

**INTO THE FUTURE FOR FLORIDA'S RESPECT LIFE DIRECTORS**  
*(For use by the Diocesan Respect Life Directors within the State of Florida)*  
May 2000

*This document, written for the use of diocesan Respect Life Directors, outlines strategies (goals, objectives and proposed action) for the coming decade. The importance of this planning is intensified by a sense that the coming years will be especially challenging for the Church, particularly in her role as promoter and defender of human life and human dignity.*

**BACKGROUND**

We, Diocesan Respect Life Directors within Florida, have worked collaboratively under the encouragement of the Florida Catholic Conference since 1976. We are united in the pro-life essence of our faith but diverse in the uniqueness of each Diocese. We realize that our task is one of service to our Bishops and the Catholic community. We clearly understand that it is our Bishops who establish the direction and policies of our Offices. Our position embraces heavy responsibilities - matters of life and death - that involve providing information (even when it is not wanted!), administrating, creating programs, inspiring prayer and interacting with leaders within and outside the Church. The nature of the responsibilities sometimes requires us to be prophetic within our Dioceses. Our experiences have enabled us to realize that these challenges are part of a global struggle between the Culture of Life and the Culture of Death which are especially intense at this point in history.

**PACKAGING OUR MESSAGE**

The *NCCB Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities* focuses the energies of the Church in opposition to abortion. The *NCCB Respect Life Program* places that focus within a broader framework of the "consistent ethic," the Church's fundamental tenet that every human person has an innate and inestimable value, made in the image of God. Further, Pope John Paul II leads the way as he repeatedly proclaims every human person as the glory of God and exhorts all of us to celebrate our heritage as God's redeemed and cherished children. We have found that broadening the focus beyond opposition to abortion does not weaken our efforts on behalf of the unborn.

On the contrary, this very positive approach entrusts the pro-life cause to the heart and soul of the entire Church. We are realizing that the Church is credible in our society to the extent that she is steadfast in defending and championing truth and justice for every person, from conception to natural death and regardless of age or condition. Our critics have no hesitation to point out our inconsistencies when they occur. Communities, parishes and individuals who champion life from conception to natural death, regardless of age or condition, to the limits of their abilities and budgets, have experienced a marked drop in the rate of pregnancy outside marriage, abortion, suicide, and violence. (Governor John Engler of Michigan describes this experience in his state and cites statistics to demonstrate that this strategy is effective as government policy.)

**HOW IMPORTANT IS THE RELIGIOUS ROLE TO THE PRO-LIFE MOVEMENT?**

God is the Lord of Life. Just as surely as it is He who blesses the technologies that provide humankind with increasing abilities to manipulate nature, so also does He desire for us to use these gifts at the service of human nature, within a moral framework that carefully preserves the integrity of the person.

“The eclipse of the sense of God and of man inevitably leads to a *practical materialism*, which breeds individualism, utilitarianism and hedonism.” *Gospel of Life*, 23. This “practical materialism” is rampant throughout our world and is fueled by enormous energy and seemingly limitless funds. **We can be certain that the Church is the ultimate defender of “the sense of God and of man” and the moral conscience of the world, because her only vested interest is service to God and His human children.**

### **FACING OUR FUTURE TOGETHER**

As Diocesan Directors, we reaffirm our dedication to the mission, which seems to intensify each year. As we face the future with our Bishops, state Catholic Conference and pastors, we will need very many holy and dedicated “laborers” in their Respect Life apostolate who can be both a resource and a source of action and inspiration. This apostolate is made up of large numbers of priests and religious, but also lay people. We - Diocesan Directors - serve them. All of us together must remember that the grace for this formidable task comes from God and that grace can transform our inadequacies to His service in proclaiming the Gospel of Life.

This document provides goals, objectives and proposed action for the next decade in order to refocus, renew and increase our efforts in building the Culture of Life. We want to remember that the traditional structures and our efforts up to this time within the Church have not been sufficient. God has, however, allowed us to sustain the Church’s position. We realize that the vast majority of Catholics continue to be distracted and unaware of the cultural conflict described earlier, but they are beginning to seek more spirituality and direction. We are challenged not only to continue on course but to be pro-active. We are evangelizing at the same time that we continue the defensive mechanisms against the cultural death-tide.

This document will not recommend specific projects for diocesan activity. Rather, it will focus on goals, objectives and proposed actions in our governance as diocesan directors.

## Statewide Strategies

### GOAL NO. 1

#### OBJECTIVES

*“...our Respect Life Program, [has always been] a multi-issue approach to public morality. ...each of the life issues - while related to all the others - is distinct and calls for its own specific moral analysis... a consistent ethic of life is a contribution to the witness of the Church’s defense of the human person. Publicly, a consistent ethic fills a void in our public policy debate today. I submit that a Church standing forth on the entire range of issues which the logic of our moral vision bids us to confront will be a Church in the style of both Vatican II’s Gaudium et Spes and in the style of Pope John Paul II’s consistent witness to life. The pastoral life of the Church should not be guided by a simplistic criterion of relevance. But the capacity of faith to shed light on the concrete questions of personal and public life today is one way in which the value of the Gospel is assessed.” **Joseph Cardinal Bernardin “Consistent Ethic of Life,” 1988.***

#### Reach the Hearts and Minds of Massive Numbers of Catholics

- A. To achieve and maintain a balance of education, pastoral care (services and prayer) and public policy in our efforts. (This balance wins hearts of the uncommitted. The experience of dioceses and parishes throughout the country has demonstrated its effectiveness):
1. *Information and education* is fundamentally necessary for all of us, for the good of society, and especially for parents raising families.
  2. *Pastoral Care:* **Service ministries** in the dioceses and parishes give witness to our willingness to live the Gospel message. Our diocesan offices may not directly oversee the ministries, but we should collaborate. This is an important aspect of our Respect Life apostolate since serving the vulnerable provides support that makes choices for death unnecessary. Those involved in hands-on ministries need to have the information provided in the first effort No. 1 above.  
**Prayer** informs and forms hearts at the same time that it entreats God’s forgiveness and blessings. Without the prayers of the Church our efforts will be futile.
  3. Too often *public policy* is formed in a vacuum created by lack of information (effort No. 1) and indifference on the part of the community (effort No. 2). This third effort is dependent on No 1 and No.2 for success in achieving “person-friendly” policies.

**Proposed Action:** The state Respect Life Commission will develop a tool for assessing balance within each Diocese. This tool will enable diocesan Directors to individually and collectively oversee the development of weak areas in the balance. The tool should be ready for use at the end of one year or sooner from the date of implementing this document. The ‘diocesan balance assessment’ could be shared with our written reports currently prepared for our SPLCC meetings. Directors, in concert with their Bishops, could decide if they would like to make use of the assessment tool in future years.

**Proposed Action:** An ad hoc committee should be formed as soon as feasible to develop brief, readable and attractive (pictures!) tracts on life issues. These tracts could be produced en masse to cover the entire state and be made accessible in parishes (pamphlet racks, through all kinds of education classes, through organizations), Catholic hospitals and learning institutions. Many would provide Church teaching and cultural trends. Others could cover public policy issues. Similar leaflets could be designed within each diocese to advertise ministries and various prayer and liturgical services offered. **This action would require in-depth study, ongoing planning and funding.**

- B. To multiply and strengthen Parish Respect Life committees/groups. (Both experience and reason keep reminding us that if we want the Catholic community to understand the urgency of these matters we are going to have to reach the faithful in the parishes. (Using only one example: If we want Catholics to connect their vote for public officials with their faith values, we are going to have to connect our message to the parishes where they worship.)

**Proposed Action:** We will encourage the NCCB Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities to move forward in providing an updated Pastoral Plan. It is our hope that they will reaffirm the wisdom of the balanced effort, and call for a renewed effort in every parish, including parish committees. We will recommend that our Florida Bishops:

1. provide the updated Pastoral Plan to their pastors; and
2. emphasize for the pastors that parish Respect Life committees and a balance of the three efforts (see Objective 1a above) should be embraced in our parishes.

- C. To make better use of media, both Catholic and secular. (We can see a general improvement in the Catholic media focus on human life and dignity. Their efforts to get accurate information from the Bishops' offices [in Washington, Tallahassee and locally] are to be commended. Their increasingly frequent spotlight on the Bishops' Program will popularize the teaching office of the Bishop and develop better informed, pro-life attitudes.)

**Proposed Action:** Each Diocesan Director will examine any means of communication within the Catholic community that we may be able to better utilize (i.e. Chancery newsletters, Catholic radio and newspaper, e-mail/web connections, to find ways to improve providing information to larger audiences.

**Proposed Action:** Through the Diocesan Communications Director, Catholic media professionals should assist the diocesan Respect Life Director in communicating with the secular media, especially with news happenings.

**Proposed Action:** The Florida Catholic Conference should renew their efforts to have a liaison between the Communications and Respect Life Commissions. We believe the Communications Directors in each of the dioceses should be close collaborators with our offices. We need each other's help.

## **GOAL NO. 2**

### **OBJECTIVES**

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*“Today I believe the Lord is saying to us all: Do not hesitate, do not be afraid to engage the good fight of the faith [cf. 1 Tim 6:12]. When we preach the liberating message of Jesus Christ we are offering the words of life to the world. Our prophetic witness is an urgent and essential service not just to the Catholic Community but to the whole human family.” Pope John Paul II, 1988 Ad Limina visit to the United States.*

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#### **Enlist Great Numbers of Priests, Parishioners and Others to Action in The Diverse Activities Needed to Develop a Culture of Life.**

- A. To improve interaction with parish leaders who have educational responsibilities and enlist their assistance in actively stemming the tide of the culture of death within our society.

**Proposed Action:** The Florida Catholic Conference and Diocesan Respect Life Directors will take further steps to collaborate with Catholic educators, ministers and leaders.

This will include encouragement to:

- 1) attend the annual statewide Respect Life Conference and other educational forums within the dioceses, and to
- 2) make use of the life issue tracts mentioned in Goal No. 1, second Proposed Action.

**Proposed Action:** Encourage parish Respect Life Committees to interact and collaborate with their parish education leaders, and to share teaching and pastoral statements, alerts and other pertinent information received from their diocesan Respect Life Office.

- B. To empower large numbers of Catholic youth to live and promote the Gospel of Life.

**Proposed Action:**

- 1) Each diocese will generate at least one focus (within a conference or a separate program) on life issues for youth each year locally, with the Respect Life Director working with either the diocesan Youth Director or parish youth ministers;
- 2) Diocesan Respect Life Directors will see that the Annual Respect Life Conference will be well advertised to Catholic young people. Pastors/ youth ministers/ Catholic High Schools will be encouraged to send (register and pay for, chaperone and transport) selected youth to the Conference. The youth will be expected to join in the regular Conference presentations and in addition, a special gathering for the youth will be scheduled on Friday and Saturday evenings after the regular program is completed.
- 3) The Respect Life Directors should make every effort to collaborate with all diocesan offices that are involved in youth formation.

C. To collaborate as fully as possible with our diocesan Catholic Medical Associations.

**Proposed Action:** Set aside an extended amount of time for discussion at a SPLCC meeting with their designated leaders to pursue our common goals.

**Proposed Action:** Encourage parish Respect Life Committees to make one-on-one contacts with physicians in their parish, especially CMA members, and to utilize them as consultants or resources for parish activity and ministries.

D. To pursue further avenues of collaboration with state and diocesan Knights of Columbus, Councils of Catholic Women, and other Catholic organizations.

**Proposed Action:** Meet with leaders of these groups within each Diocese over the next year to pursue greater collaboration. A starting point in collaboration is to be put on each other's mailing list, and urge appointment of someone in the organization to be a liaison with Respect Life.

E. To increase:

- > the number and size of telephone networks for contacting legislators;
- > pregnancy support ministries; ministries and agencies to serve the frail elderly; constant prayer (in parish and otherwise) for life causes; mentoring and assisting single parents and families; bereavement; visiting the sick and vulnerable, etc;
- > seminars and workshops that empower others to speak with authority and conviction on the issues.

**Proposed Action:** Continue to do what needs to be done to accomplish the goal (we have made substantial progress). Respect Life leaders should be encouraged to delegate - and encourage other leaders to delegate - responsibilities, because this apostolate belongs to the entire Church. Collaborate even more than we already do with other diocesan or parish agents to accomplish specific identified objectives. Listen to others and prayerfully consider whether their suggestions may be helpful.

**GOAL NO. 3**  
**OBJECTIVES**

“Evangelization is a profoundly ecclesial act, which calls all the various workers of the Gospel to action, according to their individual charisms and ministry. This is also the case with the Gospel of Life, and integral part of that Gospel which is Jesus Christ himself. We are at the service of this Gospel, sustained by the awareness that we have received it as a gift and are sent to preach it to all humanity, “to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). With humility and gratitude we know that we are the people of life and for life, and this is how we present ourselves to everyone.” Pope John Paul II, Gospel of Life, Section 78.

**Ensure as much as possible that actions taken to right wrongs and to protest injustice will express love and respect for every person, including the abortionist, the pro-choice public servant, and other opponents.**

- A. To lead others, by our demeanor, to seek grace and to personify the virtue and love of Jesus Christ and His mother Mary. Respect Life leaders should always encourage appropriate behavior in every situation met, in every letter written, in every clinic vigil undertaken, and in our personal and professional lives.

**Proposed Action:** We, the Directors, can examine:

- 1) our own consciences and behaviors to identify contrary habits. We can seek God’s help to rid ourselves of these;
- 2) our own diocesan program to encourage reliance on prayer and the Sacraments; and,
- 3) any potentially troublesome situations. We will want to target these areas with our prayers and our attention.

**Proposed Action:** One SPLCC meeting should incorporate a retreat into its schedule each year if at all possible, allowing ample time for reflection and informal discussion on these matters of life and death which engage our hearts and minds so tenaciously.

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The following documents are both foundation and inspiration for these reflections:

Consistent Ethic of Life. Joseph Cardinal Bernardin, 1988

Stand Firmly on the Side of Life, Encouraging Those Who Defend It, ‘Ad limina apostolorum’: Bishops of the United States - 11, Pope John Paul II, October, 1998.

The Gospel of Life, John Paul II

Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities, US Bishops

Faithful for Life. US Bishops

Living the Gospel of Life, A Challenge for American Catholics. US Bishops

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