




Catholic Diocese of Belleville Respect Life Ministry

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Respect Life... From Conception to Natural Death... But what about all those stages in between?

This week I have a sad heart laden with images of the town where my husband and I began our married life, and where our children were born, that has been laid in ruin. The roof has been ripped from the school where the kids first learned the great fun of recess. The fine mature shade trees under which we enjoyed “pizza parties in the park” are eerie, stripped stumps in a field of misplaced debris. The neighborhood of a still missing friend has been torn to shreds; the sacred space where I was welcomed into the Catholic Church has been leveled; and my children’s elderly and almost blind adopted “Nana” is unable to stay in her home where there is neither electricity nor safe water – but rather a power line across her back porch and rain water dripping into the bathtub.

My impulse is to leave here to help, to join in the wave of generous volunteers and go to their aid. I would like to put on leather work gloves and search or clean, or help unload donations from the many arriving trucks and vans and cars, or keep vigil at a shelter keying in the names and former addresses of the guests so that others may discover that they are safe... Instead, for now, I am still here – doing what I can from the phone and the internet, and especially in prayer, after all, there is work and loved ones here too; but even as I turn towards that work, I am profoundly thankful for, and inspired by, the help pouring into Joplin, Missouri.

Returning to my desk after the weekend, there was an article about the Respect Life Office expressing concern that there is disproportionate attention given to a single issue. Taking the concern to heart, I looked over a broad sampling of communications during this past year, and indeed it is true that beginning of life issues receive greater attention (arguably significantly greater attention) than even other also importantly addressed life issues such as the death penalty; with broader issues of human dignity seemingly being footnotes in the volume of information.

But my mind drifts back to Joplin ... When resources are spread thin, when hemorrhaging is taking place, when needs are wide and varied, then it is especially important to triage or prioritize the needs, and it is also critically important that the doctors show up at the hospitals, the big equipment operators are in their positions to move collapsed roofs, the rescuers search with their dogs, and the youth volunteers help keep children comforted in the shelters and water bottles distributed to the thirsty work crews. Everyone does their part. And they are all a team, working through a disaster, moving toward the direction of rebuilding.

Respect Life isn’t that different. Respect Life is about defending the inherent dignity of every person, it is about protecting it from assault, it is about uncovering it when hidden, it is about healing it when wounded, and it is about celebrating and equipping it to flourish. And no office singularly respects life. We all do it. Poverty Services does it. Hispanic Ministry and Prison Ministry do it. St Vincent de Paul,

Catholic Social Services, Day Star, Catholic Urban Programs, and Rural Life do it. Catholic Schools and Youth Ministry do it and in the Liturgy we do it. Priests, religious, couples, singles, families ... we all help make it happen; we are a team (or, I suppose more correctly, we are one body) defending the dignity of life through the challenges of today, toward “thy Kingdom come,” for which we pray.

And just as the witness of the wellspring of goodwill toward the suffering in Joplin is inspiring and stirs within even a heavy heart a profound thankfulness, so too can our authentic witness to life, through our love and service for both the world and one another. And still more, the thankfulness once stirred can become an invitation to know the Giver of the gift of life and the true source of our thanksgiving.

Back to the article on my desk... The imbalance of the attention of the Respect Life Office in protecting nascent human life and defending and celebrating its dignity in the transmission of life, is because of the triage that is necessary in a morally confused culture that is hemorrhaging life. But it is also because the Respect Life Office recognizes, fully supports, and is profoundly grateful for the many who already selflessly support and defend the dignity of every person in “all those stages in between.”

For those vulnerable who otherwise will never have a voice and life to support and defend, Respect Life will continue to speak with particular passion. But even more, it will continue to encourage a united voice as we stand together with the message of defending life from conception to natural death, and all stages in between, because it is a message the vulnerable need voiced and the world needs to hear, while our unity they need to see. The message of the great dignity and preciousness of life gives perspective to the recurring reminders around us of the fragility of that life.

Thank all of you for your witness to life, through your prayers, support and service!

May God bless you and those you love and serve,

Lauri Edwards



Thank you too for your prayers for Joplin, and certainly other needs in our own diocese and families where there is heartbreak.



(Pictures from the Diocese of Springfield – Cape Girardeau website.)