

**Welcome and Protect Life**

**August 5, 2016**

**By Deirdre A. McQuade**

On the eve of World Youth Day 2016 in Poland, Pope Francis gave a [beautiful address](#) urging leaders to support the family, the “primary and fundamental cell of society.” Specifically, he urged them to welcome and protect human life in all its stages: “Life must always be welcomed and protected. These two things go together—welcome and protection, from conception to natural death.”

The Holy Father said that responsibility for vulnerable families is shared in a particular way by the institutions of the State, the Church, and society:

All of us are called to respect life and care for it. On the other hand, it is the responsibility of the State, the Church and society to accompany and concretely help all those who find themselves in serious difficulty, so that a child will never be seen as a burden but as a gift, and those who are most vulnerable and poor will not be abandoned.

In “[Living the Gospel of Life](#),” the U.S. bishops issued a similar “welcome and protect” challenge to ordinary citizens and high-powered leaders alike. Written in 1998, its insights remain fresh and relevant today.

All too often in debates, people pit the defense of innocent, defenseless lives in opposition to work promoting the dignity of other vulnerable persons throughout the lifespan. From a Catholic perspective, these issues need not be in competition, but they must be held in proper relation to each other for promotion of the common good. Our bishops proposed the beautiful image of the human person as the “living house of God,” and taught that the right to life is the foundation on which that house stands, with all other human dignity issues serving as the house’s much-needed protective walls and crossbeams.

“Opposition to abortion and euthanasia does not excuse indifference to those who suffer from poverty, violence and injustice.... Catholics should eagerly involve themselves as advocates for the weak and marginalized in all these areas,” they taught. The bishops then explain:

If we understand the human person as the ‘temple of the Holy Spirit’—the living house of God—then these latter issues fall logically into place as the crossbeams and walls of that house. *All direct attacks on innocent human life, such as abortion and euthanasia, strike at the house’s foundation.* These directly and immediately violate the human person’s most fundamental right—the right to life. Neglect of these issues is the equivalent of building our house on sand. Such attacks cannot help but lull the social conscience in ways ultimately destructive of other human rights ([Living the Gospel of Life](#), 22).

So the bishops’ challenge gives us a constructive model for thinking about vital social and political concerns. Before voting this coming November, consider reading the [entire statement](#) along with the more recent “[Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship](#) (2015)” to enrich your conversations with friends, family members, and colleagues on these critical issues.

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