



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



December 2020

Dear Friends for Life,

The tiny, vulnerable Baby in the manger is a beautiful Christmas image that reminds us of God's endless goodness and His immense love for us despite our undeserving reality. He, the King of kings, humbled Himself to become Man of flesh, in the most unassuming way—a tiny, vulnerable baby born in a stable more fitting for beasts of burden. But in this way, we can dare to approach Him—not as a distant, uncaring Power—but as a gentle, loving Creator, Who, thirty-three years later, would die sinless on the Cross so that we might live in His eternal glory.



When we look at the mystery of the Nativity without faith, the seeming contradictions can be perplexing. Likewise, this year, when loss and hardship abound, without faith, it is difficult to see beyond our sorrow and fears. But, **“The angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Messiah and Lord.’”** (New American Bible, Luke 2:10-11) What was true then, is true now: the good news of great joy is that God is with us, to save us, but also to be with us in every step, every breath we take—always!

If we are humble, prayerful, and open to God's graces, we can be enlightened by His infinite goodness, even when times are dark. What doesn't make sense in appearance, what the world tells us is without value, what seems irredeemably weak can be turned inside out to manifest its truth, treasure and strength—but only in faith, when we trust God's plan. For example, in this month's newsletter you can read about Nicholas whose parents chose to ignore the worldly message that promised to take all hope from them. Nicholas has defied every one of those worldly “promises” with an unconquerable joy and love—an example by which we all could live more closely.

At the same time, through faith, we are not overtaken by the darkness of the last year, but rather made stronger. In many ways, the pricelessness of life seems more appreciated than ever. We know with greater tenderness how much our relationships matter, the importance of family, and our need for community, most especially that of parish life and the Sacraments. Indeed, even the exploitation of nascent life in the laboratory (despite intentions to bring about good, e.g. in the production of vaccines) has been exposed in a new light not previously seen. This recognition is important because I hope it will bring us to defend all human life with a renewed tenacity. We must especially champion the lives of those not yet born—after all,

abortion, unthinkably considered an essential service during the height of the COVID-19 shutdowns, remains the preeminent human rights issue of our time.

Every January since 1973, by participating in the annual **March for Life**, we remember the fateful day that Roe vs. Wade changed this country. To accommodate COVID-19 related restrictions this year, we will not be marching in Washington, D.C. on Friday, January 29, 2021, but that does not mean we will be sidelined. Please visit our microsite to see how you can participate in a local or virtual event including Masses, Adoration, Rosaries, opportunities for witness, youth-oriented activities, etc.: www.DRVCMarchforLife.com. If you would like to host an event, please let us know that, too! Come back often as details are updated frequently.

In addition, new materials on the **COVID-19 vaccine** will be available through our website and vaccine microsite. We realize this is a difficult subject with many facets of concern. Regarding moral issues related to vaccines (and anything else for that matter): it is a reality that we live in a fallen world and it is virtually impossible to avoid *any* connection with the sinful acts of *others*. Ultimately, it is our absolute duty to avoid the direct commission of evil ourselves. But sometimes, evil committed by someone else might be tolerated (lacking any intention) in order to avoid something far worse or to avoid losing something far better. This should never be taken lightly. **It does not imply approval, consent or compromise**, but it does accept with reluctance the reality of living in a fallen world. The very personal issue of certain vaccines falls in this category. We hope we can lend some clarity, if not consolation, to the issue. See www.RespectLife.org or www.vaccinebioethics.com and our recent newsletters which include issues from Fr. Tad Pacholczyk's *Making Sense of Bioethics* that relate to the COVID-19 vaccines.

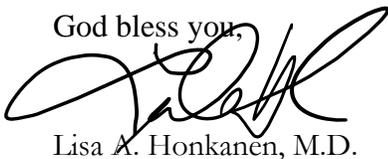
Finally, if you are not familiar with the **St. Andrew Christmas Novena**, I include this powerful prayer here. It is traditionally recited fifteen times each day from November 30 (the Feast of St. Andrew the Apostle) until Christmas:

Hail and blessed be the hour and moment in which the
Son of God was born of the most pure Virgin Mary,
at midnight, in Bethlehem, in piercing cold.
In that hour, vouchsafe, O my God! to hear my prayers
and grant my desires, through the merits of Our Savior
Jesus Christ, and of His Blessed Mother. Amen.

Stay close to Jesus in the manger! He is never far from you.

In closing, we in the Office of Human Life, Family and Bioethics wish you and your families a very Merry Christmas and a very Happy and Holy New Year. Pray always!

God bless you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lisa A. Honkanen', written over a horizontal line.

Lisa A. Honkanen, M.D.