



THE DIOCESE OF ROCKVILLE CENTRE

# Office of Human Life, Family and Bioethics



**November 2021**

## Highlights of this newsletter:

- ❖ [Thanksgiving](#)
- ❖ [Upcoming Activities](#)

Dear Friends for Life,

## THANKSGIVING

As we prepare to celebrate Thanksgiving this week, we should consider that the *very first Thanksgiving*, was not a harvest festival of the Pilgrims of Plymouth but a feast of thanksgiving by the Spanish colonists for a safe arrival in the New World. On September 8, 1565 (the Blessed Virgin's nativity), the first act of these Catholic settlers was the celebration of Mass, *the Eucharist* ("[to give thanks](#)")! Following Mass, they, too, shared a communal meal with the natives in gratitude to God for their many blessings, but it did not become a regular event.

This year, we mark the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Pilgrim's famous Thanksgiving harvest festival in 1621 which followed an arduous first year in the new land. As Puritans, this event would not have been festive in giving honor to God for the bounty they enjoyed were it not for the Native American, [Squanto](#). He had been abducted into slavery as a youth, freed by Spanish friars, and eventually was baptized into the Catholic faith. He later returned to his native land where, having cross-cultural and language skills, he acted as an intermediary to the settlers, teaching them how to survive. But, in friendship, he also influenced their first Thanksgiving with a Catholic spirituality of giving thanks with joy. These Thanksgiving festivals had more staying power, but still they were celebrated intermittently and on days that varied regionally.

It was during the Civil War, on October 3, 1863 that President Abraham Lincoln proclaimed the last Thursday in November "as a day of Thanksgiving and Praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the Heavens." Lincoln's [Thanksgiving Proclamation](#) was intended to bring some degree of unity to a nation deeply divided, with all regions of the country recognizing "the gracious gifts" of a merciful God on the same day. Seven years later, it was declared a national holiday which we will celebrate this week as a nation perhaps not much less divided, but before an immutable God infinitely munificent and merciful.

In 2021, we enjoy so many blessings afforded by a first world country (comfortable homes, bountiful food, advanced healthcare, etc.), but ironically, these days, our hard-fought freedoms, including religious liberties and freedom of conscience, seem as uncertain as survival in the harsh climate faced by the early settlers. We must not take for granted the sacrifices our forefathers made and the graces of God, by which they framed a country in which each person is seen as created equal and endowed by God with the inalienable rights to “Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness” ([Declaration of Independence](#)). As we give joyful thanks and praise to our Almighty God for His great gifts on this national holiday, let us also persevere in prayer, humility and prophetic witness to uphold these inalienable rights—for they are not assigned and manipulable by man, but rather, given freely by God, the Creator and our ultimate destiny.

## UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

On December 1, the Supreme Court hears [opening arguments](#) in [Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization](#). You don't have to go to Washington, D. C. to be a participant in this historic day: Wear blue in solidarity with all those in the prolife movement and/or join others in prayer across the country—come to the Pro Biker's for Life Prayer Rally with Fr. Fidelus at 11:00 a.m. at the Hempstead Planned Parenthood. On December 4, there is a Mass and Prayer Rally with Fr. Kline in Patchogue to pray for the Dobbs case as well. (See more details in the newsletter and website calendar).

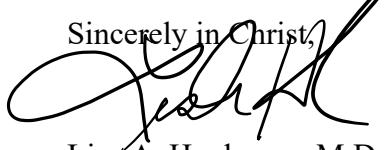
The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is preparing to [reverse regulations](#) that have allowed religious exemptions and conscience protections which were implemented during the Trump Administration. The ramifications are far-reaching, most especially for the delivery of healthcare in faith-based ministries which may be required to perform objectionable procedures or referrals, or face severe penalties and forced closures for non-compliance. You can submit a public comment [here](#) (closes December 9, 2021).

Please refer to our website for more information on the [National Night of Prayer for Life](#) (December 8-9) and plans for the upcoming [March for Life](#) (January 21, 2022) which will be marked as a local event this year.

Know that in our Office we are grateful for all God's gifts, especially those of Life, our Catholic Faith and our beloved families, but also for the opportunity to walk with you as we promote and defend the sanctity of all human life. In the example of the early settlers, might we begin this Thanksgiving Day and every day in *the Eucharist* (at Mass or in a spiritual Communion), fill the day with *joyful* gratitude and praise for His gracious gifts and mercy, and *continue to toil*, arduous as it may be sometimes, *giving Him glory* in the lives we lead—for Life is sacred and precious, and meant for Eternity in Heaven. Happy Thanksgiving and may God bless you and your families!

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

Sincerely in Christ,



Lisa A. Honkanen, M.D.