

October is annually observed as Respect Life Month in Catholic Churches across our nation. This provides a wonderful opportunity for catechists to teach children and youth the truth about the dignity of the human person. Human life is under constant attack in our culture today; from the moment of conception to natural death. Life is threatened because we no longer understand what it means to be human, and what our humanity calls forth from us in our responsibility to care for other persons. John Paul II in his encyclical the Gospel of Life (*Evangelium Vitae*, EV) tells us that “For the Christian, it is an absolute imperative to respect, love and promote the life of every brother and sister, in accordance with the requirements of God’s bountiful love in Jesus Christ.” n. 77

RESPECT

Respect is the acknowledgement that all human persons are made in the image of God. It is important that children learn at an early age to recognize that they are a human person because they possess a God-given dignity. This can be done by emphasizing their Heavenly Father’s love for them. “See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are... Beloved, we are God’s children now.” (1 John 3:16)

“In every child which is born and in every person who lives or dies we see the image of God’s glory. We celebrate this glory in every human being, a sign of the living God, an icon of Jesus Christ.” (EV 84) Respect obligates us to revere and honor not only others, but ourselves as well. Young children can learn to respect themselves by how they: treat their bodies; what they watch on T.V. or DVD; what games they play; what time they take to pray and thank God for His gifts to them; how they respect their parents.

LOVE

Older children can be taught ways in which our dignity as human persons calls us to love others. Here love is not an emotion but a call to action. Our attitude should be to care for another as a person for whom God has made us responsible. This care for another “cannot tolerate bias and discrimination, for human life is sacred and inviolable at every stage and in every situation, it is an indivisible good. We need to ‘show care’ for all life and for the life of everyone.” (EV 87) Children in grades 4-6 can be introduced to issues such as abortion and euthanasia as violations of our human dignity. They can be shown ways to care for the elderly, take part in prayer for an end to abortion, lend help to a neighbor in need or help at a food pantry in the community. These are just a few examples of caring for our neighbor.

PROMOTE

Students in junior and senior high school need to be engaged in the life issues of our day. In order to build a culture of life, we must be actively pro-life and contribute “to the renewal of society through the promotion of the common good. It is impossible to further the common good without acknowledging and defending the right to life, upon which all the other inalienable rights of individuals are founded and from which they develop.” (EV 101) A catechesis on basic moral and life principles found in the Catechism of the Catholic Church 2258—2317 give students a foundation for promoting the culture of life in their daily living.