

To be read at Masses weekend of October 5-6, 2002

My Brothers and Sisters in the Lord:

Our annual Respect Life observance takes on special meaning and significance this October 2002 as we continue to remember with sorrow last year's terrorist attacks, and as we prepare for next month's election. Daily, we hear reports of many forms of violence and abuse to human life near and far. Now more than ever, we recognize that the gift of life is precious, yet very fragile.

As we reflect on the wide-scale violent abuse of life, we cannot help but be dismayed that over one million lives are being lost each year to abortion. In the name of the Lord, we are compelled to respond by defending the dignity of every human life – from the first moment of conception until the last natural breath. Recognizing that we are *stewards* – not owners – of life, we see a necessary and unavoidable connection between our worship of God and our respect for His presence in every human being.

Struggling with *where* and *how* to change the minds and hearts of our fellow citizens, we find direction from the bishops of our country who have written in our National Pastoral Plan for Life: "*We must begin with a commitment never to intentionally kill or collude in the killing of any innocent human life, no matter how broken, unformed, disabled, or desperate that life may seem.*"

Abortion, the direct taking of human life prior to birth, is always a moral evil; the same is true for the deliberate destruction of human embryos. Likewise, assisted suicide or euthanasia is morally unacceptable. Direct attacks on innocent civilians and acts of terrorism are also morally unjustifiable. Simply put, we wish to proclaim and live a "consistent ethic of life," affirming the dignity of all life and condemning any form of violence that would weaken or destroy that life.

Every day, every one of us recommits ourselves to the dignity of life: we do so by bringing life into this world and educating and forming our children. We also affirm life as we work to ensure the right of all people to quality education and dignified labor, especially immigrants and marginalized persons. Many of us have the privilege of bringing healing for the body or spirit at very critical moments in the life journey through our work in the health care profession or as public servants of the common good as law enforcement officers and fire fighters. Some of us are privileged to serve in positions of leadership in business and commerce, as well as in government – settings in which you shape legislation which defends the life of all, especially the most vulnerable.

Catholic public officials have a special moral obligation to understand and accept wholeheartedly the Church's teaching on the dignity of innocent human life; they may never advocate for, or actively support, legislation which would allow direct attacks on innocent human life. When it is impossible to overturn or prevent passage of a law which allows or promotes abortion, an elected official should always seek to limit the harm done by such laws. Nor can Catholic political leaders justify inaction with regard to the dignity of human life simply on the grounds that abortion is the law of the land, because ultimately, there is a higher law, the law of God.

These basic truths about right and wrong must shape our political judgments and our decisions about how we vote. The charge laid upon me by Christ compels me to speak to these issues and underscore the questions that each of us has to consider between now and election day: What is the candidate's commitment to supporting quality health care benefits and educational opportunity of all, especially the poor and the vulnerable? Where does the candidate stand on the death penalty? And most importantly, where does the candidate stand on abortion – “the preeminent threat to human dignity because it directly attacks life itself, the most fundamental human good and the condition for all others” (Michigan Catholic Conference, “*A Catholic View to Elections 2002*,” June 26, 2002).

In closing, I thank you for your personal and family witness to life, a commitment that has characterized our local Church of Detroit for 170 years. Over the decades, we have made a powerful impact on the wider society precisely because we have presented a unified and respectful voice on behalf of the dignity of all human life. Together, may we join minds, hands, and hearts in a renewed commitment to defend and promote the dignity of life, God's greatest gift!

Your brother in the Lord,

Adam Cardinal Maida
Archbishop of Detroit