



THE DIOCESE OF ROCKVILLE CENTRE

Office of Human Life, Family and Bioethics



September 2020

Dear Friends for Life,

It has been a busy month to say the least: continued re-openings, political conventions, release of Bishop Barres' newest pastoral letter, *Evangelium Vitae: The Gospel of Life for Today*, etc.

There is one item in particular, though, that has troubled me a great deal. "It is above my paygrade" was the response of the very educated Sister Simone Campbell, in a Catholic News Agency interview when she was asked if her organization, Network Lobby, opposes the legal protection of abortion.¹ In other words, she was affirming her comments from an interview four years earlier when she declared "I don't think it's a good policy to outlaw abortion."² Is the intrinsic evil of abortion above anyone's paygrade?

Granted, the question posed was slightly more nuanced, but even then, is the legitimacy of the legalization of abortion above anyone's paygrade? Just a few thoughts:

- The medical science tells us that a new human life begins at fertilization and we can witness its beautiful unfolding with the technology available to us:

Human development begins at fertilization, when a male gamete or sperm (spermatozoon) unites with a female gamete or oocyte (ovum) to form a single cell...the beginning of each of us as a unique individual.³ (italics in original)

- Scripture tells us human life begins in secret, before human eyes can see it:

You formed my inmost being; you knit me in my mother's womb.

I praise you, because I am wonderfully made; wonderful are your works! My very self you know.

My bones are not hidden from you, When I was being made in secret, fashioned in the depths of the earth.

Your eyes saw me unformed; in your book all are written down; my days were shaped, before one came to be. (New American Bible, Psalms 139:13-16)

¹ Kevin Jones, "Legal abortion 'above my pay grade,' says religious sister who will pray at DNC." Catholic News Agency, Denver Newsroom, Aug 20, 2020. <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/legal-abortion-above-my-pay-grade-says-sr-simone-campbell-before-prayers-at-democratic-national-convention-27998> (accessed Sept. 18, 2020)

² *ibid.*

³ Keith L. Moore, *The Developing Human: Clinically Oriented Embryology*, 7th edition. (Philadelphia, PA: Saunders, 2003), 16.

- Our Faith teaches us that every human life, even in its earliest embryonic form, is worthy of all the respect owed the human person:

The human being is to be respected and treated as a person from the moment of conception; and therefore from that same moment his rights as a person must be recognized, among which in the first place is the inviolable right of every innocent human being to life.⁴

- Our social experience highlights that abortion is the most egregious social injustice against the innocent and defenseless. Gianna Jessen who survived a saline abortion says:

If abortion is merely about women's rights, then what were mine?⁵

Pope Francis concludes, "Abortion is not a religious problem in the sense that just because I am Catholic I must not seek an abortion. It is a human problem. It is a problem of eliminating a human life. Period."⁶

Often Pope Francis' words from *Gaudete et Exsultate* are selectively misquoted by omitting the recognition of the unborn and focusing only on the latter sentence (both quoted here): "Our defense of the innocent unborn, for example, needs to be clear, firm and passionate, for at stake is the dignity of a human life, which is always sacred and demands love for each person, regardless of his or her stage of development. Equally sacred, however, are the lives of the poor, those already born, the destitute, the abandoned and the underprivileged, the vulnerable infirm and elderly exposed to covert euthanasia, the victims of human trafficking, new forms of slavery, and every form of rejection."⁷

While all human life is equally sacred, the USCCB recognizes that **"The threat of abortion remains our preeminent priority because it directly attacks life itself, because it takes place within the sanctuary of the family, and because of the number of lives destroyed."**⁸ Pope St. John Paul II noted, **"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."**⁹

⁴ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction on Respect for Human Life *Donum vitae* (February 22, 1987) Part I, §1. https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19870222_respect-for-human-life_en.html.

⁵ Melanie Arter, "Abortion Survivor: 'If Abortion Is Merely About Women's Rights, Then What Were Mine?'" CNS News, Sept. 23, 2016. <https://www.cnsnews.com/news/article/melanie-hunter/abortion-survivor-if-abortion-merely-about-womens-rights-then-what-were> (accessed Sept. 18, 2020)

⁶ Vatican News, "Pope interview addresses violence against women and more." Vatican News, May 28, 2019. <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2019-05/pope-francis-interview-televisa-women-sexual-abuse-migrants.html> (accessed Sept. 18, 2020)

⁷ Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation On the Call to Holiness in Today's World *Gaudete Exsultate* (March 19, 2018) §101. http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20180319_gaudete-et-exsultate.html#_ftnref84

⁸ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship" digital edition 2020. p. 6. <https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/faithful-citizenship/forming-consciences-for-faithful-citizenship-introductory-letter> (accessed Sept. 18, 2020)

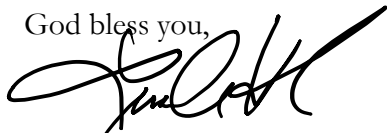
⁹ John Paul II, Encyclical on The Gospel of Life *Evangelium vitae* (March 25, 1995) §101. http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae.html

Therefore, we must not waiver in our defense of the unborn – in our daily witness, in our prayers, and in our preparation for the very important civic duty of voting. There are so many wonderful ways to prepare, but foremost is prayer.

- Bishop Barres' newest Pastoral Letter, "**Evangelium Vitae: The Gospel of Life for Today**" is an excellent resource for *living* the Gospel of Life, including the importance of building a culture of life with a political system that respects the dignity and inviolability of all human life. You can read it here:
<https://www.evangeliumvitaepastoralletter.com/>
- **40 Days For Life** campaigns are beginning in Hempstead, West Islip and unofficially in Smithtown. Your *presence* is powerful. Please *sign up* for an hour here:
www.40daysforlife.com/Hempstead
www.40daysforlife.com/westislip
- **Stand Up For Life** on October 4 is another excellent opportunity for witness. You can find more information here:
<http://www.prolifeli.org/index.php/events>
- Check out the latest installment of "**Teachable Tuesdays**" with Victoria Hamilton on our website, www.respectlife.drvc.org
- Read about our new bioethics initiative and the National Catholic Bioethics Center seminar in this newsletter and the October issue of The Long Island Catholic.
- Remember **October 4, 2020 is Respect Life Sunday**. Please give generously to support the work of the Office of Human Life, Family and Bioethics and your parish ministry so that together, we may build a civilization of love and life.
- Please see the rest of this newsletter and refer to our website, www.respectlife.drvc.org for more information and updates to events for October, Respect Life Month.

Finally, in the words of the beautifully humble, Sister Deirdre Byrne, "While what I have to say may be difficult for some to hear, I am saying it because I am not just pro-life, **I am pro-eternal life. I want all of us to end up in heaven together someday.**" Period.

God bless you,



Lisa A. Honkanen, M.D.