



THE DIOCESE OF ROCKVILLE CENTRE  
**Office of Human Life,  
Family and Bioethics**



March 2021

**Highlights of this letter:**

- ❖ The Annunciation
- ❖ News in our Office
- ❖ New Threats to Human Life and Dignity

Dear Friends for Life,

As we approach the Feast of the Annunciation on Thursday, March 25 this year, I am reminded ever more strongly of the secret treasure in surrendering to God's Will. *Fiat mihi*. **Our Lady is the perfect model for us in her consummate trust, joy, and readiness to allow God's greatness to be fulfilled through her cooperation.** And as we mark a full year, our second Lent, in the throes of the pandemic, amidst so much public health uncertainty, cultural confusion, and social conflict, that example is even more necessary as we strive to live a moral life. In these last few weeks of Lent, consider reading Bishop Barres' pastoral letter, *Evangelium Vitae: The Gospel of Life for Today*,<sup>1</sup> to meditate on Mary's role as the Mother of the Incarnate Word, in our lives and our salvation, as well as to understand the threats to human life and dignity with our responsibility to combat the culture of death.



## NEWS IN OUR OFFICE

In the next few weeks there are exciting things happening in our Office! We will be launching a **new website** ([www.drvcclife.org](http://www.drvcclife.org)), we will be promoting the **Roe v. Wade** movie with a 35% discount through our Office between April 5 and April 19, and through a collaboration with the Gianna Center and founders of the Students for Life chapter at Stony Brook University, we will be promoting a three-part **Women's Health webinar series** in April. You can read more about these upcoming events in this March Newsletter.

## THREATS TO THE DIGNITY AND SANCTITY OF HUMAN LIFE

Since our last newsletter, several legislative actions have been proposed or have taken place. I think it is valuable to explain their impact on life issues because it is not always obvious in their illusory titles.

- **The American Rescue Plan Act.** This is the latest COVID relief package, signed into law on March 11. Unlike previous COVID relief packages, this one excluded application of the Hyde Amendment which prohibits federal funds (taxpayers dollars) from paying for abortions.

<sup>1</sup> [Evangelium Vitae Pastoral Letter – by Bishop John O. Barres](#)

The USCCB stated: “...it is unconscionable that Congress has passed the bill without critical protections needed to ensure that billions of taxpayer dollars are used for life-affirming health care and not for abortion.” You can read more here: [Statement of USCCB President and Bishop Chairmen in Response to Passage of the American Rescue Plan Act | USCCB](#)

- **Equality Act.** In late February, the House of Representatives passed the Equality Act which expands the 1964 Civil Rights Act to include LGBTQ identity as a protected class and adds more places of business under which this Act would apply. **Effectively it denies the inseparability of biological sex from the social context of gender orientation and, in doing so, endorses that one can identify as a gender (a social and cultural construct) different from his or her biological sex (a biological fact encoded in his or her DNA) at the expense of others’ freedoms and rights—most especially of the faithful. Although some opposition is expected in the Senate, President Biden has emphasized his full support of this legislation.**<sup>2</sup>

The USCCB has expressed concern in a letter addressed to both the Senate and House of Representatives.<sup>3</sup> To summarize, as Catholics we believe that human dignity demands that everyone be treated with respect and compassion, but this legislation discriminates against people of faith who uphold traditional Christian beliefs on marriage and sexuality. Faith-based organizations (churches, foster agencies, etc.) and individuals would be required to violate their beliefs or to restrict activities to a virtually meaningless level, healthcare workers who refuse to do abortions or support gender transitions would lose recourse to conscientious objection, and women are directly threatened: first, in allowing biological males who identify as women to share private spaces (e.g. locker room and bathroom facilities) with biological females—which compromises their safety and privacy; and second, in allowing these biological males to compete against biological women in sports—which sets up an automatic disadvantage for the latter group. You can read more here: [Letter to Congress on Equality Act Feb 23 2021 \(usccb.org\)](#)

- **The Equal Rights Amendment (ERA).** The ERA was proposed in 1972 as a constitutional amendment to prohibit discrimination between men and women. The amendment process requires that two-thirds of each house of Congress pass the proposed amendment which then must be ratified by three-quarters of the states. Although the ERA was passed by both houses of Congress in 1972, it was not ratified by the requisite number of states (38) before the deadline for ratification (and despite an extension to the deadline). However, in 2017 there was renewed interest in the ERA by abortion rights activists and, in 2020, Virginia became the 38<sup>th</sup> state to ratify the amendment. Now, some argue that the 1979 deadline for ratification is not valid and that the amendment should be adopted, while others argue the deadline expired and therefore the process must be restarted from the very beginning.

In an attempt to circumvent this deadline, the House is expected (imminently) to vote on and pass H.J./ Res. 17 which aims to repeal the ERA deadline, allowing the amendment to be added to the Constitution any time three quarters of states have ratified the amendment—and since this was technically accomplished last year (albeit over five decades!), the ERA could become part of our Constitution.<sup>4</sup> To be clear, they are not voting on the ERA itself (because it is unlikely it would garner the same support in Congress as it did in 1972), but rather, they

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<sup>2</sup> [Statement by President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. on the Introduction of the Equality Act in Congress | The White House](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Letter to Congress on Equality Act Feb 23 2021 \(usccb.org\)](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Equal Rights Amendment: Biden taking hands off approach on DOJ barrier \(usatoday.com\)](#)

This would likely be challenged in court, especially since some states which ratified years ago have since withdrawn.

are voting to dismiss the deadline for states to ratify it—so that, with this scheme, something which was “dead” a long time ago could be revived.

While we support fair and equal treatment of men and women in the workplace and freedom from exploitation of any kind, the ERA poses great concerns regarding abortion funding, conscience protections and even threats to some government programs designed to assist women. **Indeed, advocates for abortion insist the ERA is necessary to protect the “right” to abortion. Regardless, there will be challenges, so we need to understand what the amendment is, what it could do, and how it may come to be so that we can oppose what its proponents promise.** <sup>5</sup>

You can oppose the resolution here: [Action Center \(votervoice.net\)](https://www.votervoice.net/action-center)

- **Marijuana legalization.** The New York State legislature is looking seriously at the legalization of recreational marijuana. The normalization of marijuana usage is of particular concern for children because it may affect brain development and can be the gateway to more powerful drugs and deviant behavior which can have fatal consequences. When we already face an opioid epidemic, this is very unwise legislation.<sup>6</sup> Please oppose it here: [Recreational Marijuana | New York State Catholic Conference \(nyscatholic.org\)](https://www.nyscatholic.org/recreational-marijuana)

## LENTEN OPPORTUNITIES CONTINUE

With a few more days left in Lent, please consider an hour of witness with **40 Days for Life (40DFL)**, participating in **The International Gift of Life Walk** on March 25 and/or scheduling a meeting with your State Senator or Assemblyperson to discuss opposition to the pending **Assisted Suicide legislation**, please let us know if you need assistance in preparing or if you would like support at the meeting. We are here to help you.

In closing, let us not forget to invoke the example of the Blessed Virgin Mary as we continue our Lenten journey and the trials of daily life. Pray the Rosary daily to meditate on the life of Christ Who died on the Cross so that we might share eternal life with Him! As we think about ways to celebrate the upcoming Easter season, perhaps consider Marian consecration or, in this year of St. Joseph, consecration to St. Joseph as they will help us on the way to a holy life.

Finally, we, in the Office of Human Life, Family and Bioethics, continue to pray for all of you and for our mission that this work will lead to eternal life with God the Creator of all. ***We wish you a most holy Easter.*** Let us always pray without ceasing!

Sincerely in Christ,

Lisa A. Honkanen, M.D.

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<sup>5</sup> [Department of Education \(usccb.org\)](https://www.usccb.org)

<sup>6</sup> [Recreational Marijuana | New York State Catholic Conference \(nyscatholic.org\)](https://www.nyscatholic.org/recreational-marijuana)