

# **Roman Catholic Archdiocese of San Francisco**

## **Respect Life Program**



### **Parish Respect Life Handbook: A Guide for Parish Pro-Life Activities**

**Prepared by Archdiocese of San Francisco  
Office of Public Policy and Social Concerns, Respect Life Program**

**[www.sfarchdiocese.org/home/ministries/social-justice-life/respect-life](http://www.sfarchdiocese.org/home/ministries/social-justice-life/respect-life)**

*Updated January 2015*

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*We recognize and are sensitive to the richness of racial and ethnic diversity within the boundaries of the Archdiocese of San Francisco. Through the implementation of our pro-life programs, we strive to respond to this diversity and foster harmony and mutual respect among the different cultures that make up our parish and school communities.*

## **Introduction**

Catholic Pro-Life activities at all levels are directed by the teachings of the Catholic Church and are implemented in all dioceses and parishes in the United States according to the *Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities* issued by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). The *Pastoral Plan* details the bishops' vision for a diocesan Respect Life Program. It includes four elements: (1) public information and education; (2) pastoral care for women; (3) public policy efforts; and (4) prayer and worship. See Appendix 1. The primary teachings of the Catholic Church on those topics covered by the Respect Life Program are found principally in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and in the papal encyclical of Saint John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*. See Appendix 2.

## **Parish Pro-Life Committees: Getting Organized**

All members of the parish Pro-Life Committee should first read the USCCB *Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities*. Then arrange a meeting with your pastor to discuss how he wants to proceed. Your parish committee should consist of practicing Catholics who are willing to devote time and energy to helping their pastor and fellow parishioners learn about pro-life issues. We strongly recommend that each parish Pro-Life Committee include a Spanish-speaking member to coordinate our Hispanic Outreach.

Education is essential. Most helpful in our educational outreach are the materials produced by the USCCB, as well as papal encyclicals and instructions. The importance of educating the faithful in these vital life areas cannot be over-emphasized. To that end, the Archdiocesan Respect Life Program will provide educational materials to parishes on pro-life issues including abortion, partial birth abortion, RU-486 chemical abortion, post-abortion healing, pregnancy assistance, euthanasia, assisted suicide, in-vitro fertilization, embryonic and adult stem cell research, human cloning, contraception, emergency contraception, natural family planning, capital punishment and any other subjects that the USCCB or local archbishop may wish to highlight. The Archdiocesan Respect Life Program will regularly pass on communications from the USCCB *Pro-Life Secretariat* to the parishes to keep them up to date. Information from the California Catholic Conference (CCC) will also be distributed periodically to keep parish committees abreast of important state legislative developments that concern pro-life issues.

Collaboration is important. At the parish level, we recommend that Pro-Life Committee members attend parish council meetings to integrate pro-life activities with those of other councils, committees and organizations, including Knights of Columbus, St. Vincent de Paul Society, Legion of Mary, prayer groups, liturgy committees, etc. At the Archdiocesan level, partnerships should be formed with other social justice ministries, youth, young adult and Catholic school groups, marriage and family programs, etc.

## **Word of Life**

*Word of Life* is a monthly resource for dioceses and parishes. It is available in both English and Spanish. Each month the *Word of Life* is transmitted electronically to each parish from the Archdiocese. It includes bulletin quotes, petitions for Prayers of the Faithful, and occasional homily notes. Please encourage your parish to include these resources in your bulletins and Prayers of the Faithful every Sunday. [www.usccb.org/about/pro-life-activities/word-of-life/index.cfm](http://www.usccb.org/about/pro-life-activities/word-of-life/index.cfm)

## **Activity Suggestions for Parish Pro-Life Committees**

- \*Ask to have USCCB *Word of Life* quotes printed in your parish bulletin
- \*Include USCCB *Word of Life* Intercessions in Sunday Mass Prayers of the Faithful
- \*Host a monthly pro-life Rosary or dedicate a specific hour of Adoration for pro-life intentions
- \*Bring *The Gabriel Project* to your parish to support pregnant mothers and their unborn children
- \*Sponsor a parish baby shower for a mother in need or spiritually adopt an unborn child to pray for
- \*Sponsor a fundraiser to help your parish subsidize a bus to the *Walk for Life West Coast*
- \*Make a banner to carry at the *Walk for Life West Coast* and attend as a parish group
- \*Arrange for a parish group to pray at one of the *40 Days for Life* locations
- \*Keep parish entryways stocked with pro-life pamphlets, including *Gabriel Project* and *Project Rachel*
- \*Plan a parish potluck and invite a pro-life speaker to educate on timely pro-life topics
- \* Sponsor a pro-life table at your parish ministry fair making available educational materials
- \*Sponsor a coffee & donut social after Mass and have pro-life materials and a sign-up sheet available
- \*Identify parish pro-life youth activities for your school, parish school of religion or CCD program
- \*Work with your school or parish school of religion to invite pro-life and chastity speakers
- \* Sponsor a “get-out-the-vote” drive or other nonpartisan voter-education initiatives
- \*Promote the Archdiocese pro-life website in your parish bulletin: [www.sflifeandjustice.org/respectlife/](http://www.sflifeandjustice.org/respectlife/)

## **Annual Events: Planning Your Program**

### January

*Walk for Life West Coast* in San Francisco is held on the Saturday closest to January 22. In recent years over 50,000 people from all over the West Coast have participated in this annual pro-life event. For more information visit [www.walkforlifewc.com](http://www.walkforlifewc.com). An archdiocesan-sponsored Walk for Life Mass at Saint Mary's Cathedral the morning of the Walk is celebrated by our Archbishop, along with bishops and priests from all over the West Coast. Parishes may also wish to celebrate a special Mass on January 22 to commemorate the *Roe v. Wade* decision, praying for reparation for our country.

### February and/or September

*40 Days for Life* is the largest internationally coordinated pro-life mobilization in history, helping local communities end the injustice of abortion. It consists of 40 days of prayer, fasting, community outreach

and peaceful vigil outside abortions facilities. *40 Days* takes place at different times of the year in the three-county Archdiocese---during Lent and/or in the Fall. Please check the *40 Days* and Archdiocesan websites for the timing in your county. The Archbishop encourages participation in this ministry of prayer that has saved so many lives. Encourage your parish to participate.

### September

Meetings of Parish Pro-Life Committees to distribute USCCB Respect Life packets and outline activities. These are distributed to pastors and/or respect life parish reps when received by the Archdiocese. They may be also obtained directly online at [www.usccb.org/about/pro-life-activities/respect-life-program/](http://www.usccb.org/about/pro-life-activities/respect-life-program/)

### October

National Respect Life Month:

Parishes are encouraged to celebrate annual Respect Life Mass--usually the first Sunday of the month--using Liturgy Guide materials and homily suggestions in USCCB materials and the *Word of Life*.

Respect Life Essay Contest:

Each school year, from October through February, the Respect Life Program conducts its *Annual Respect Life Essay Contest*. Its purpose is to encourage religious educators in our Catholic high schools, grade schools, parish schools of religion and homeschools to teach their students what the Church teaches on the broad range of topics relating to the dignity of every human life. The contest is open to 1st through 12th graders. Prizes are awarded in each of five categories: 1st-2nd grade/3rd-4th grade/5th-6th grade/7th-8th grade/9th-12th grade. Prize money is solicited as donations from local Knights of Columbus Councils and archdiocesan pro-life groups. A special Liturgy & Awards Ceremony is held at the Cathedral with one of our bishops presiding to honor winning students. Winners are also recognized in Catholic San Francisco newspaper. Pro-Life Committee members have the opportunity to be graders.

### **Archdiocesan Ministries**

#### *The Gabriel Project: Crisis Pregnancy Help*

The USCCB *Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities* notes that one of the objectives of a parish pro-life committee should be to "develop or adopt a parish-based ministry to pregnant women and their children." *The Gabriel Project* answers this call and embodies the practical support that the bishops promise pregnant women. By employing their individual talents, collaborating with various other ministries and utilizing community resources, parishioners stand ready to provide a mother with the kinds of assistance she needs in caring for her child. These may include friendship and emotional support, pastoral care and counseling, transportation, prenatal care, education, employment, housing, adoption services and financial assistance. *The Gabriel Project* is the only Catholic pregnancy help organization within the Archdiocese's boundaries and the only one we sponsor. Each volunteer is committed to faithfully uphold the teachings of the Catholic Church in mentoring and serving their client families, regardless of the religious preferences of those we serve. [www.sfgabrielproject.wordpress.com](http://www.sfgabrielproject.wordpress.com)

### *Project Rachel: Post Abortion Healing*

*Project Rachel* is a program of the USCCB and as such, operates under specific guidelines. First and foremost, it is a Catholic program whose main objective is Sacramental Reconciliation and spiritual healing centered on a consciousness towards Christ. Implemented at the Archdiocesan level, it strives to offer hope, healing and Sacramental Reconciliation to women, men and families pained by abortion by sharing the love and mercy of Christ. *Project Rachel* refers persons to other agencies and individual providers who share our values on the dignity of human life and sexuality and are willing to partner with us in planning spiritual reconciliation following emotional healing. Our current services include telephone intake and guidance; referral to priests, spiritual counselors and other appropriate professionals; periodic trainings for mentors and priests; and non-residential retreats for Spanish speaking individuals. Training is provided for priests, as well as information days for other interested persons, counselors, and providers who serve populations that include those who may have experienced abortion. In partnership with Holy Cross Cemetery, a biennial Healing Liturgy is offered in memory of babies who died from any cause. [www.sflifeandjustice.org/post\\_abortion\\_healing](http://www.sflifeandjustice.org/post_abortion_healing)

### *RU-486 Abortion Pill Reversal Program*

RU-486, the chemical abortion pill, is an attempt by the abortion industry to make abortion more accessible---and more dangerous. The procedure consists of taking two pills. The first pill, mifepristone, blocks the hormone progesterone which is needed to sustain the pregnancy. The second, misoprostol, causes the uterus to cramp and expel the embryo before implantation. A new procedure is available that can reverse the effects of RU-486. Doctors are on hand in the San Francisco Bay Area who will help a women who has changed her mind about having an abortion. Call the hotline: 1-877-558-0333.

### *Advance Health Care Directive Program*

Euthanasia is defined in St. John Paul II's encyclical, *Evangelium Vitae*, as "an act or omission which of itself or by intention causes death, with the purpose of eliminating all suffering." An Advance Health Care Directive, developed by the Archdiocese of Los Angeles and available on our website at [www.sflifeandjustice.org/end\\_of\\_life\\_issues](http://www.sflifeandjustice.org/end_of_life_issues), summarizes fundamental Catholic principles: Euthanasia is not permitted. Medicating to control pain is not euthanasia since the objective is not death but rather to alleviate severe pain. We do not have an obligation to pursue or continue a life-sustaining treatment if its risks or burdens to the patient are disproportionate to its expected benefits. Failure to provide a patient with nutrition and hydration, for the purpose of ending his or her life or accelerating death, constitutes euthanasia. See Appendix 3 to obtain a copy of this Catholic Advance Health Care Directive in English or Spanish. Please make it available in your parish.

### *The Death Penalty*

*The Catholic Mobilizing Network to End the Use of the Death Penalty* was launched in 2009 to work in collaboration with the USCCB to prepare Catholics for informed involvement in campaigns to repeal state death penalty laws and expand or inaugurate restorative justice programs. Its goal is to put the Church's teaching about the death penalty per the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* into action by proclaiming its unconditional respect for life. Avenues to accomplish this include: (1) educating the community through programs and materials explaining Church teaching on the death penalty;

(2) facilitating respectful and informed discourse within the Catholic community and the community at large; and (3) encouraging informed Catholic involvement in the public debate.

### Natural Family Planning

The Archdiocesan Natural Family Planning (NFP) program is administered by the Office of Marriage and Family Life. For more information on NFP methods, resources available and local instructors, please visit [www.sfarchdiocese.org/home/ministries/marriage-family-life/family-planning/nfp](http://www.sfarchdiocese.org/home/ministries/marriage-family-life/family-planning/nfp).

### **Guidelines for Parishes on Advocacy and Political Action**

While it is increasingly accepted that major public issues have moral dimensions and that religious values have public consequences, there is often confusion and controversy over the participation of religious individuals and groups in public life. It is important that the Catholic community be encouraged to vote, inform themselves of the issues, develop an informed conscience and practice political advocacy by putting faith into action. Following are some practical principles for parishes on advocacy and political action which will clarify what is allowed on an individual basis and an institutional basis.

\*No candidate advocacy or voter education suggesting a particular candidate or political party.

\*Advocacy for initiatives or legislative bills is permitted.

\*No politicking or leafleting on parish property or in parish parking lots.

\*No signage on parish property EXCEPT for bishop-endorsed issues.

\*No inclusion of political materials or voter guides in church lobbies, bulletins or mailings UNLESS the materials are produced by the USCCB, CCC or Archdiocese of San Francisco.

\*In case of doubt about any political issue, the Archdiocesan Legal Department should be consulted.

### **Catholic Media: Keeping Informed**

Read our Archdiocesan newspaper, *Catholic San Francisco*, each week to stay abreast of current news. The digital paper is available at [www.catholic-sf.org/digital\\_paper.php](http://www.catholic-sf.org/digital_paper.php).

*Immaculate Heart Radio* is a lay apostolate dedicated to spreading the knowledge, love and practice of the Roman Catholic Faith by means of radio. Programming content is primarily catechetical, devotional and inspirational, responding to the call of the Second Vatican Council to the laity to evangelize. *The Archbishop's Hour*, aired weekly, is a program of the San Francisco Archdiocese. We encourage parish Pro-Life Committee members to listen to IHR on KSF 1260 AM with coverage throughout the Bay Area.

From daily Mass to nightly news, the *Eternal Word Television Network* (EWTN) is equipped to bring Catholicism into your home. Launched in 1981, EWTN has become the largest religious media network in the world offering programming 24 hours a day. It is dedicated to teaching the truth as defined by the Magisterium communicating the beauty of the Church to help people grow in their love and understanding of God. EWTN programming is found on channel 229.

## Sample Bulletin Announcements

The below sample content and contact information can be altered to accommodate any parish situation, particularly if the parish already has a Respect Life Representative/Committee or wishes to expand it.



# Attention!

## Our Parish is About to Form (or Re-form) a Parish Pro-Life Committee

### Why?

- To actively promote respect for human life, the responsibility of every Catholic
- To foster an understanding of pro-life issues among parishioners
- To keep parishioners informed of pro-life legislation and engage in issue advocacy
- To sponsor parish prayer for mothers and their unborn children, the dying, disabled, death-row prisoners, victims of violence
- To support & promote legal safeguards for the chronically ill, disabled & dying
- To promote/assist The Gabriel Project, ministry to pregnant mothers and their children
- To promote/assist Project Rachel, post-abortion counseling and reconciliation
- To promote legal protection for unborn children
- To dovetail committee efforts with other programs of the parish & the Archdiocese
- To promote respect for life to parish organizations, especially schools & religious education programs and to encourage education & discussion

### PLEASE CONSIDER JOINING US IF YOU ARE A:

- Person responsible for education or pastoral care
- Representative of or a person with disabilities
  - Member of an adult or youth parish group
    - Person of a minority culture
- Person who cares about any or all of the above

### When & Where?

We will hold a pilot meeting:  
(date & time) in (parish room/location)  
to discuss how and when future meetings will be held

For more information contact: (name of rep) (phone number/email)

## WANTED...

### **Parish Respect Life Representatives**

Whether you've been involved in Pro-Life Ministry for years or whether you feel newly called to Pro-Life work, your Church needs you!

We are renewing our efforts to have a Respect Life Committee in each San Francisco Archdiocesan Parish and renewing our commitment to a Culture of Life.

For more information, please contact the Archdiocesan Respect Life Program Coordinator at 415-614-5533.

### **Be a Respect Life Parish Representative!**

We're seeking more parish representatives to bring the *Good News* from our Archdiocesan Respect Life Program to your Parish Community.

Programs include:

- Abortion Prevention & Pregnancy Services
- Post Abortion Healing & Reconciliation
- Opposition to Assisted Suicide Legislation
- Bioethics & Ethical Stem Cell Research
- Care for the Incarcerated, Victims & Families
- Walk for Life West Coast

Help us further our programs of pastoral care, public information & education, prayer & worship.

There is something here for everyone!

For information, please contact the Archdiocesan Respect Life Program Coordinator at 415-614-5533.