

**Witness for Life Formation Sessions for Youth**  
***On the Sanctity of Human Life***  
***Recommended for use the week of January 19-25, 2003***  
***On the occasion of the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Roe v. Wade Decision***

**Learning Outcomes:**

To increase youth awareness of the...

1. Sanctity of unborn human life
2. Cultural forces that separate the conjugal and procreative elements of sexuality and exploit sexuality
3. Perceptions and attitudes towards the dignity of all human life and justice for each individual.

**Overview and Introduction:**

War looms as a real possibility. Environmental degradation is obvious. College costs are escalating while employment opportunities are declining. Businessmen are taken away in handcuffs on charges of ripping off investors. Priests are removed from the ministry because of charges of sex abuse. Yet some people continue to spend their time talking about the problem of abortion. With all these big obvious problems, what could possibly be the point of worrying about an infinitesimal embryo?

The ways in which we look at creation, focus upon truth and assign value to our choices are crucial to problem identification and solution formation. We need to call upon our physical resources, intellectual knowledge, emotional acuity and spiritual awareness to comprehensively face challenges presented to us. When we are less than honest or draw from less than the most complete knowledge that we have on any one decision, it becomes easier to distort the truth about many things. The way in which we perceive the embryo therefore, is very much related to the ways in which we perceive the other challenges presented to us.

Our faith helps direct the paths we take when developing knowledge. It grounds us in the awareness of another's needs when emotion overwhelms us. Our faith helps to decide how we will allocate our time and talents. Do we have a framework for relying on our faith in these ways? Yes, we do.

We pray the Nicene Creed each time we attend mass. This profession of our faith restates our beliefs as Catholic Christians. A few moments of reflection on the Creed helps us to frame the questions of life and death that will confront us throughout our earthly lives, even the questions about the tiny embryo.

***Use any or all three of the following strategies to help young people reflect upon the issues surrounding our respect for life, the dignity of all humans and of our own personhood. Should you need additional support, please contact:***

- Life Issues Coordinator: Jann Armantrout – x304
- Director of Youth Ministry: Michael Theisen – x279
- AV Resource Librarian: Sr. Connie Derby – x201

## Strategy A: The Sanctity of Unborn Human Life

In the first part of the creed, we say, “*We believe in God, the Father, the Almighty maker of heaven and earth, of all that is seen and unseen.*”

### Helpful Visual Aids:

- Wonders of God’s Creation a video by Questar Inc. available at our AV Resource Library
- Images from Time Magazine, “Inside the Womb.” November 11, 2002
- From Conception to Birth: A life Unfolds by Alexander Tsiaras, Random House, Inc. 2002

### Activity: Case Study

1. Divide the large group into small groups of 4 people each and distribute newsprint and markers to each one. Present each group with a copy of the following case study. Ask the small groups to outline the various options Melissa and Ricky have (both individually and collectively) along with the pros and con’s for choosing each one.

#### Case Study:

**Melissa is a senior in high school, just accepted to a major college on a full basketball scholarship. The Summer before college begins, she discovers that she is 2 months pregnant. The father (Ricky) is a guy she’s been dating for about 3 months who is also planning on going away to school in a couple of months. What are their options and what are the pro’s and con’s to each?**

2. Invite the groups to share their options along with their pro’s and con’s and tape the newsprint summaries on the wall. After all are presented, note those that were repeated by other groups. As a large group, invite them to prioritize the list of options with the top choice being the one that most values life to the last choice being the one that least values life.
3. Use the images and information from the Time magazine article or the video, Wonders of God’s Creation, which illustrates the conception and development of a child in the womb (available from our AV video library by contacting Sr. Connie Derby at ext. 201). Especially highlight the stage of development the baby is at 2-3 months old and connect this to where “Melissa” is in her pregnancy.
4. After reviewing the images, ask the young people:
  - Does the “invisible” nature of the unborn life make it easier to justify killing that life through abortion?
  - If you knew of Melissa and Ricky’s situation, how might you support them and help them understand the developing life that is within her?
  - What questions do you still have about the issues of abortion, pro-choice, pro-life and the church’s teachings about these issues?

**Overview:**

The mystery of creation unfolds around us. Who made the big bang? How long will the sun last? Each generation makes discoveries that were unknown to those who went before them. Microscopic organisms could not be seen 200 years ago, yet some people had the vision to accept that they were real. A mere century ago, Doctor Lister had to fight to get his colleagues to wash their hands before surgery! Today, in a world of lasers, electronic microscopes and digital photography we can see the uniting of a sperm and egg. These discoveries enhance rather than diminish our awe of creation. The unique personhood of each individual begins at conception, of this we are assured by our current science and understanding of DNA. Our faith tells us that human life, in all its forms, is gift from God, not ours to be disposed of as though we were the sole creators.

**Follow-Up Questions for Youth to Reflect On:**

- If we do not accept and respect the dignity of human life from the moment of conception, then how shall we define human life?
- Should society decide that only those of a certain IQ or a particular beauty shall live?
- Can we say that the quality of dependency, e.g., a child dependent on parents or the elderly dependent on nursing care, negates rights to fair and life giving treatment?
- Must a human being function at a certain level for his or her life to be considered valuable?

**Strategy B: Sexuality, Procreative and Conjugal Love**

*We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ .... For us men and our salvation he came down from heaven.*

**Visual Aids:**

- Current Magazines & Newspapers and possible TV commercial clips

**Activity: Media Search**

1. Go through some current newspaper and magazine ads and cut out various ads that use "sex" to sell a product. If you have the ability, copy some TV commercials or MTV music videos onto tape as well.
2. Gather the group and show them one ad at a time and ask:
  - Who is this ad aimed at?
  - What's being sold?
  - Why did they choose to use the images that they did to sell this particular product?
  - What messages and values does this ad support? What values does it ignore or diminish?
3. After doing this with a few of the ads and/or video images, invite the group to talk about who is being exploited through these ads.
  - How do these images of men and women effect "real men and women" and their own expectations for who they should be, their own self-images?
  - What impact might these images and expectations have upon the relationships between males and females in our culture?

- Who is making money out of all this and who is not? Who is being “exploited”?
- How powerful are these ad symbols in our world today in defining what’s important, what’s valued and what’s meaningful?

### **Overview:**

God so knows our nature and our needs that he chose to reveal Himself through Jesus Christ, true God and true man. He gave us Himself as a touchable, walking, thinking, and feeling man for the same reason we are created; out of love and for love.

Touch, taste, smell, hear, and see. We humans need our senses to sustain and celebrate life. We continue to experience Jesus Christ’s presence in the celebration of the sacraments. As the church, we continue to experience God with our senses. The waters of new life flow over a Baptized baby, bread is blessed, broken and shared in Eucharist, oil anoints those being Confirmed, receiving Holy Orders and who are Sick.

Similarly, in Marriage, vows and rings are exchanged before God and unity in love occurs. This physical act of lovemaking is so powerful that it creates life sustaining, life long partnerships between a husband and wife and it brings forth new humans beings. This loving creating force, reflective of God’s own love and creative abilities, is the sacredness of the sexuality.

In our culture, sexual stimulation is separated from the sexual expression of marriage. Sexual stimulation is used for entertainment in song and film, to advertise commodities to buy, and sold as a solution for loneliness. Sexuality within marriage is a wonderful gift, used wrongly, it can be an emotional (heartbreak), physical (disease), intellectual (distraction) disaster. And people not yet ready to care for them, conceive children. This is a major contributing factor to abortion rates being highest among people ages 18 to 24.

### **Possible Follow-Up Questions:**

- What components make up our sexuality? Is it just limited to the biological or physical dimensions of our being like many of the ads proclaim?
- Can the pleasure and life-transmitting qualities of sexuality ever be truly separated?
- If sexuality is a wonderful gift from God that enables two people to live as one and to procreate, is it okay to use this gift with people other than your spouse?
- If a baby is conceived outside of marriage what should be done with him or her?

## **Strategy C: Culture and Life Decisions**

*We believe in the **Holy Spirit**, the Lord, **the giver of life**, who proceeds from the Father and the Son.*

**Aids:** Songs, either sung or recorded

- “Send Down the Fire” by Marty Haugen, GIA Publications 1989 Gather Hymnal # 466
- “You Are Near” by Dan Schutte, New Dawn Music 1971 Gather Hymnal # 604
- “Abundant Life”\_by Ruth Duck, GIA Publications 1992 Gather Hymnal #710

### **Activity: A Values Auction**

1. Invite the group to develop a list of 20 things that people their age would really value in life, either now or in the next 10 years. These might include things like money, beauty, a successful job, good health, excellent education and so on...As the list is brainstormed by the group, write these on newsprint and post them on the room for all to see.
2. Distribute 20 tokens to each person (these can be toothpicks, slips of paper, paper clips, etc...). Tell them that you will conduct an auction and that they can only use the amount of tokens they have to purchase any of the items on the list. Let them know that they can purchase more than one item if they have enough tokens to do so.
3. Then go down the list auctioning off each value listed, one at a time. If no one bids on a value, skip it and return to it later after completing the list.
4. Once a person is successful in purchasing an item, collect the number of tokens it cost them and write the person's name and amount by that value on the newsprint.
5. When done, review the list and discuss which values were the most highly prized by the group and which were not. Ask if this reflects society's view of life as well and why it does or does not.
6. Conclude the activity by asking which ones Jesus would have bid on and why and which he would have ignored. Do these differ from the values we hold today?

### **Overview:**

Sadly, we all know people who value things over people, who think that having something is better than being someone. This mentality can lead to people being trapped in or excluded by economic class, physical beauty or social savvy. It can lead to the attitude that a particular human life is not very important.

Individuals are sometimes confronted by choices which are either life giving to others or the personal fulfillment of the desire for things, power or prestige. Many of these choices effect born human beings, some affect children not yet born. Too frequently, when teen or college age woman becomes pregnant, abortion is encouraged.

Pride suggests an abortion because of fear that a family's reputation may be harmed. Desiring to extend the carefree days of youth that will end with the responsibility of a child may be given as a reason to abort. Interference with career or education that produce wealth and power is another reason to opt for the "choice" of abortion. *Powerful forces in our culture say that life, justice and peace are not reasons to choose in a particular direction!*

Jesus came though so that we may all have life, life in its fullest. He sends us the Holy Spirit so that we may choose life giving ways based on justice, fostering peace. The Holy Spirit lets us act in kindness with patience, faithfulness, and goodness even when our intellect tells us a problem is difficult and our emotions say something is going to be hard. The Spirit, is accessible to each of us in prayer and gives us life. The Spirit gives our community, the Church, the ability to reach out and care for one another, to forgive one another and to be light in the world even in dark hours and tough times.

### **Possible Follow-Up Questions for Reflection:**

- Pope Paul VI said “If you want peace, work for justice.” How much does our world value the ideals of peace and justice? What impact does this have upon our world today?
- How is the value of prayer incorporated in your decision making process for what to value in life?
- Do the policies and values of our government support or deny life (use examples of welfare reform, pre-emptive military strikes, legislation on cloning)?
- Many people can recall the warmth of their families’ love experienced during holidays, but cannot recall the actual presents they received. Is this an example of the value of spirit over things?
- How does abortion or the “right to choose” conflict with our Christian values?

### **Prayer of Solidarity for Life**

*To be prayed at noon on January 22 during Witness for Life Week*

Use this prayer to pray at the beginning or end of your session and distribute it to the entire parish and invite them to pray it at noon on January 22 in solidarity with other people throughout our Diocese and in Washington DC who are “Witnessing for Life”.

**Author of All Life,  
We pray for the eyes to recognize  
all creation as gift from You.  
We pray for the mind that remembers  
we are co-creators of human life with You.  
We pray for the conviction to respect  
and honor the sanctity of every life.**

**Give us a love so great  
That we recognize your Presence  
in every human being.  
Grant us the grace to care for the  
unborn and born  
and to forgive those who do not.  
Let us make decisions  
In accordance with the will of  
the Holy Spirit,  
Who continues to breathe Life  
into each one of us.  
And use us to be Your Witness to Life  
all the days of our lives.**

**Amen**

### **Prepared by:**

Jann Armantrout, Life Issues Coordinator and  
Michael Theisen, Director of Youth Ministry  
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