



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



November 2020

Dear Friends for Life,

Every day, every moment, we should be thankful: “In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus.” (New American Bible, 1 Thessalonians 5:18) The month of November, though, brings occasion to more formally (and perhaps more deeply) consider the myriad of blessings bestowed upon us.

It goes without saying that I am profoundly grateful for my Catholic Faith, for my dear family, and for the material blessings that make my life comfortable. These are among the visible things I see and appreciate every day. But, over the last couple of years, there are numerous actions protective of human life that have been undertaken by the current presidential administration which may have gone unnoticed in day-to-day life—yet their significant impact on building a civilization of life and love should not be taken for granted.

This is a short list of those items for which I am thankful in the progress made towards promoting a culture of life:

Restoration of the Mexico City Policy in 2017.¹ The Mexico City Policy prohibits U.S. dollars from financing international organizations that promote abortion. Although it has become a “political football,” it clearly broadcasts the approach regarding life issues that any new administration will take in the coming years. It is a good sign when it is reinstated.

Introduction of the Protecting Life in Global Health Assistance Program in 2017. This new initiative (announced with the reinstatement of the Mexico City Policy) heralded a new conviction for defending life by providing almost nine billion dollars to global organizations (non-governmental organizations, or NGOs) that do not promote abortion as a method of family planning.² Last month, the U.S. Agency for International Development reinforced efforts to ensure compliance and addressed loopholes and other ways of evading these abortion-related restrictions.³

Formation of the Conscience and Religious Freedom Division in the Office of Civil Rights in 2018.⁴ With this, conscience protections for health care professionals, faith-

¹ Presidential Memorandum Regarding the Mexico City Policy. 82 Fed. Reg. 8495 (Jan. 23, 2017) <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2017/01/25/2017-01843/the-mexico-city-policy>

² Protecting Life in Global Health Assistance. Content last reviewed February 2018. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, Rockville, MD. (accessed Nov. 23, 2020) <https://www.ahrq.gov/funding/grant-mgmt/globalhealth.html>

³ Stefano Gennarini, BREAKING: ‘Trump to Enforce Compliance on Abortion Overseas,’ *Center for Family & Human Rights*, New York. October 30, 2020. Accessed Nov. 23, 202 https://c-fam.org/friday_fax/breaking-trump-to-enforce-compliance-on-abortion-overseas/

⁴ United States Department of Health and Human Services. “HHS Announces New Conscience and Religious Freedom Division.” *HHS News Release*, January 18, 2018. <https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2018/01/18/hhs-ocr-announces-new-conscience-and-religious-freedom-division.html>

based health care institutions, researchers, and patients expanded tremendously. New regulations implemented 25 provisions that included tools and enforcement mechanisms to ensure no one is forced to act against his or her conscience in activities such as abortion, sterilization and assisted suicide (2018).⁵

Implementation of new regulations that allowed exemptions based on moral/religious objection to the “HHS contraceptive mandate” in 2019.⁶ As you probably recall, under “Obamacare,” entities like the Little Sisters of the Poor were required to provide employee health insurance plans that covered contraceptives and abortifacients—despite these organizations’ strong, long held moral and/or religious convictions against the use of these agents. Eventually, the case of the Little Sisters of the Poor went to the Supreme Court; the regulation was upheld—in favor of the Sisters (2020).⁷

Reversal of Title X family planning regulations in 2019. “Title X” refers to a federal grant program whose focus is on family planning and related services for low income patients. This Title X Rule clarifies and reinforces that funding through this program was never intended to support abortion as a family planning method. In addition, the Title X Rule encourages parental communication in adolescent family planning services, protects women and children from abuse, trafficking and other victimization and seeks innovative ways to meet local needs and culture. In this, programs that were previously denied consideration for these grants because they did not include abortion referrals (e.g. life-affirming pregnancy care centers) have become eligible to apply for these funds.⁸ Of note, as a consequence of these regulations, Planned Parenthood withdrew from the Title X program forgoing \$60 million dollars of financial aid.⁹

Condemnation of terrorism and religious persecution. In 2018, the State Department introduced the International Religious Freedom Fund and the Genocide Recovery and Persecution Response Initiative which assists victims of ethnic and religious discrimination groups across the globe—defending their religious liberty and their human dignity.¹⁰ Subsequently, sanctions have been issued against the Burmese, Russian and Chinese governments for the violation of human rights.

⁵United States Department of Health and Human Services. “Factsheet Final Conscience Regulation” *HHS* (May 2, 2019) <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/final-conscience-rule-factsheet.pdf>

⁶ Exec. Order No. 13,798, 82 FR 21675 (2017-09574)

<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2017/05/09/2017-09574/promoting-free-speech-and-religious-liberty>

⁷ Little Sisters of the Poor Saints Peter and Paul Home v. Pennsylvania, et al., 591 U.S. __ (2020)

https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/19pdf/19-431_5i36.pdf

⁸ United States Department of Health and Human Services. “HHS Releases Final Title X Rule Detailing Family Planning Grant Program.” *HHS News Release*. February 22, 2019 <https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2019/02/22/hhs-releases-final-title-x-rule-detailing-family-planning-grant-program.html>

United States Department of Health and Human Services. “HHS -Fact Sheet: Final Title X Rule Detailing Family Planning Grant Program.” *HHS News Release*. February 22, 2019 <https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2019/02/22/fact-sheet-final-title-x-rule-detailing-family-planning-grant-program.html>

⁹ The CNA Daily News, “Planned Parenthood to pull out of Title X program.” *Catholic World Report*. August 16, 2019 <https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2019/08/16/planned-parenthood-to-pull-out-of-title-x-program/>

¹⁰ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor “International Religious Freedom Fund Fact Sheet.” *Office of International Religious Freedom*. July 27, 2018. <https://www.state.gov/remarks-and-releases-bureau-of-democracy-human-rights-and-labor/international-religious-freedom-fund/>

US AID from the American People. “Genocide Recovery and Persecution Response.” USAID.gov. (accessed November 23, 2020) <https://www.usaid.gov/iraq/genocide-recovery-and-persecution-response>

Limitations on fetal tissue research. We know the sacrifice of nascent human life for therapeutic purposes violates the dignity of the human person and is not morally permissible.¹¹ In 2019, Health and Human Services halted internal research using aborted fetal tissue and declared that all external research (funded through the National Institute of Health grants) would be subject to more rigorous ethics review.¹² Under this scrutiny, only one of fourteen proposals were recommended for funding because of ethical concerns.¹³ Of note, Fr. Tad Pacholczyk of the National Catholic Bioethics Center, a highly respected expert in the field and whose work is featured in *A Bit of Bioethics* this month, is a member of this board.

Advocacy for the Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act and the Born-alive Abortion Survivors Protection Act.¹⁴ Unfortunately, neither bill was passed by Congress. However, in response to this inaction, an executive order was issued this past September which not only clarified and reinforced existing laws to protect vulnerable children but also, in particular, stressed protections for babies surviving abortion.¹⁵

Strengthening our foster care and adoption system. In particular, an executive order this year put forth many enhancements to the current system of foster care and adoption programs, which included restoring partnerships with faith-based organizations that had been closed for upholding the Christian viewpoint on marriage and parenting.¹⁶

Opposition to the Equality Act. If passed, the Equality Act would expand “LGBTQ” rights at the direct expense of women and people of faith. In particular, biological males would be allowed to compete with female athletes over whom they have a natural but unfair advantage, conscience protections would be jeopardized for people of faith, and employers of religious schools would be required to hire those espousing views that contradict the employers’ moral convictions.¹⁷ It should be duly noted that all people should be treated with respect and recognized to have equal rights that flow from their dignity as human persons, however the biological (and complementary) difference between male and female sex (which is scientifically indisputable) cannot be separated from gender (that is, the

¹¹ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction on Certain Bioethical Questions *Dignitas personae* (September 8, 2008) §30. https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20081208_dignitas-personae_en.html;

¹² United States Department of Health and Human Services. “Statement from the Department of Health and Human Services.” *HHS News Release*. June 5, 2019. <https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2019/06/05/statement-from-the-department-of-health-and-human-services.html>

¹³ National Institutes of Health Office of Science Policy. “Report of the Human Fetal Tissue Research Ethics Advisory Board FY2020.” *NIH 2020*. https://osp.od.nih.gov/wp-content/uploads/HFT_EAB_FY2020_Report_08182020.pdf

¹⁴ Executive Office of the President Office of Management and Budget Statement of Administration Policy S-3275 – Pain Capable Unborn Child Protection Act and S.311 Born-Alive Abortion Survivors Protection Act. February 25, 2020 retrieved from https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/SAP_S-3275-and-S-311.pdf

¹⁵ Exec. Order No. 13,952, 85 Fed. Reg. 62187 (2020-21960) <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2020/10/02/2020-21960/protecting-vulnerable-newborn-and-infant-children>

¹⁶ Exec. Order No. 13,930, 85 Fed. Reg. 38741 (2020-14077) <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/president-donald-j-trump-taking-action-strengthen-americas-child-welfare-system-improve-outcomes-children-families/>

¹⁷ Anne Hendershott, “For Joe Biden, Trans People are More Equal Than Others,” *Crisis Magazine* July 31, 2020. <https://www.crisismagazine.com/2020/for-joe-biden-trans-people-are-more-equal-than-others>

social/cultural perception of one's genetic endowment), most especially when doing so undermines the equal rights of others.¹⁸

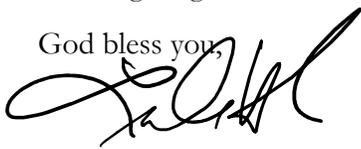
Efforts related to the Coronavirus Pandemic. In addition to orchestrating a nationwide effort to mobilize scientific and medical experts, health care personnel, medical equipment, hospital resources, and testing collaborations, etc. from the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in order to save lives directly, there were other life-affirming actions undertaken during this unprecedented time. This response included: working with states to remove practices that discriminated against those with disabilities (which violate their human dignity and indeed in some cases, threaten the lives of the disabled),¹⁹ denying large abortion providers (e.g. Planned Parenthood) financial protection through the CARES Act which has provided economic relief during the pandemic²⁰ and Operation Warp Speed that was designed to develop and distribute a safe and effective vaccine against SARS-CoV-2 with unprecedented speed.²¹

I could continue the list with Supreme Court appointments of constitutional originalists, appointing administrative advisors who hold life-affirming views, attending the March for Life to deliver a speech in person (something no other president has done), etc. Of course, there is no perfect Administration—but extraordinary efforts over the last four years to defend the inviolability and dignity of human life, emphasize the importance of family as the “sanctuary of life,” uphold traditional marriage and protect the right of religious liberty and the exercise of conscience in these areas are definitely goods for which I am very grateful. I pray these are blessings all Americans will continue to enjoy over the next four years—regardless of the final determination of the presidential election. They are tremendous strides which no one should take lightly, and, as St. Paul exhorts, we are called to “retain what is good.” (1 Thess. 5:21)

In this month of the Holy Souls, let us continue to pray for each other and most especially the Poor Souls in Purgatory who are infinitely grateful for our prayers and on whom we can depend for intercession as well.

We in the Office of Human Life, Family and Bioethics wish all of you and your families a Happy Thanksgiving!

God bless you,



Lisa A. Honkanen, M.D.

**“Give thanks to the Lord, who is good,
whose mercy endures forever” (Daniel 3:89)**

¹⁸ *Catechism of the Catholic Church with modifications from the Editio Typica*, 2nd edition Washington, D.C.: USCCB Publishing, 369, 1934-1935.

¹⁹ United States Health and Human Services Office for Civil Rights in Action. “Bulletin: Civil Rights, HIPAA, and the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)” *HHS Bulletin*. March 28, 2020 <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ocr-bulletin-3-28-20.pdf>

²⁰ Mark Moore, “SBA tells Planned Parenthood to return \$80M in stimulus funds,” *New York Post* May 20, 2020. <https://nypost.com/2020/05/20/sba-tells-planned-parenthood-to-return-80m-from-stimulus/>

²¹ United States Health and Human Services. “Fact Sheet: Explaining Operation Warp Speed.” HHS.gov. last updated November 20, 2020. <https://www.hhs.gov/coronavirus/explaining-operation-warp-speed/index.html>