, the disabled and those considered outside the boundaries of legal protection. To choose life also means a rejection of violence and physical and emotional abuse, the omission of any form of prejudice and racism and the letting go of any hatred and bitterness within our hearts. Perhaps on this Respect Life Sunday, you may be mindful of a need to abandon a destructive behavior that fails to honor your body as a temple of the Holy Spirit or you may need to reconcile a relationship or situation that is in need of healing. In doing so, you begin to know the infinite forgiveness of the Lord, perfected when you receive His grace in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Always remember, there is no sin greater than His mercy and love.

An essential teaching given to us in 2004 by Pope John Paul II, and recently reaffirmed by the Holy See under Pope Benedict XVI, states that “the intrinsic value and personal dignity of every human being do not change, no matter what the concrete circumstances of his or her life.” On this Respect Life Sunday, we rededicate ourselves to the task of defending that dignity, especially on behalf of those who cannot protect themselves. Through the intercession of Mary Mother of the Church, may all people join together to celebrate, to revere and to respect the most precious gift of human life! When this hope and prayer are fulfilled, we will find every reason to *leap for joy!*

Most Reverend Michael F. Burbidge
Bishop of Raleigh