



Having Effective Pro-Life Discussions

This outline is available for download at www.respectlifekcsj.org



Sign-in, get drinks/snacks, and socialize

Welcome & Opening Prayer for Life

Youth Facilitator opens meeting with a “thank you” to all who have attended and a prayer and leads the meeting ensuring all members feel welcomed and are participating within their own comfort level.

Opening Prayer

Prayer to St. Michael the Archangel

St. Michael the Archangel,
defend us in battle.
Be our defense against the wickedness and snares of the Devil.
May God rebuke him, we humbly pray,
and do thou,
O Prince of the heavenly hosts,
by the power of God,
thrust into hell Satan,
and all the evil spirits,
who prowl about the world
seeking the ruin of souls. Amen

Icebreaker: “What do you mean?”

Ask participants to describe the first 5 words that come to mind as they consider each of the following situations or activities. Write the words down and refer back to them during the section later on “effective communication”.

- Standing up in a full lunchroom at school and loudly proclaiming you are, “*one proud, pro-life Catholic*”.
- Responding to a pro-choice comment made by someone on the street standing in a group of adults who are twenty years older than you.
- Starting a conversation with a total stranger who is pregnant in order to share your unsolicited personal views on the sanctity of human life.
- Interrupting a discussion that does not directly pertain to you in order to say something that you know will likely cause someone pain.
- Overhearing a classmate tell someone that he or she is leaving school in 10 minutes to take a friend to get an abortion.

Presentation – Having Effective Pro-Life Discussions

NOTE: The Powerpoint presentation is available online for download.

- ❖ The presentation file has been updated into the same PDF format as this session outline so it should be just as easy to access. If no laptop/projector is available, a printout of individual slides can also be copied/printed and used as both a presentation and as a handout for participant notes.
- ❖ The content in the slide presentation is designed to be straight-forward but also to allow flexibility.
- ❖ The comprehensive nature of the written facilitator notes below has been provided to allow for diversity among groups, for an extended and on-going education, and for later reference on the topic. **Therefore, it is possible that all the content included in the facilitator notes will *not* be covered in a single session. Please review the information below for each slide and then create a presentation that is your own based on the needs of your particular group.**
- ❖ If necessary, the Respect Life Office can answer any questions or provide guidance on any topics in the slide deck. Please contact the Respect Life Office at (816) 756-1850 or francis@diocesksj.org if you cannot access the on-line files.

Slide 1 Introduction Having Effective Pro-Life Discussions

Slide 2 Topics

- Pro-Life Communication Skills
- Building a Culture of Life
- Promoting a Gospel of Life
- Living a Witness to Life

Slide 3 Pro-Life Communication Skills

- Preparation
Remember, knowledge builds confidence...confidence builds enthusiasm...and genuine enthusiasm is what makes people want to share time with you and ultimately results in changed hearts.
- Presentation
The way we approach pro-life discussions is the single biggest factor in our effectiveness. Most people have a strong opinion regarding topics like abortion, embryonic stem cell research, capital punishment, and euthanasia but *everyone* has an opinion of what a “pro-lifer” looks like and how they act. We must understand that it is not our work, but His work, that we are doing and our goal always must be to change hearts—not to prove we are right or to win an argument or to disrespect others. This approach will ensure we put our best foot forward and that we are always worthy of our role as the face of Jesus.
- Critical Listening
“Hearing” is not “listening” and appearing to be listening is not the same as actively listening. You cannot change hearts if you do not know what deeply motivates people and you will never know why people feel the way they do, or why they say what they do, if you are more concerned about what you are going to say next.
- Non-Verbal Communication
While verbal and written communication skills are important, research has shown that nonverbal behaviors make up a large percentage of our daily interpersonal communication. People can communicate information in numerous ways; so pay attention to things like eye contact, gestures, posture, body movements, and tone of voice. All of these signals can convey important information that isn't put into words. By paying closer attention to both your own nonverbal communication and that of others, you will improve your own ability to have effective pro-life discussions.
 - SMILE! People will remember 70% of HOW you communicate and only 30% of WHAT you communicate.
 - Radiate holiness – You cannot convince others that you respect life if you do not respect them, even when you disagree with them.
- Empathy (Love)
The greatest need everyone has is to feel understood and appreciated,-- to be loved. They will give their confidence and trust and respect to the person who meets these needs. That is why it is so important to be prepared; that way you can truly listen with the confidence of knowing you have what it takes to help someone else.

Remember, just like “being pro-life” is something you *do*, not simply something you *are*; “love” is also something you *do* for someone else, not simply something you *feel* for someone else.

Slide 4 Catholic Resources

Anyone can memorize facts and statistics about abortion, contraception, embryonic stem cell research, and euthanasia. It takes a true pro-life leader to understand how this information relates to our Catholic faith. Until you can confidently use these five Catholic documents to defend your faith and the Church’s teaching on the sanctity of human life, you will struggle.

- **The Bible** -- The Bible is the divinely-inspired primary religious text of Christianity. During the three centuries following the establishment of Christianity in the 1st century, Church Fathers compiled Gospel accounts and letters of apostles into a collection of texts that became known as the New Testament. The New Testament is composed of the Gospels (“good news”), the Acts of the Apostles, the Epistles (letters), and the Book of Revelation.

The canonical composition of the Old Testament varies between Protestants, who hold that only the books of the Hebrew Bible are canonical, and Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox, who additionally consider a group of Jewish books (deuterocanonica), to be canonical. The Old and New Testaments together are commonly referred to as “The Holy Bible”.

- **Humanae Vitae** -- (Latin for “Of Human Life”) An encyclical written by Pope Paul VI and issued on 25 July 1968. Subtitled “On the Regulation of Birth”, it re-affirms the traditional teaching of the Catholic Church regarding married love, responsible parenthood, and the continuing proscription of most forms of birth control.
- **The Catechism of the Catholic Church** -- The Catechism of the Catholic Church (or CCC) is the official text of the teachings of the Catholic Church. A provisional, “reference text” was issued by Pope John Paul II on October 11, 1992 — “the 30th anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council” — with his apostolic constitution, *Fidei depositum*. The new Catechism was first published in the French language in 1994 and was then translated into many other languages.
- **Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship** -- A call to political responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States that prepares Catholics for upcoming presidential elections by reflecting on forming consciences for faithful citizenship. It poses challenging questions and offers a framework for responding to the political questions of our day.
- **Evangelium Vitae** -- (Latin for “The Gospel of Life”) is the encyclical written by Pope John Paul II which expresses the position of the Catholic Church regarding the value and inviolability of human life. The Pope issued the encyclical on March 25, 1995.

Beginning with an overview of threats to human life both past and present, the encyclical gives a brief history of the many Biblical prohibitions against killing. It then addresses specific actions in light of these passages, including abortion and euthanasia, The encyclical also condemns the use of the death penalty in the world today, since the only potentially acceptable use of the death penalty, according to John Paul II and the Magisterium, is when it would not otherwise be possible to defend society, a situation that--according to the encyclical--is rare if not non-existent today.

Evangelium Vitae then addresses social and ecological factors, stressing the importance of a society which is built around the family rather than a wish to improve efficiency, and emphasizing the duty to care for the poor and the sick. The encyclical also deals with the proper uses of sex and the implementation of knowledge on adolescent teens of these behaviors.

Slide 5 The Best Offense...

Briefly discuss what we mean by “offense” and how each of the items displayed represents this approach.

- **Project Rachel** post-abortive healing ministry
- **National Committee for Human Life Amendment** is focused on educating citizens, developing pro-life legislative networks, and offering programs in support of pro-life legislation. Among its various activities, NCHLA produces educational and program resources, communicates with leaders about legislative priorities, and presents legislative seminars throughout the year. In a special way, NCHLA assists dioceses, state Catholic conferences, and Catholic lay groups. The Committee also works closely with the Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.
- **Spiritual Adoption** program provides pro-life prayer, education and pastoral care.
- **4D (moving 3D) sonogram**
- **Fetal models**
- **Respect Life Committee ministry fair booth**

- **Truth Illuminated** teen pro-life program includes education, prayer, pastoral care, and public policy advocacy.
- **Sidewalk counseling and prayer vigils**
- **Understanding the basics of stem cells**
- **The March for Life Pilgrimage**
- **Purchasing and displaying pro-life merchandise**

Slide 6 ...is a Great Defense

Briefly discuss what we mean by “defense” and how each of the items displayed represents this approach.

- **Moloch** was a god worshipped by the Phoenicians, and had associations with a particular kind of child sacrifice by parents. The evil role of Moloch was not unlike the role of Planned Parenthood in today’s society—a pagan worshiped by society as a provider of necessary services.
“Do not give any of your children to be sacrificed to Moloch, for you must not profane the name of your God. I am the LORD.” Leviticus 18:21
- **Attitudes toward the Jews during the Holocaust in Nazi Germany** were not unlike the attitudes toward the unborn today.
- **Dr. Bernard Nathanson** -- (July 31, 1926 – February 21, 2011) An American medical doctor from New York who helped to found the National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws (NARAL Pro-Choice America), but later became a pro-life activist. Nathanson grew up Jewish and for more than ten years after he became pro-life he described himself as a "Jewish atheist". In 1996 he converted to Roman Catholicism through the efforts of a Rev. C. John McCloskey. In December 1996, Nathanson was baptized by Cardinal John O'Connor in a private Mass with a group of friends in New York’s St. Patrick’s Cathedral. He also received Confirmation and first Communion from the Cardinal. When asked why he converted to Roman Catholicism he cited that *“no religion matches the special role for forgiveness that is afforded by the Catholic Church”*.
- **The world map of the current average number of children born per woman (total fertility rates) in each country** can be used to defend against claims that the world is overpopulated. These false claims are used to justify abortion and human rights abuses around the world.
- **Graph of declining total fertility rates (TFR) around the world** can be used to emphasize the fact that although the world population may currently be increasing, it will eventually begin decreasing in the next 30-50 years and will continue to decrease unless society begins to embrace a culture of life.
- **Attitudes toward these slaves in a cotton field in the late 1800’s** were not unlike the attitudes toward the unborn today.
- **Margaret Sanger**, founder of the Birth Control League which eventually became Planned Parenthood, was a eugenicist who embraced the views of Charles Darwin. Eugenics is the bio-social movement which advocates the use of inhumane practices aimed at improving the genetic composition of a population. Sanger was particularly focused on eliminating the African American population after the Civil War and eliminating the “feeble-minded”, the “imbeciles”, and the “defective stock” that made up most of the immigrants to America in the early 1900’s. Eugenics is also the basis of the genocide of 10 million people in the 1930’s and 1940’s by Adolph Hitler during the Holocaust in the name of “improving the genetic make-up” of German society during World War II.
- **Undercover investigations of Planned Parenthood** by Lila Rose and the Live Action Organization have exposed illegal activities like covering up child prostitution and sex abuse, facilitation of sex trafficking, insurance fraud, and countless lies and other unethical procedures to increase the number of abortions they can sell.
- **This euthanasia training manual** is evidence of our current culture of death and widespread attempts to devalue human life at its latter stages.
- **The SilentNoMore Awareness Campaign** was founded by Georgette Forney and Janet Morana to expose the real pain of post-abortion syndrome and to provide a public forum for those victimized by abortion to speak out.

Slide 7 “I am personally pro-life but...”

Briefly discuss with participants the impact of Pontius Pilate’s decision to not stand up for the sanctity of innocent human life and how this is no different than people today not speaking out against abortion.

Slide 8 You Believe WHAAAAT!?

Briefly discuss the initial impression that participants have of being yelled at and how receptive they would be to a message that is delivered in this way.

Slide 9 NO, NO, NO, NO, NO, NO!

Briefly discuss the initial impression that participants have of being nagged at or spoken to in a condescending manner and how receptive they would be to a message that is delivered in this way.

Slide 10 WHATEVEER!

Briefly discuss the initial impression that participants have of being ignored or treated like they are stupid or that their opinion does not matter and how receptive they would be to the message of someone who treated them this way.

Slide 11 Pro-Life Discussions

Briefly discuss the initial impression that participants have of the people shown and how differently they would feel about having a discussion with these people.

Now suggest participants think about these last four slides each time they are faced with someone who disagrees with them on pro-life topics.

Slide 12 Tell Stories...

Jesus told parables to get his message across.

- Ask participants to identify the five parables on the slide and explain how Christ's message in each can be used to help them have more effective pro-life discussions.
 - The Woman at the Well
 - The Prodigal Son
 - The Good Shepherd
 - The Sower
 - The Good Samaritan
- Ask participants if they have examples of any personal stories they could use to help them have more effective pro-life discussions.

Slide 13 Be a Pro-Life "Master Carpenter"

Discuss how these carpentry metaphors relate to having effective pro-life discussions, what some of the pro-life "jobs" we perform are, and how using these concepts can assist us as we build a Culture of Life.

- Understand that you work for Him
- Have a clear plan before you start
- Always keep the goal in mind
- Use the right tool for the job
- Check your work and correct your mistakes
- Build a culture of life

Slide 14 Prayer is the Most Powerful Pro-Life Tool

Discuss with participants whether they consider prayer to be a "power tool" or a last resort when nothing else seems to be working.

Here are the thoughts of Archbishop J. Michael Miller, pastor of the Archdiocese of Vancouver, British Columbia, on how prayer can make the pro-life movement more effective...

First of all, we can never stop praying for the cause of life. It is a constant and consistent discipline for many Christians, Catholic and Protestant, on behalf of those who have no voice. This vigil of prayer must be extended to the often complacent believers who have given little more than lip service to their belief in the cause of life.

We must now adopt all the weapons of spiritual warfare, offering prayers not only for the direct perpetrators of attacks on human life but also for elected officials: that hearts will be converted to love for life.

Prayer must be accompanied by penance and sacrifice. Now is the time to take seriously praying the Rosary, making novenas, and initiating our own daily discipline of personal prayer on behalf of the unborn and for the conversion of our society from a culture of death to a culture of life.

We are filled with the certainty that we can rely on the help of God, for Whom nothing is impossible. In the words of Pope John Paul the Great: "A great prayer for life is urgently needed, a prayer which will rise up throughout the world. Through special initiatives and in daily prayer, may an impassioned plea rise to God, the Creator and lover of life, from every Christian community, from every group and association, from every family and from the heart of every believer."

The Pope added, "Let us therefore discover anew the humility and the courage to pray and fast so that power from on high will break down the walls of lies and deceit: the walls which conceal from the sight of so many of our brothers and sisters the evil of practices and laws which are hostile to life."

Slide 15 United Nations and Planned Parenthood

A few key areas every successful pro-life leader should be effective at discussing are...

- General topics that touch most people but are not typically considered "pro-life" like the tight national relationship between Planned Parenthood and the Girl Scouts.
- Sensitive topics that touch some people very personally like the corporate relationship between Planned Parenthood and the Susan G. Komen Foundation.
- Discussions about the pro-abortion policies of the U.S. and international organizations like the United Nations.
- Topics that directly involve specific political leaders.

Although all of these situations require a solid understanding of the facts, in each case the discussion will likely not be whether the issue is right or wrong, but rather your motivation for bringing the topic up. Each of these is an opportunity to gain respect and confidence and trust or to lose respect and confidence and trust; the difference is all in the way you prepare, present, listen, manage your non-verbal communication, and empathize with the person with whom you are speaking.

These are also very good examples of why your goal should never be to "win" or to prove the other person wrong, but to simply change hearts.

- Despite the information on the slide, most local Girl Scout troops are lead and managed entirely by mothers, teachers, parish ministry leaders, etc. so the blatant pro-choice views of the Girls Scouts national leadership organization is not a direct factor in what is done within the individual troops. In our diocese, the Respect Life Office simply makes sure we have the facts because we are contacted regularly by concerned parents who just recently found out about the connection and we are contacted by upset Parish Respect Life Coordinators who feel they need to do something about it within their parish. There are few other options to the Girl Scouts and if no money is sent to the national organization, there is little reason for concern; however, this might be enough for someone to decide not to buy Girl Scout cookies.
- Here are the facts about the link between Susan G. Komen and Planned Parenthood...
 - There is direct clinical link between having an abortion and developing breast cancer. During pregnancy, certain hormones are increased in the woman's body. When the child is born, these hormones naturally decrease. When a pregnancy is terminated prematurely, these increased hormone levels remain and make the woman more susceptible to breast cancer.
 - Planned Parenthood does not do breast exams and it has been reported by Planned Parenthood themselves that none of their facilities even have mammogram machines.
 - The national Susan G. Komen Foundation has donated millions of dollars to Planned Parenthood each year for the past few years.

In this case, again, it is important to differentiate the national organization and the local affiliates. Within our diocese, the Respect Life Office has met with the local Susan G. Komen Foundation and confirmed that none of the funds raised by their annual Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure event go to Planned Parenthood. Unlike the Girls Scouts, however, there are other local medical organizations that do breast cancer research so the agreement we have reached is that we will not actively boycott their annual race if they do not actively promote the event in our parishes. This information is made available to all and when information is requested, the Respect Life Office provides the facts and encourages individuals to donate to other breast cancer research organizations.

- The United Nations is so involved with Planned Parenthood globally that in most cases, they are one and the same. Many UN humanitarian activities are founded on the mistaken premise that there are too many people in the world, we do not have the necessary resources, and abortion and contraception are the solution for most problems of underdeveloped countries. Most of these countries, especially in Africa, South America, and Latin America are pro-life and Catholic. The Respect Life Office discourages any donations to UNICEF, UNESCO, or to any other UN-affiliated organization.

Outreach Planning

Slide 16 Pro-Life Movies

Take a few minutes to discuss the experiences of the participants with regard to promoting pro-life movies and praying at abortion mills. Both are easy, inexpensive, non-confrontational ways for everyone to deliver a pro-life message.

Suggest to participants that they contact their Parish Respect Life Coordinator or their Youth Minister to schedule a showing of a pro-life movie. It is always easier to do this during an existing event rather than trying to get people to come to a new event.

Suggest to participants that they schedule a date and time for the group to pray outside of an abortion mill or get a group of people from their school or parish to do so.

Evangelization/Catechesis

Slide 17 “Contraception” of the Gospel of Life

Many times one of the most challenging places to initiate a pro-life discussion is the one location it should be commonplace--in our parishes from the pulpit.

Attached to the end of these notes is APPENDIX A, *The Most Common Reasons Pastors Give For Not Preaching About Abortion*. This document is a list of over 30 of the most common reasons given by pastors for not talking about abortion. These reasons have been grouped by the underlying factor and a pastoral response has been provided for each to assist with working through the underlying issues.

Time will not allow you to review the entire list during your presentation but discuss a few and then recommend participants review the list and become familiar with the discussion points. Encourage people if they know of a pastor who might benefit from this information, and who is genuinely willing to speak to the issue, to meet and review the list with him.

Slide 18 Summary

- Develop Pro-Life Communication Skills
- Build a Culture of Life
- Promote a Gospel of Life
- Live a Witness to Life

Closing Prayer

Slide 19 Prayer for Pro-Life Messengers

*O Blessed Virgin Mary,
Grant that all who believe in your Son
may proclaim the Gospel of life
with honesty and love
to the people of our time.
Obtain for them the grace
to accept that Gospel
as a gift ever new,
the joy of celebrating it
with gratitude throughout their lives
and the courage to bear witness to it
resolutely, in order to build,
together with all people of good will,
the civilization of truth and love,
to the praise and glory of God,
the Creator and lover of LIFE.*

APPENDIX A

The Most Common Reasons Pastors Give For Not Preaching About Abortion (Courtesy of Priests for Life)

A. Personality or perception of the pastor

"I do not want to be associated with the negative stereotypes of a 'typical' pro-lifer."

There are "eccentrics" in every movement. The pro-life movement, being the largest grassroots movement in the history of the United States, is no different. The pro-life movement, however, more fully reflects the rich diversity of American society than the pro-abortion movement does.

A key role of the pastor is to foster the gifts of the believers, encouraging them to use those gifts to transform society. Furthermore, it is very much in your power to strengthen the pro-life movement by bringing into it as many people as possible, including professionals of every field. This involves identifying those in our congregations who have the kind of leadership skills that can be effectively applied to the pro-life movement. If we call forth such individuals to take their part in local leadership, they will likewise attract others who can bring experience and professionalism to the movement. If, however, there is a vacuum of leadership, it will quickly be filled by "eccentrics." In the case of many of neighborhood churches, they should be partnering with other church ministries, to be the pro-life movement of the neighborhood! It is up to us to make that happen! Nobody is exempt from the call to be a "pro-lifer". What, after all, is the alternative?

"I do not want to be seen as confrontational."

Being confrontational is not the same as being unloving or uncharitable. Our Lord, who ate with sinners, also confronted them. Love demands confrontation, because it cannot rest if the beloved is entangled in evil. Love seeks the good of the beloved, and this means it has to get tough at times to extricate the beloved from evil. Many think of the price of confrontation, but forget that there is also a price to be paid for not confronting. That price is that evil continues to flourish, relationships become shallow and superficial, and true leadership vanishes because the leader is no longer able to point out the right path, and will eventually lose the respect of those who look to him for guidance.

Successful social reform movements, moreover, always confronted an unwilling culture by exposing the injustices they were fighting. A careful study of the Civil Rights Movement provides just one example."

"I do not want to let, or appear as though I am letting, my personal agenda interfere with the Word of God or the liturgy."

If defending innocent children from death and reaching out in practical charity to help pregnant women in need is simply a "personal agenda", then what is the church's agenda? Can it possibly not include this? Scripture makes it clear that liturgy which ignores the demands of justice is not true worship.

Isaiah 1 tells us of a people who lived in Judah and Jerusalem but who were in trouble as they faced destruction by the Babylonians. Isaiah deals with the nature of the problem, he shows the cause of the troubles, the false ways in which people were trying to deal with them and get out of them, and then announces the true and only way of deliverance...His message to the sinful Israelites at this particular juncture in history is the message of God to the whole of the human race in its own trouble and distress. The problem for them, as well as for us, is the same: it is sin.

James 1:27 tells us the religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

All laws have a moral basis. What law or regulation is not based on some person's or group of person's conception of right and wrong? Since all law is legislated morality, why should abortion be an exception? Are you prepared to say that Wilberforce, Lincoln, Frederick Douglas and the abolitionists had no right to force their opinions about slavery on our republic? Are you prepared to say that Susan B. Anthony and those who fought for women's suffrage were wrong? Then you should not say fighting for the right for every baby to live and be free of the threat of having his or her life

extinguished is wrong. This is a greater fight because the unborn child cannot speak for himself or herself! And since this is a democratic republic, there is no reason for you to keep your opinion on this matter to yourself.

If you are a Christian, you live for God's approval, not the approval of humans. Proverbs says "rescue those being led away to death; hold back those staggering toward slaughter. If you say, 'But we knew nothing about this,' does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who guards your life know it? Will he not repay each person according to what he has done?" (Proverbs 24.11-12). We have a Christian obligation to defend the rights of the unborn whether or not anyone approves of it. We have a judge to face when we don't. He will definitely know we did not defend those rights.

"As pastor, I cannot afford for people to not like me or be uncomfortable around me."

Sometimes our fear about addressing abortion, or other controversial issues, is as simple as that -- and as profound. A strong relationship with Christ, who is the source of all love, and a conviction that fidelity to Him is the foundation for love between human beings, is a key remedy for this fear. Moreover, fidelity to our mission of proclaiming the Gospel -- especially when that means taking on hard issues -- is what will earn us the love and respect of those we serve. To the extent that we are disliked for what we say about abortion, we might ask whether efforts to save the life of a child are worth that sacrifice. The answer is self-evident.

"I do not want to be, or appear to be, a 'single issue' pastor."

As pastors, you necessarily address a multitude of issues, and must be committed to a consistent ethic of life. Numerically, abortion is one issue; but it is one issue like the foundation of a house is one part of the house. There is a hierarchy of moral values and the dignity of life is the fundamental one. The reason why every other issue is an issue to begin with is that human beings have a right to life. We do not, therefore, address abortion because we are unconcerned about other issues, but precisely because we are concerned about them, and realize that we cannot make progress on them unless the foundation itself is secure.

"I do not want to be perceived as being 'right wing', 'fanatical', 'controversial', or out of step with my flock."

Unfortunately, some do use these labels to describe the pro-life movement. Priests were not ordained and pastors were not called to preach in order to belong to any one "faction", but rather to faithfully articulate the Bible's teachings, among the most fundamental of which is the right to life. "If you have been called to shepherd God's people and to lead them, then you are called to help them see and practice the truth. If in doing this your church becomes labeled, so what? If people can influence us by labels, isn't that a weakness on our part? Furthermore, no person or group within the Christian faith is exempt from the privileged duty to defend life, nor does any group have a monopoly on the defense of life.

An important aspect of pastoral leadership, in other words, is to re-frame the issue. There should not be a gap between 'social justice' concerns and 'right to life' concerns. The starting point and heart of 'social justice' is the dignity of the human person. Surveys, moreover, show that the people to whom you minister are much more in step with the position of the Christ on life issues than with the positions of pro-abortion groups."

"As a man, I do not feel I have the right to address this issue."

The taking of a human life is a human issue, and addressing its injustice requires no qualifications other than being a decent human being. The "abortion-rights" community never complains when men, married or single, speak out in favor of abortion; nor should the pro-life community have any fear about men speaking out against it.

"I do not think I am equipped to address the topic of abortion."

Our confidence will increase as we become more informed about the issue, speak with other pastors who are active in the movement, pray, and practice. There is sometimes a fear that we will give the issue the wrong emphasis -- "coming down too hard," "fostering guilt," "sounding uncaring". We can counteract this by always mentioning the help available to women in need, and the peace and forgiveness available to us in Christ and that Christ offers in the Gospel.

"I honestly do not know why I shy away from the topic of abortion."

If we can admit to ourselves that we don't know why we are not doing something we should be doing, then a privileged moment of growth has arrived. Let us respond in two ways. First, let us become more familiar with the issue itself and

its connections with pastoral ministry and with the lives of our people. Second, let us bring the matter before the Lord in prayer, asking Him to break through the barriers, to renew our calling as shepherds of God's flock, and through us to renew the face of the earth.

B. Concern for those individuals who have been touched by abortion or who have strong feels on the topic

"I do not want to drive away anyone who has had an abortion or who has been directly touched by abortion

We preach on abortion to save such women, and to protect other women from making the same mistake. Within our own Project Rachel post-abortive healing ministry it is not uncommon to hear women say, "I can't help but think that if I heard in church that abortion was wrong...I might have chosen to keep my baby instead of killing my baby." As we condemn abortion, we also proclaim forgiveness and healing.

Experts in post-abortion healing tell us that it is absolutely essential that the woman "stop using the mechanisms of defense, such as denial, self-repression, and rationalization of abortion." (Dr. Philip Mango, "The Consequences of Abortion and Their Treatment," August 1990) Men and women both must face the fact that a baby was killed. We can help them enter the path of healing by proclaiming the truth about abortion and the reality of forgiveness.

When we address abortion, it tells her, "We care." Our silence, on the other hand, does not interpret itself. The fact that nothing is said about abortion may lead such a man or woman to conclude one of three things:

- My pastor doesn't know about the pain associated with my abortion
- My pastor knows my pain, but doesn't care;
- My pastor knows and cares about my pain, but there's no hope. Nothing can be done to heal it.

"Women and men who have been touched by abortion feel bad enough. I do not want to make them feel worse."

See response above. An understanding of the dynamics of post-abortion women and men is extremely helpful in dealing with this fear. Many pastors are silent out of the best of good intentions towards such people in their congregation. Silence, however, does not interpret itself. It is not silence that helps one break out of denial, but rather an honest and compassionate word about the reality of what they have done. We preach on abortion to save post-abortive people, and to protect others from making the same mistake. Actually, it is not uncommon to hear a post-abortive woman say after a sermon on the topic, "It often hurts when I hear about abortion, but please keep preaching about it, because it is so consoling to know that by your words, someone else might be spared all the pain I have gone through."

"I do not want to alienate anyone."

We do not want to unnecessarily offend or alienate anyone from the church. We are reconcilers. At the same time, the One to whom we reconcile the people is God. To have the people coming to the church is one aspect of our mission; another aspect is to make sure that when they come they hear the full message of the Gospel. This is not a favor to them; they have a right, in strict justice, to hear the full truth of Gospel teaching.

You know better than anyone, people appreciate hearing clear teaching from the pulpit about tough issues. Yet to believe we can do this faithfully and at the same time never alienate anyone is to ignore the fact that even Christ Himself alienated some people (see John 6). Can we do better than Christ did? Such alienation is not intentional on our part, but is, in some cases, inevitable.

Some people have alienated themselves from the truth about abortion. If, then, we faithfully expose that truth, they may choose to alienate themselves from us, too. This is not the same as "driving them away," which is a situation in which we provide the cause of alienation by our carelessness or unkindness."

"Abortion is too sensitive of an issue to discuss in church."

Many aspects of abortion are very sensitive. That means they have to be dealt with in a sensitive way; it does not mean they should be ignored. The impact of abortion on the lives of our people -- physically, spiritually, and emotionally -- is all the more reason for a shepherd to pay attention to these wounds, and to help people avoid them in

the first place. Ministry necessarily involves confronting problems that provoke emotions within us and among our people. In this case, ministry regarding abortion involves nothing less than life and death.

C. Business concern for my church

“I do not want to mix politics and religion“

Is the killing of children merely a political issue? In the moral and spiritual realm, how is abortion different from the killing of 2-year-olds? Do we have any less of an obligation to speak up for our brothers and sisters before they are born than after they are born? Does the fact that politicians talk about abortion require us to be silent? It is amazing how Christians receive such praise for speaking up for peace or for economic justice, which are also "political issues," but is subject to different rules when it comes to abortion. Some pastors or clergy will be silent, saying it is a "political issue." Then, some politicians will be silent, saying it is a "religious issue." If abortion is immoral, where do we go to say so?

Actually, abortion is many things. It is an issue of public policy, which we have every right to shape. It is a spiritual issue, confronting us with the challenge as to whether we will peacefully co-exist with child-killing in our midst, or rather acknowledge God as the Lord of Life and worship Him by defending life. It is critical to point out, especially at election time, that no matter what position any particular party or candidate takes in any race, the Christian's message about abortion is always the same. Speaking for life can just as well, in effect, help a pro-life Democrat and hurt a pro-abortion Republican as it can help a pro-life Republican and hurt a pro-abortion Democrat. Our motive is none of the above, but simply the defense of life.

If being afraid of political issues is the problem, how much more should we fear spiritual ones, in which the powers at war are much more awesome and the stakes much higher! But as pastors, you do not undertake the task on human strength, but in the power and authority of Christ. Hence, we do not let fear deter us. Just because a government may be ordained by God, doesn't mean that everything it does is willed by God or approved of by God. It's hard to believe that God would ordain things he clearly says are wrong and contrary to his prescription.

Second, if we take the position that all government decrees are God's will, then we have a problem. The Supreme Court made abortion a choice and stripped the unborn child of his or her rights. It is the same Court that denied Dred Scott his humanity and said that he was another's personal property. It refused him the right to self-determination. The court also gave us the separate but equal doctrine and the Korematsu decision which interned American Japanese. We should instead say that only good laws and good governments are ordained by God and bear his stamp of approval. It is no sin to petition a government about heinous, unjust laws. Even if we were to say that evil governments were ordained by God, it is no sin to petition a government about heinous, unjust laws.

Third, governments and laws are always changing. Don't discount the truth that God uses Christians to advocate justice to change governments and their laws and policies. The slave trade in the British Empire was not ended by evangelism and the changing of hearts to Christ and the church. It wasn't as if, one day after successful evangelism, that there was no more need for the slave trade. It came to an end because of persistent advocacy by Christians like Wilberforce at the behest of the great evangelist John Wesley.

Finally, it is self evident that our society is in a great need of the insights of biblical teaching. The responsibility to make political choices rests with each person and his or her properly formed conscience.

“I do not want to jeopardize our tax-exempt status”

The law does not forbid us to speak on public policy issues. The classic legal distinction is between issue advocacy, which is permitted, and candidate advocacy, which is not. Though non-profit designated churches are required to refrain from partisan electoral politics, issue-oriented speech is protected by the First Amendment, even within the section 501(c)(3) regulatory framework. A church may not endorse a candidate, but it can freely take a stand on important public issues. Both the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and the National Association of Evangelicals have put together brochures and other materials specifically detailing what a church may or may not do under the non-profit tax status. In addition to speaking out against abortion, you may be surprised to know it is also permissible to conduct voter registration in your church. Again, just so long as you don't promote a specific candidate or for instance, offer free rides only to people who want to register as either a Democrat or a Republican.

“I have a good congregation. I do not want to cause any unnecessary divisions.”

Every church is already "divided," with people on different sides of the abortion issue. If we never speak of the issue, we may cover over the division for a while, but that is not the same thing as unity. Unity is founded on truth, and is fostered by a clear exposition of truth. "When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to Myself" (Jn.12:32). We do not build unity by our own human plans, efforts, and programs. We build it by lifting up Christ for all to see and hear. We build it by proclaiming His Word, without ambiguity or apology. Sure, there will be some division for the same reason that there will be some alienation. But the Word itself causes that. "I have come for division" (Luke 12:51). It is the division between truth and error, grace and sin, life and death. This division must come before unity is possible; otherwise the unity will be superficial and illusory.

D. Lack of appropriate resources or information on abortion

“There are simply too many other issues to address to focus on abortion.”

The fact that we have to address innumerable problems puts us in the same position in regard to all of them. We judge which ones to devote more time to depending on their urgency. Which do the most harm to humanity, the crown of God's creation? Which provide the greatest threat to the spiritual well-being of our people? How does a Christian commitment to the poor and weak inform each specific issue? Abortion, which claims more victims than any other act of violence, and whose victims are the weakest and most defenseless, ranks quite high in the answers to these and similar questions.

“I am too busy right now to start talking about a topic like abortion.”

Much of what we are called to do for pro-life does not take more time. Rather, it takes more spirit. It doesn't take any extra time to preach on abortion than to preach on any other topic. It doesn't take any more time to put a pro-life announcement in the bulletin than it does to put in any other kind of announcement. It doesn't take any more time to let a pro-life group know they have your encouragement. Beyond this, we can reflect that innocent life is at stake. If we would take time to try to save a child who was struck by a car on the road near our church, can we not also take time to do something about 4000 children being deliberately killed every day in the womb? All our time is God's anyway. Let's use more of it to save His children!

“I do not have the appropriate resources to tackle the topic of abortion.”

The Respect Life Office has many materials we can provide to you; if we do not have the appropriate information for a given situation we can refer you to the appropriate alternative resource that does.

“My fellow pastors are not talking about this topic either.”

We may not be feeling the encouragement we need from our fellow pastors or members of our parish or denominational leaders. It always helps when pastors come together to pray and share ideas and support one another. Contact with other priests or pastors who have taken a stand on behalf of life can be very helpful. In most congregations, encouragement to speak out is certainly there. Take a strong stand on life and that encouragement will grow. Complaints will also come, but it is not the complainers who have to answer to God for what is preached or not preached in the pulpit! In regard to our pastoral leaders, we need to heed Scripture's advice to pray for them, and if some are not encouraging us regarding the life issues, we should kindly but firmly request that they do.

“We have been wrestling with abortion for 40 years. Why risk causing a problem within my church now when there is nothing meaningful that will come of it?”

Every day brings us a new opportunity to play our part with God in the unfolding of His plan. Every day brings a new opportunity to convert a heart that has not yet heard the truth, or to save a life that has not been destroyed before -- and to that life, it means everything. Every day brings a new opportunity to speak up for the defenseless, knowing that justice is on their side and that no lie can live forever. Does a government that abandons its responsibility to defenseless children have the last and definitive word? We have no reason and no right to declare this cause lost. It is not a question of pro-life winning or pro-choice winning. The fact is that if pro-life doesn't win, nobody wins! We must not lose our historical perspective. Evils such as slavery and segregation took a long time to overcome. Progress is in fact being made in the pro-life cause, and our goal of victory needs to be fresh before our eyes. Yet the One who calls us already holds the victory of life.

E. Misinformed about general congregation or need to discuss the topic

“I do not doubt the national ‘averages’ but I do not necessarily think these statistics apply to my particular congregation.”

Most counties in America do not have an abortion provider, and the numbers of abortions are certainly higher in the big cities than anywhere else. But as Dr. Martin Luther King stressed during the Civil Rights Movement, injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We do not fail to preach about famines, wars or oppression that happens in far-off places. Love does not know geographical boundaries. Preaching on abortion in our community is part of teaching our people how to love one another, wherever the other may be, and whether the "other" means multitudes or just one.

“There are too many issues and my congregation is too diverse to appropriately address an issue like abortion.”

Any good public speaker knows that a primary rule is "Know your audience." A Sunday congregation is a varied audience, in terms of age, education and spiritual maturity. The problem of addressing such a group is not limited to abortion. For any subject, we must exercise sensitivity and prudence. Outside of the Sunday worship service, our members are constantly hearing messages that contradict historic Christian teaching on faith and morals. Our challenge is to provide them with truth that will counteract the confusing messages they hear elsewhere. If our criterion in preaching is that every person will immediately understand everything we say, we are using an unrealistic and unnecessary criterion.

People will so differ, furthermore, in their estimation about what is "appropriate," that there will always be some criticism. We must live with that. We should make it clear that we are always open to speak with people privately if questions or misunderstandings arise due to our preaching. Using prudence, we must at the same time ask, "If they don't hear the truth from us, exactly where and when will they hear it?" Do we allow a society which is saturated with pro-abortion rhetoric and so often intent on covering up the truth about abortion to have the first, last, and only word with people whom we are responsible to shepherd? "

“My sermons should apply to everyone. Abortion is too specific, too complex, or too grown up to fit into one of my sermons.”

Abortion is psychologically complex, but morally it is quite straightforward: abortion is a direct killing of an innocent person, and is therefore always wrong. Nothing can justify it. It is not "too complex" to denounce killing in a sermon, to point out injustice toward the most defenseless members of society, to proclaim that there is help available for pregnant women, and that there are better choices than abortion. How is this any more complex than addressing racism, poverty, warfare, or drug abuse?

“My congregation is older so they are not overly concerned with abortion.”

While many are too old to have a child, none are ever too old to love one, never too old to save one. They are therefore never too old to be concerned about abortion. By our active concern, any one of us can save the life of a baby scheduled to die. To try to save our youngest brothers and sisters is an expression of the love we are bound to for all our lives.

Parents and grandparents, furthermore, have a crucial, sometimes decisive role in the attitudes of their children and grandchildren toward abortion. Do they pass on a concern for life? Do they convey compassion, so that if their daughter or granddaughter were to become pregnant, she would know she could turn to them for understanding, rather than turn to the abortionist?

Despite age, people can also continue to make their voices heard in arenas of public opinion and the political process. Let nobody say they are too old to be concerned about abortion. As long as we possess life, we have the duty to defend life.

“I know my congregation fairly well and they are just not concerned about abortion.”

How much people care about an issue depends in part on how clearly they see its connection with the things they do care about. Our teaching can help them make those connections regarding abortion. Why, for example, do we see children killing children in our society? Might it have a connection with the fact that the law allows parents to kill children by abortion, thereby teaching children that their lives are disposable? Significant studies likewise show links between abortion and child abuse, poverty, substance abuse, suicide, breast cancer, and numerous other problems. All these life issues are interrelated; therefore, abortion cannot be ignored.

“My congregation is fairly well-educated or already active in social issues so they do not need to hear about abortion during church.”

It is not enough to "hear and know" about abortion, any more than it is enough to "hear and know" about poverty and crime. The point is that something must be done about these problems, and we are called to help our people get involved. A person may be opposed to poverty attitudinally, but what do they do to help the poor? How do they express their opposition behaviorally? Certainly, most of our congregation would lament abortion. But the challenge remains to bring to their attention continually both the obligations and the opportunities to actually prevent abortion in their community.

Since the Roe vs. Wade decision legalized abortion in 1973, legal protection has not been restored to a single unborn child in our land. These abortions still occur at the rate of one every 23 seconds (i.e. 4000 a day, 1.3 million a year), and Christians, statistically, procure abortions as much as anyone else. Seventy-three percent of the women getting an abortion claim some Christian affinity, and one out of every six identifies herself as an evangelical or "born again" Christian.

Knowledge obviously, is still lacking. Most people still do not know, for instance, the extent of abortion, the revolting ways it is performed, or the harmful physical and psychological after-effects of the procedure on the mother. Many know abortion is evil but they do not realize how evil it is. Moreover, knowledge is not virtue. Our task is to rouse people to do something about it. If they already know enough about it, where are our local pro-life groups? Where are our local crisis pregnancy centers and shelters for unwed mothers? Many exist but so many more are needed! People need encouragement from us more than ever as they are bombarded with pro-abortion slogans and lies."

F. Lack of Scriptural knowledge

“I am not sure how I would tie abortion into the Scripture readings.”

If Scripture does not teach the immorality of abortion, it does not teach anything at all. A particular word like "abortion" does not have to appear in the text of Scripture in order for Scripture to teach about it. Abortion is the killing of an innocent, human child. The teaching on abortion is contained in the numerous condemnations of the shedding of innocent blood, and the numerous instructions about justice and charity, especially toward the weak, the small, the helpless, and those whom society rejects. Numerous texts exist, but beyond this are the entire themes and directions in which Scripture moves. The people of the old and new covenants are called to be a holy people, a community bound to God and one another in love. This happens because God takes the initiative not only in giving life but also in intervening to save the helpless. Such are central events of both the Old and the New Testaments.

The themes of pro-life are on every page of Scripture. Homilies are not simply Scripture lessons. Rather they apply the great Biblical themes to the day to day challenges that believers face as they live their lives. So, for instance, the Bible is clear that only God has dominion over human life – he made it, he cares for it, he owns it. That is why no human being can own or kill or devalue it.

Abortion belongs to a totally contradictory dynamic of thought and life: It excludes members of the community and destroys rather than defends the helpless. One resource, regardless of denomination, to assist in this area is the Gospel of Life by the late Pope John Paul II. It provides specific materials on relating the abortion issue to Scripture, including sample sermons. Many can be modified or used directly in ecumenical services.

“I am not sure about all the scriptural claims that are being tossed around about abortion.”

See response above. All the teachings of the Lord Jesus hold together in an indivisible, living unity. We may not see the full "credibility" of any of the teachings if we isolate them from the whole, or eclipse the others. Is it difficult at times to observe the Bible's clear directives on abortion? Certainly. But there are other difficult obligations, including dying to ourselves, loving our neighbor, forgiving those who have sinned against us, and so on. In this context, the teaching on

abortion is in fact very credible, and will be so to our people if we present it as part of a clear, vigorous exposition of the entire Gospel, with no distortions or omissions, and if we place it in the context of a life marked by faith, compassion, and deep holiness.

There is a great spiritual warfare associated with the issue of abortion. Killing children is Satan's way of striking out at the very heart of God. If he cannot kill God, the next best thing is killing those created in God's image. He is killing God in effigy. To combat this evil, we must proclaim the truth to our congregations first, then to our community: No matter what we have done, no sin is beyond the reach of God's grace. God has seen us at our worst and still loves us. He loves us as we are, but he loves us too much to let us stay that way. He is determined to bring us to our knees to confess, repent, and be healed by His unending Mercy.

“Abortion is a personal issue and unless someone has had an abortion, it is not an issue that directly impacts one's salvation.”

The First Letter of John asks how the love of God can survive in one who has enough of this world's goods, yet fails to help his brother in need. (See 1Jn. 3:17) The question behind abortion, therefore, is not simply, "Would I do it?" but rather, "What am I doing to stop it?" To possess the greatest of "this world's goods" -- life itself -- and to fail to defend that gift for others, diminishes our own relationship with the Lord and Giver of life.

“I would have to preach non-stop on abortion for it to really have any impact.”

The American people are conflicted about abortion, and by no means as entrenched in their positions as we might imagine. Countless people have changed their views thanks to a single sermon. One example is a woman telling her pastor, "I came in here today 100% pro-abortion, and now my views are completely changed." because he used the example that federal law protects sea turtles from destruction, but does not protect unborn babies from abortion. It can be that easy and people sitting in the pews wrestling with the decision to abort can be persuaded to save that life.



Agenda - Having Effective Pro-Life Discussions



- I. Sign-in and drinks/snacks
- II. Welcome
- III. Opening Prayer to St. Michael the Archangel

*St. Michael the Archangel,
defend us in battle.
Be our defense against the wickedness and snares of the Devil.
May God rebuke him, we humbly pray,
and do thou,
O Prince of the heavenly hosts,
by the power of God,
thrust into hell Satan,
and all the evil spirits,
who prowl about the world
seeking the ruin of souls. Amen*

- IV. Icebreaker: "What do you mean?"
- V. Presentation: "Having Effective Pro-Life Discussions"
- VI. Outreach Planning: Sponsor a pro-life movie or join a regularly scheduled pro-life prayer team
- VII. Evangelization/Catechesis: Help get the pro-life message included in your parish activities
- VIII. Prayer for Pro-Life Messengers

*O Blessed Virgin Mary,
Grant that all who believe in your Son
may proclaim the Gospel of life
with honesty and love
to the people of our time.
Obtain for them the grace
to accept that Gospel
as a gift ever new,
the joy of celebrating it
with gratitude throughout their lives
and the courage to bear witness to it
resolutely, in order to build,
together with all people of good will,
the civilization of truth and love,
to the praise and glory of God,
the Creator and lover of LIFE.*

IX. Next meeting date / time / location is: _____

Truth Illuminated New Chapter Members

Name of Chapter: _____

Name:	
Phone:	Cell phone:
Email:	Home address:
School I attend:	Parish I attend:
Grade (9 th , 10 th , 11 th , or 12 th):	Age:
Parents'/Guardians' Names:	How I heard about Truth Illuminated:

Name:	
Phone:	Cell phone:
Email:	Home address:
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