

October 4, 2020

Dear Friends in Christ,

Every October the Church in the United States celebrates Respect Life Month, and the first Sunday of the month is observed as Respect Life Sunday. As Catholics, we are called to cherish, defend, and protect life, from the beginning to its natural end, and at every stage in between.

This year the Church celebrates the 25th anniversary of Pope John Paul II's landmark pro-life encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* (The Gospel of Life). This document passionately reaffirms the Church's teaching on the value and sacredness of every human life and inspires this year's Respect Life theme, "Live the Gospel of Life."

Gratitude and joy at the incomparable dignity of the human person impel us to bring the Gospel of Life to the hearts of all people and into every part of society. In every person we see the image of God's glory. Having received the gift of the Gospel of Life, we are a people of life and a people for life.

I join with my brother bishops in inviting parishes to take part in an important initiative called "Walking with Moms in Need: A Year of Service" to serve pregnant and parenting women who are in difficult circumstances. Well over 150,000 low-income mothers deliver their babies at Catholic hospitals each year, and tens of thousands of pregnant and parenting moms are helped each year through Catholic Charities programs and other agencies. In addition, thousands of pregnancy care and crisis centers are staffed by Catholic volunteers. This is the Gospel of Life that we live as Catholics, but we need to do a better job of connecting moms with these resources. This year will provide the foundation we need to help us accomplish those efforts. Please let your pastor know if you would like to be involved in this effort at the diocesan level.

Thank you to our parishes, schools, institutions, and individuals in the diocese for responding to the call to actively live out the Gospel of Life, especially those that make respect life efforts a priority throughout the year. I invite you to visit the diocesan website for Respect Life Month resources and to learn more about the "Walking with Moms in Need" initiative.

May our efforts be entrusted to the care of our Blessed Mother, the model for how life should be welcomed and cared for.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend David J. Walkowiak
Bishop of Grand Rapids