



## DIOCESE OF BELLEVILLE

### RESPECT LIFE MINISTRY

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### *A Labor Day Confession and Invitation*

Sunday's gospel stirred me to acknowledge that I have a confession to make. Let me explain...

Sunday night at home we watched the 1940 black and white movie "Grapes of Wrath." There is a scene, just before the displaced family sets off to cross the desert, when a couple of gas station attendants question one another about how people could live the way this family, and the many they had seen ahead of them, were living. The conclusion was that these people from Oklahoma simply must not be human to be able to live in such misery. It was clear that to the attendants there was certainly a great divide between themselves and these others.

Moving forward eight decades since John Steinbeck wrote his novel... Last month we were on our way home from vacation on an international flight that included a large number of somewhat disoriented, disheveled refugees (displaced families). A little while into the flight, the woman seated in front of us asked the flight attendant where they were all from. She dismissively answered that they could be from any number of places; that a U.S. group sponsors them to come over. She then added with a laugh, "Would you like to take one home with you, it would make a great souvenir from Europe?" My daughter and I looked at each other rather stunned at this exchange, even as the woman in front lightheartedly repeated it to her own daughter.

In contrast to the attitudes above, we are called to practice solidarity, whereby we recognize that we are one human family; we identify ourselves with the "other" rather than stand away. The human dignity we defend from conception is too often assaulted, rather than celebrated, right through to the end of life.

My regret, my confession, is that I remained silent. Oh, I was indignant about it; I used the exchange to highlight to my kids just one more example of the lack of regard for people's basic human dignity. But it didn't even occur to me, until I returned home, that during the very long flight, perhaps I could have had a private, gentle word with the attendant about the offense of her remark. The gospel Sunday concluded with, "He makes the deaf hear and the mute speak." My petition in response is, "May God have mercy on me, help me to not be deaf to cries for charity and justice, and help me not be silent with truth." My comfort and encouragement is in what directly preceded the concluding remarks: "He has done all things well." Looking around the diocese I see witness to this repeatedly, and an invitation for us to participate.

For example, in solidarity with the poor, helping all of us live up to our dignity, consider participating in the St Vincent DePaul [Friends of the Poor Walk](#). If you don't have a group to walk with, or Althoff Catholic High School in Belleville is too far, sponsor me representing Respect Life, and ALL proceeds will go to the SVdP Council you designate.

Another thought is to be informed and engaged in the issue of immigration reform. You might start with reading about [Rigo Padilla](#) (his story is summarized in the suggested text for the letter on the link) and consider sending an e-mail in support of this young man, who was brought to the U.S. as a boy, and whose story is repeated many times over by young people here in our own diocese. You can read about the Bishops' support of the "Dream Act," which would help in these kinds of circumstances, by [clicking here](#).

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Finally, many parishes have tried to remain informed about the issue of Health Care Reform which also challenges us to be neither deaf nor mute. Consistent with our faith may we have the grace to listen not for what will best serve our own personal needs, but for what is right and good. There are many areas about which we can have healthy, and hopefully fruitful, differences, with discussion/debate refining and improving reform. These are features that are left to prudential judgment that can be guided by clearly stated principles such as: including access for all with a particular concern for the poor; pursuit of the common good while preserving pluralism; and restraining and equitably applying costs.

While these features of reform may arguably be achieved through different means, and therefore lend themselves to negotiation/compromise on approaches, issues of freedom of conscience and the continuation of the current federal ban on funding for abortions need a readiness to be firm; awakening a call to not be silent. Without specifically included protections, Health Care Reform will be a vulnerable backdoor vehicle for radical elements of FOCA, opposed by millions earlier this year, including many who are "pro-choice."

Of course central to our opposition to abortion is the value we place on all human life; the inherent dignity we recognize as independent of stage or circumstance of life, and that calls us to solidarity with each other. This is not the voice of "special interest groups," rather an invitation to affirm our unity as one human family. Denial of the value of every human life, including the very youngest, puts in jeopardy the value of every other, making it dependent on a variable determined by one group potentially at the expense of another, and is a betrayal of the human family.

After a day of rest from labor, may God help us to be attentive beyond sound bites and rhetoric, to hear cries for help, to listen with faith guided discernment; and then not be afraid to be engaged, to speak, and act in defense of life: for the unborn, the sick, the poor, the stranger and the discouraged. Contact information for federal legislators can be found by [clicking here](#) (designs as 2-sided strips) or at [www.usccb.org/healthcare](http://www.usccb.org/healthcare).

United with you in prayer,

*Laurie Edwards*

***May the Catholic Diocese of Belleville be a witness to human dignity in all stages and circumstances. May we protect and defend it against all assaults, and nurture and celebrate it through all transitions and milestones. May we be quick to recognize Jesus in the poor, the weak, the vulnerable, the lonely, and the person with whom we need to be reconciled. Because of the witness of our love for one another, may people be drawn to the love of the Father. Amen.***

***May truth and love promote healing and wholeness!***

P.S. If you are reading this as a hard copy, please know it is also available on-line at [www.respectlife.catholicweb.com](http://www.respectlife.catholicweb.com), where the referenced links are active.