This October the Catholic Church throughout the United States will observe Respect Life Month, an annual tradition now in its fortieth year.

Beginning on October 2, 2011 — Respect Life Sunday — Catholics across the nation will join together to witness to the inherent equality and transcendent value of every human being.

In countless liturgies and events we will give thanks to God for the gift of human life, and pray for his guidance and blessings on our efforts to defend the most vulnerable members of the human family.

We will voice our opposition to the injustice and cruelty of abortion on behalf of those victims whose voices have been silenced. At the same time, we will remind the living victims of abortion — the mothers and fathers who grieve the loss of an irrereplaceable child — that God’s mercy is greater than any human sin, and that healing and peace can be theirs through the sacrament of reconciliation and the Church’s Project Rachel Ministry.

The theme chosen for this year’s Respect Life Program is — “I came so that all might have life and have it to the full.” In this brief explanation of his mission (cf. John 10:10), Jesus refers both to our hope of eternal life, to be restored through his death and resurrection, and to our life in this world.

By following Jesus’ new Commandment of unselfish love, our lives can be richly fulfilling, and marked by joy and peace. In contrast, treating continued on Page 14
The New Evangelization

In my previous column I reflected on the Church’s mission of evangelization. The work of evangelization moves us to proclaim Jesus Christ. It is “the vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity,” according to Pope Paul VI in his foundational apostolic exhortation, “On Evangelization in the Modern World.”

The focus of evangelization efforts certainly include the mission “ad gentes,” that is, to those parts of the world where Christ has not yet been proclaimed, nor his Church well established. But the work of evangelization which is particularly urgent in our time and place is what Pope John Paul II began to refer to frequently as “the New Evangelization.”

Many people today are nominally Christian or nominally Catholic. They claim to believe but act as if God does not exist. They compartmentalize their faith, as if it permitted only to Sundays or certain religious exercises. Their faith has little or nothing to do with the way they live their lives each day. Though they have not formally rejected Christ or his Gospel, the lives of many Catholics are being shaped far more by the conventional values of the secular culture than by the liberating truth of the Gospel and the teaching of the Church.

Rather than evangelizing the culture, that is, shaping the culture according to the truth, beauty and goodness of the Gospel, many Christians are being “evangelized” by the anti-Gospel values which the culture espouses.

The faith of believers in our post-Christian culture needs to be reawakened. This is our challenge! “You are the light of the world.” (Mt 5:15). The Church is in the world to bear witness to Christ. “Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father.” (Mt 5:16). Many Catholics shy away from their responsibility to become evangelizers. Perhaps they misunderstand their role.

While each and every member of the Church has a proper part in the evangelizing mission of the Church, some as pastors, parents or catechists, all are called to be witnesses to Christ. “Preach the Gospel always, and use words when necessary.” This, saying, attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, reminds us that the witness of a holy and virtuous life is the most effective and compelling evangelizing influence. This is the lesson that the saints teach us! Holy men and women will bring the world to Christ and renew his Church.

The challenge of the New Evangelization urges us to find new and effective ways of bearing witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is not a new Gospel which we present, of course, but new approaches, new methods and modes of presenting the Gospel which will be understandable and compelling to people in the 21st century. This is our task. This is our mission. This is also why I have spent so much time in previous columns emphasizing the universal call to holiness. We cannot give what we do not have. It begins with us. The evangelizers must themselves be fully evangelized. Our faith must be reawakened and set aflame. Our witness and efforts in the work of the New Evangelization will be fruitful to the extent that we are aflame with the love of Christ. “The love of Christ urges us on!” (2 Cor 5:14)

Archbishop Coakley’s Calendar

The following events are part of Archbishop Coakley’s official calendar:

- **Sunday, October 9** - Our Lady of Fatima Celebration, St. Joseph Church, Bisson, 3 p.m.
- **Tuesday, October 11** - Archdiocesan Department Heads, Catholic Pastoral Center, 10 a.m.
- **Tuesday, October 11** - Mass at Catholic Pastoral Center, 11:30 a.m.
- **Tuesday, October 11** - Archdiocesan Finance Council, Catholic Pastoral Center, 2 p.m.
- **Wednesday, October 12** - Priests Council, Catholic Pastoral Center, 9:30 a.m.
- **Wednesday, October 12** - Archdiocesan Personnel Board, Catholic Pastoral Center, 11 a.m.
- **Wednesday, October 12** - Mass and Dinner with University of Central Oklahoma Students, 6:30 p.m.
- **Thursday, October 13** - Mass and Classroom Visits, Rosary School, 9:15 a.m.
- **Friday, October 14** - Saturday, October 15 - Board of Directors Meeting, Conception Seminary College, Conception, Mo.
- **Sunday, October 16** - 50th Anniversary Mass, Diocese of San Angelo, Texas
- **Tuesday, October 18** - Thursday, October 19 - USCCB Subcommittee on Home Missions, El Paso, Texas
- **Friday, October 21** - Sunday, October 23 - Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, Southwest Lieutenancy Meeting, San Antonion, Texas
Archbishop Tells Rally Life Worth Fight, Prayers

By Traci Chapman

OKLAHOMA CITY — Life is worth fighting for. It is also worth praying for, and that is what 40 Days for Life is all about, said Archbishop Paul S. Coakley.

"With 40 Days for Life we stand up for life — this truly shows the transformation of society through individual conversion," he told a crowd that gathered at Christ the King Church for a special Sept. 25 rally held to kick off the annual event.

"In a world that does not value marriage, these people give us hope," Rigazzi said. "They have made the commitment and the sacrifice to love as Christ would have us love.

"These people show us by their commitment to the sacrament of marriage that it can be done and done well."

El Arzobispo Pablo Coakley invita a las parejas casadas que estén celebrando su aniversario especial de (25, 40, 50, 60) el presente año 2011 para que asistan a la Misa Especial de Aniversario el día 6 de noviembre de 2011, iniciando a las 3:00pm en la Catedral de Nuestra Señora del Perpetuo Socorro, 3214 North Lake Avenue, Oklahoma City. Después de la Misa habrá una recepción. Es muy importante que si usted desea asistir por favor contacte a la Oficina de Vida Familiar al 405-721-8944. El Arzobispo impartirá su bendición y la comunidad local se alegará en su ejemplo y compromiso al Sacramento de Matrimonio.

Archbishop Coakley speaks at the 40 Days for Life rally.
EDITOR’S NOTE: The following is the homily given at the Sept. 24 Red Mass by Archbishop Joseph F. Naumann, D.D., Archbishop of Kansas City, Kan. The Red Mass was celebrated at the Cathedral of Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Oklahoma City. A legal professor, Paul S. Coakley was the principal celebrant.

I am grateful to Archbishop Paul Coakley for his kind invitation to preach this Mass. Bishop Coakley actually grew up in the Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas, received his undergraduate degree from the University of Kansas in Lawrence, and became a priest of the Diocese of Wichita and then Bishop of the Diocese of Salina. He has made a powerful mark on the Catholic community of Kansas. We Kansans take a special pride in all the good the Lord is accomplishing through Archbishop Coakley’s remarkable ministry. He is a bishop for whom I personally have great esteem and respect: for his prayerfulness and his own personal striving for holiness, for his firmness and clearness in teaching the truth of the Gospel, for his gentleness and compassion. Archbishop Coakley, if you ever long for the sunflowers of Kansas, I brought a pair of ruby slippers you can click to come home.

I accepted this invitation in part because of my high regard for Archbishop Coakley and my desire to help and support his pastoral work. I accepted also because of my respect and esteem for the legal profession and its importance to our culture and society. I also wanted to come and pray that the Sooners will take mercy on our poor Jayhawks this year!

A couple years ago at our Red Mass in Kansas City, the cantor fell and broke her leg as she missed a step while leaving the Sanctuary. The Cathedral staff called 911. The cantor was taken out of the Cathedral on a stretcher. I was quite open about the importance of his Christian faith, being asked by a member of the media if it was an abuse of his celebrity as an athlete to attempt to influence the belief of others by speaking so frequently about Christ and the Gospel. This very successful athlete responded: “I am not trying to tell you or anyone else what you should believe. However, if you ask me what motivates me to play to the best of my abilities, to strive for excellence, to get involved with community charities, to care deeply about teammates and to be devoted to my wife and family, I cannot explain myself without speaking about Jesus Christ and what His love has done to me.”

What a beautiful testimony of the integration of faith into one’s personal and professional life.

As Christians we are compelled to show great respect to our co-workers, our clients, and even our adversaries, because each has a special claim upon us. Their claim on our energy and even our adversaries, because each has a special integration of Life

It is this integration of life that our Gospel reminds us of this evening. The Gospel makes clear that it is not enough to profess our obedience to the Lord with our lips, but to ignore His desires by our actions.

In my Confirmation homilies to young people, I remind them as baptized, confirmed Catholics we represent Jesus Christ in the world. Others will come to believe in Jesus or not believe in Him based on how we represent Him. Through our Baptism we claim to carry the very life of Jesus Christ within us. We call ourselves accurately the Body of Christ. If others see in the Body of Christ actions that are inconsistent with the teaching of Jesus, it becomes very difficult to believe in the words of Our Savior.

Every Christian is called to live a life of integrity — where what we profess with our lips corresponds with the manner with which we conduct our lives. This obviously applies to your chosen profession — the practice of law.

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The enaction of just laws and good public policies is important as is the proper and fair administration of the law. In many ways, a good legal system is what holds together a culture and a society.

In the play, A Man for All Seasons, based on the life and letters of the patron for lawyers and statesmen, the 16th century English saint, Thomas More, there is a poignant scene in which Thomas More has a lively discussion with his son-in-Law, William Roper. Roper advocates defying the unjust laws of Parliament. Thomas More asks the question: “Son, Roper, when you cut down all the laws — and you are just the man to do it — and the devil turns around upon you, what will you use to protect yourself — all the laws being laid to?"

While human laws by their nature are imperfect, because their architects are imperfect, they still have the ability, even with their flaws, to shelter and protect the poor and the weak. In our zeal to reform even unjust laws, we must be careful not to throw out the good with the bad by undermining the authority and force of all the law which serves to protect the vulnerable.

In the 1950s and 1960s, we saw the power and effectiveness of peaceful civil disobedience to bring about much needed social change. Yet, with the ensuing urban riots in our nation in the late 1960s and 1970s, we saw how difficult it is to preserve the discipline of non-violence once the principle that law can be disregarded is put in motion. Civil disobedience, and always non-violent civil disobedience, must be the method of last resort. Whether trying to gain equal rights for a segment of society suffering discrimination or protection for the most fundamental rights — the right to life of the unborn, we undermine our objective of legal protection if we diminish a proper respect for the law.

V

Natural Law

The founders of our nation, in part as a result of their experience of the religious divisions that plagued post-Reformation Europe, fashioned a constitution that sought to protect freedom of religious expression by guarding against a state religion. At the same time, the founders shared a common faith in God that was based upon the Judaeo-Christian heritage of western civilization. Clearly, they did not want the state or its agents to be engaged in the work of making disciples for any particular denomination or religion. Yet, a broad understanding of religious freedom was central to the founders’ vision for our nation. In our nation today, there is a serious effort to reduce and limit greatly this appreciation for religious freedom.

I want to return to the matter of the religious divisions that plagued post-Reformation Europe, fashioned a constitution that sought to protect freedom of religious expression by guarding against a state religion. At the same time, the founders shared a common faith in God that was based upon the Judaeo-Christian heritage of western civilization. Clearly, they did not want the state or its agents to be engaged in the work of making disciples for any particular denomination or religion. Yet, a broad understanding of religious freedom was central to the founders’ vision for our nation. In our nation today, there is a serious effort to reduce and limit greatly this appreciation for religious freedom.

In the Declaration of Independence, we find stated quite explicitly the notion of certain inalienable or God-given rights. These were what the founders considered fundamental human rights that the state has no power to grant or take away, but which it does have the obligation to protect.

While these rights certainly are found and upheld in Christian revelation, it is not necessary to be a Christian to understand and respect these most basic of rights. They are available to us through human reason. They were not first written in the Bible or the Scriptures of any other religion, but upon the human heart.

In philosophy, they make up what is termed the Natural Law. We do not need a statute to tell us that it is wrong to steal another’s property, to strike and harm an innocent person or to shed another’s blood. Our civil laws do not create the right to life, but are obligated to protect this most fundamental of rights. Our democratic society depends in part on the acknowledgment and respect for these fundamental or inalienable rights which do not depend upon the state. In recent years, there has been a growing relativism that seeks to deny that there is any objective truth. One of the earliest accounts of a moral relativist in literature can be found in the dialogue between Pontius Pilate and Jesus as recorded in St. John’s Passion narrative. Jesus states that He has come to proclaim the Truth. Pilate, who is trying to find a way to placate an angry mob demanding the death of a man he knows to be innocent, responds: What is Truth?

We see an illustration of the consequences of this denial of fundamental truths upon which the inalienable rights, so important to our founders, in the decisions of our Supreme Court more than 38 years ago that stripped legal protection of the right to life for the youngest and most vulnerable. We see another more recent example of the consequences of the denial of fundamental truths with a couple of state high courts choosing to redefine something as basic and fundamental as marriage upon which the health of the family and society depend.

VI

The Tyranny of the Majority

Pope John Paul II in his Encyclical Letter, Evangelium Vitae - The Gospel of Life, noted the irony that the very democratic societies that were instrumental in the promotion of a refined appreciation for human rights are now the very place where some of the most fundamental of rights are under attack:

“...This is what is happening also at the level of politics and government: the original and inalienable right to life is questioned or denied on the basis of parliamentary vote or will of one part of the people — even if it is a majority. This is the sinister result of a relativism which reigns unopposed: the ‘right’ ceases to be such, because it is no longer firmly founded on the inviolable dignity of the person, but is made subject to the will of the stronger part. In this way democracy, contradicting its own principles, effectively moves towards totalitarianism. The State is no longer the ‘common home’ where all can live together on the basis of principles of fundamental equality, but is transformed into the tyrant State, which arrogates to itself the right to dispose of the life of the weakest and most defenseless members, from the unborn child to the elderly, in the name of public interest which is really nothing but the interest of one part.” [20]

VII

The Tyranny of Relativism

Democracy, when it becomes untethered from objective truth,
Red Mass

continued from Page 5

becomes the tyranny of the majority against the weak. Pope Benedict in his address this past week to the German Parliament, recalled Germany’s own tragic history of the tyranny of a democratically elected government. In March, 2004, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, whose Prefect at the time was Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, promulgated a Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding The Participation of Catholics in Political Life. The Congregation identified relativism as the reason for democratic societies becoming disconnected from fundamental moral truths.

“A kind of cultural relativism exists today, evident in the conceptualization and defense of an ethical pluralism, which sanctions the decay and disintegration of reason and the principles of the natural moral law. Furthermore, it is not unusual to hear the opinion expressed in the public sphere that such ethical pluralism is the very condition of democracy. As a result, citizens claim complete autonomy with regard to their moral choices, and lawmakers maintain that they are respecting this freedom of choice by enacting laws which ignore the principles of natural ethics and yield to ephemeral cultural and moral trends, as if every possible outlook on life were of equal value. At the same time, the value of tolerance is disingenuously invoked when a large number of the same case could be made, but is not; because religion speaks about the equal dignity of every human being, regarding public policies on abortion or marriage is the assertion to uphold the right to life of an unborn child or the commonly held understanding of marriage by diverse cultures for millennia is the imposition of religious belief upon others.

The same case could be made, but is not; because religion speaks about the equal dignity of every human being, regarding public policies that prohibit racial discrimination or segregation are the imposition of religious beliefs.

The fact that the great religions, who give guidance to their adherents regarding fundamental issues of human rights, do not make laws upholding these basic rights an imposition of religious beliefs. To follow this line of thinking to its logical conclusion, we would not be permitted to have statutes prohibiting stealing, assault rape or murder.

There is an obvious difference between religious support for fundamental human rights and efforts to impose belief in specifically religious doctrine as in the case of our belief in Jesus as the Son of God or Catholic belief in the Eucharist as the Real Presence or Muslim belief in Mohammed as the Prophet.

IX

Attack on Religious Freedom and Conscience Rights

In recent months, there has been a growing effort to restrict religious freedom and the rights of conscience to the much more narrow understanding of the freedom to worship. This has become particularly clear in the broad mandate given by the Health Care Reform to the Department of Health in Human Services in defining what basic health services insurance companies and health care institutions are obligated to provide. Recently, Health and Human Services issued a mandate that would force all health plans to provide contraception and sterilization, including so-called contraceptives that can be used to effect a chemical abortion.

The religious exemption allowed in the mandate is so narrow that it would not cover hardly any insurance plans for Catholic employers. The effect of the mandate would be to force most Catholic entities to quit offering health care coverage, forcing employees to go into government plans. Similarly, it will result in either the closure of Catholic health care institutions or coercion to compromise Catholic moral teaching, or in other words to no longer be truly Catholic.

We must be vigilant in guarding a broad understanding of religious liberty as well as conscious protection in our nation. As Edmund Burke observed: All that is necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing.

X

Conclusion

As we gather tonight, we invoke the wisdom of the Holy Spirit to guide and direct everyone involved in the legal profession as you execute your responsibilities as legislators, judges and servants of the law. Even more, we call upon the Holy Spirit to inspire each one here tonight in your efforts to integrate your faith and your professional and civic responsibilities. May the Holy Spirit empower you to use your talents in the service of the common good and in particular for the benefit of the poor, the weak and the vulnerable? May this same Holy Spirit help each of us to do our part to ensure that our freedom is always properly tethered to the truth? May tonight re-energize each of us to be witnesses of truth as well as defenders of human life and dignity!
Mass of Thanksgiving Oct. 30 for JPII

On May 1, 2011, Pope Benedict XVI beatified his beloved predecessor, Pope John Paul II, at Rome in a ceremony witnessed by hundreds of thousands who came for this memorable event. Even from the hour of his death in 2005, the faithful who traveled to Rome to participate in his funeral rites began to cry out for his beatification and canonization: “Santo Subito!”

The memorial of Blessed John Paul II will be observed annually in Poland and in the Diocese of Rome. However, the Congregation for the Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments has given permission for the diocesan bishops to authorize a day for a special Mass of Thanksgiving in honor of Blessed John Paul II to be celebrated within a year of his beatification.

With this letter I am authorizing this Mass to be celebrated in all of the parishes of the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City on Sunday, Oct. 30 (and its vigil) using the proper Mass texts and readings.

Please join me in Celebrating Mass and reflecting on the legacy of Blessed Pope John Paul II.

With every good wish, I am

Sincerely yours in Christ,
Most Reverend Paul S. Coakley
Archbishop of Oklahoma City

Eucharistic Adoration Around the Archdiocese

Perpetual Adoration, 24 hours a day/year round
St. Monica Parish - 2001 N. Western, Edmond
St. Joseph Parish - 421 E. Acres Street, Norman
St. Andrew Parish - 800 NW 5th Street, Moore

Sunday 2:30 to 5 p.m.
Wednesday 6:30 to 10 p.m.
Friday 7 a.m. to 5 p.m.

St. Francis Xavier Parish - 110 N. Madison Street, Enid
Monday 7 a.m. to 6:30 p.m.
Christ the King Parish - 8005 Dorset Drive, Oklahoma City
Monday Noon to 10 p.m.
Sacred Heart Church - 208 S. Evans Avenue, El Reno
Wednesday 9 a.m. to 12 noon
Cathedral of Our Lady Cathedral - 3214 Lake Ave., Oklahoma City
Wednesday 11 a.m. to 8 p.m.
St. Charles Borromeo Parish - 5024 N. Grove Ave., Oklahoma City
Wednesday 7 a.m. to 7:30 p.m.
St. Eugene Parish - 2400 W. Hefner Road, Oklahoma City
Wednesday 6 p.m.
St. Mary Parish - 125 E. Street, Ardmore
Wednesday 6:30 to 7:30 p.m.
St. Francis of Assisi Parish - 610 W. 9th Street, Newkirk
Thursday 8:30 a.m. to 8 p.m.
Daily M,T,W,F 8:30 to 9:30 a.m.
Epiphany of the Lord Parish - 7336 W. Britton Road, Oklahoma City
Thursday 6:30 to 7:30 p.m.
Sacred Heart Parish - 627 12th Street, Alva
Thursday 5 p.m. to midnight
St. Gregory Monastery - 1900 W. MacArthur, Shawnee
Thursday 6 p.m.
St. Philio Neri Parish - 1107 Felix Place, Midwest City

Friday 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.
Prince of Peace Parish - 1500 Falcon Road, Altus
Friday 8:30 a.m. to 7 p.m.
St. Peter Parish - 1220 N. Quinn Street, Guymon
Friday 6 to 7 p.m.
Holy Cross Parish - 14 W. Francis, Madill
First Friday Mass and Adoration 8 a.m.
St. Vincent de Paul Parish - 123 S. 9th Street, McLoud
First Friday 11 a.m. to noon
First Saturday 8:30 to 9:30 a.m.
St. Benedict Parish - 632 N. Kickapoo Ave., Shawnee
First Friday Benediction 5:30 p.m.
St. Francis of Assisi Parish - 1901 NW 18th Street, Oklahoma City
First Friday 8 a.m. to 6:30 p.m.
Holy Angels Parish - 317 N. Blackwelder Ave., Oklahoma City
First Friday 8:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.
St. Mary Parish - 707 E. Ponca Avenue, Ponca City
First Friday Benediction 5:30 p.m.
St. John Nepomuk Parish - 600 S. Garth Brooks Blvd., Yukon
First Friday 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.
St. Peter and Paul Parish - 309 S. Main Street, Kingfisher
First Friday 6 to 7 p.m.
St. Teresa of Avila Parish - 1576 N. Tim Holt Drive, Harrah
First Friday 7:30 p.m.
St. Ann Parish - 8492 State Highway 17, Elgin
Saturday 6 a.m. to Sunday 9 p.m.
Sacred Heart Parish - 2706 S. Shartel Ave., Oklahoma City
Third Sunday 7 p.m.
Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish - 220 N. A Street, Sterling
2011 Birth Choice Walk for Life

Several hundred people turned out Oct. 2 for the Birth Choice Walk of Life event held in Oklahoma City, while more than two dozen participated in the El Reno Birth Choice walk. The events help raise money for the pro-life organizations that are heavily supported by the Oklahoma Catholic community.

A family affair: Kat Jackson of St. Andrew Parish, Moore, walks with her children at this year’s Birth Choice walk.

In El Reno, Birth Choice volunteers Daisy Weisenburger and Kay Dyer sign up walkers, from left, Micki Chronister, Suzanne Clem and Mary Brinkley. Walkers raised more than $1,300 for the event held in downtown El Reno.
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Video Education Classes Set

A presentation on the new Translation of the Roman Missal will be given by Father Stephen Bird on Sunday, Oct. 23 at 2:30 p.m. The Catholic Pastoral Center and the parishes of St. Peter in Woodward, Holy Family in Lawton, St. Francis Xavier in Enid and St. Mary in Clinton will host the presentations through the video-conferencing facilities.

A presentation on “Respect Life,” focusing on human trafficking danger, will be offered on Sunday, Oct. 30 at 2:30 p.m. Speakers will be Margie Solis, Catholic Charities Immigration Services, and Cindy Garcia, Latino Agency, who will speak about what is trafficking and where it exists in Oklahoma. Speakers will explain how to recognize it and what is being done about it. Resources and visas for women who have been victimized will be discussed. The presentation will be in Spanish.

Communion Minister Training in Spanish will be led by Father Don Wolf, pastor of St. Benedict of Shawnee, on Friday, Oct. 28 at 8 p.m. Lector Training in Spanish will also be offered on Friday, Oct. 7 and 21 at 8 p.m. Father Don Wolf, pastor of St. Benedict of Shawnee, will lead the training.

These presentations are free. Registration is requested for attendance by calling the site coordinators, Bea Parker, Enid, (580) 257-0812, Peggy Kitchens, Woodward, (580) 256-2966, Geri Hough, Clinton, (580) 323-0345, Vickie Gable, Lawton, (580) 355-2054, and Cecilia Grimes, Pastoral Center, (405) 721-4208.

Advent Reflections will be offered Nov. 27 in English and Dec. 4 in Spanish, to be led by Father Bill Pruett, St. James, and Father Roberto Quant, Sacred Heart, both of Oklahoma City. The Reflections will be held at 2:30 p.m. at the video conferencing locations.

Holiday Blues: Dealing with Grief and Loss will also be held on Wednesday, Dec. 4 at 10:30 a.m. This session will be lead by Monica Palmer, associate director of Clinical Services of Oklahoma City.

For a complete listing of the upcoming presentations, please contact Becky Van Pool at (405) 523-3003, 1-800-375-8514 Ext. 1110, or Sister Diane Koorie at (405) 721-4208. This series is provided by Catholic Charities Parish Outreach and Program Development and the Pastoral Ministry Office.
Monsignor to Address Death Penalty

OKLAHOMA CITY — A press conference and Community Roundtable will be held by the Oklahoma Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty (OCADP) in unity with hundreds of organizations around the globe for the Ninth World Day Against the Death Penalty on Oct. 10, 2011, at the state Capitol, Room 419C, from 1 to 3 p.m.

Monsignor Edward Weisenburger, V.G., will be speaking to the press along with Dr. Stan Basler, Oklahoma Conference of Churches, Dr. Susan Sharp, Oklahoma University, and Kenny Fikes, co-chair of the Oklahoma Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty.

Following the press conference, OCADP co-chair Lydia Gill Polley will facilitate the Community Roundtable discussion on participants’ responses to these speakers’ statements and the general public attitude about the death penalty. The World Coalition’s focus will be on the inhumanity of the death penalty with topics about the worldwide trend toward abolition, inhumane executions and conditions on death row, the dehumanizing process that it can carry out an execution even with significant doubt about the guilt of Troy Davis. For more information on worldwide observances, visit www.worldcoalition.org.

School to Host ‘Catherine of Siena’

OKLAHOMA CITY — Bishop John Carroll School, 32nd and Western, is sponsoring the one-woman play, Catherine of Siena: A Woman for Our Times. The acclaimed production will be held in the Connor Center at The Cathedral of Our Lady of Perpetual Help on Saturday, Nov. 19.

In this drama, Adrian Dominican Sister Nancy Murray (the older sister of actor Bill Murray) gives a wonderful and inspiring portrayal of one of the Catholic Church’s most influential women, St. Catherine of Siena.

Sister Nancy Murray has the ability to capture the audience with her energy and excitement about the program and want to get involved. “Children need a safe place to go where they will not only be safe and happy, but have fun and learn new things,” says Jeanne Weaver, St. Mary’s parishioner and program coordinator. A corporate volunteer from Valero, a local corporation in Ardmore, says, “I think this is a great program, just great. This isn’t about us; it’s about them, the kids. We should be honored that they let us be here.” Local businesses serve lunch and volunteer with the children.

Tabetha Scasta, program coordinator, said, "It's an honor to be here, each year we gain more volunteers and more kids." Catholic Campaign for Human Development grants help fund programs, like the Communities in Schools program, which are focused on improving communities and empowering participants. With this funding, Communities in Schools, along with many other programs, are able to form programs that benefit people of all ages, ethnicities and backgrounds.

The Catholic Campaign for Human Development is the Catholic Church’s domestic anti-poverty program. For nearly 40 years CCHD has helped to make long-term changes in the economic condition of communities. CCHD supports programs that are aimed at breaking the cycle of poverty. The annual collection, to be held on Nov. 19 and 20, gives local grants to help parishes throughout the Archdiocese provide social ministry programs. For more information about Communities in Schools or other possible grant opportunities, contact Becky VanPool, Archdiocese Director, CCHD, at cchdoklahoma@gmail.com or (405) 523-3003.

Ardmore Parish Helps Support Community Project

ARDMORE — The halls of the vacant parish school at St. Mary's Parish in Ardmore were filled this summer with the laughter and work of 262 students enrolled in the Communities in Schools summer program and its 54 AmeriCorps volunteers and three paid staff members.

The Communities in Schools program is an example of one of the 10 local grants that Catholics in Oklahoma funded through the Catholic Campaign for Human Development. Seven parishes received grants which will address the needs of the poor and vulnerable through parish social ministry projects through the Archdiocese. Grants were awarded to parishes in Woodward, Ardmore, Shawnee, Norman and Oklahoma City.

St. Mary Parish in Ardmore sponsors Communities in Schools, which provides kids a structured program that gives them both a safe environment and an opportunity to learn something new every day and to make new friends. The program builds self-worth and self-esteem. During the school year, program volunteers help children with their homework and coordinate community resources such as fire safety and dental health. St. Mary's Parish makes a positive and direct impact on many families in Ardmore through sponsorship and direct involvement.

The entire Ardmore community, as well as St. Mary parishioners, are excited about the program and want to get involved. "Children need a safe place to go where they will not only be safe and happy, but have fun and learn something new every day and to make new friends," said, Lydia Gill Polley.

Before school is out, students take part in the CCHD program. Students take part in the CCHD program.

Students take part in the CCHD program.
LAWTON — On Saturday, Oct. 15, Birth Choice of Lawton will host its second annual “Sweetness of Life” poker run starting at Saints and Sinners Tattoo Shop, 2621 N.W. Cache Road, Lawton. Registration starts at 8 a.m. and first bike out is at 8:30 a.m. Cost of the ride is $25 for riders and $10 for passengers. A poker run is a motorcycle ride, but all vehicles are welcome. Last year more than 80 riders and passengers took part and raised nearly $5,000.

During the ride, each participant plays a game of 5-card stud poker against all the other riders. During the ride, participants will start in Lawton, where each rider will pick their initial card and get it marked on their score sheet. The route will then continue to Walters, Waurika and Duncan before returning to the Birth Choice Center, 5108 W. Gore. At each stop they will draw another card. The highest hand will be rewarded with a prize. Highlights of the ride are sweets such as cookies and brownies at each stop, as well as a beautiful ride through Waurika Lake and over Waurika Dam providing a panoramic view over the lake and surrounding area. This stunning ride and treats combine to focus on the purpose of the fundraiser, the Sweetness of Life!

The Lawton Birth Choice Center has been serving the Lawton/Fort Sill community for over 30 years. The organization exists to encourage pregnant women to choose the gift of life for herself and for her unborn baby. Birth Choice of Lawton is completely volunteer-run, from the director to each of the individual staff members, who gladly give of their time weekly, totaling well over 2,000 hours of time last year.

Birth Choice provides free pregnancy testing and free counseling regarding the development of the baby. However, sometimes counseling is required to assist a woman or a couple to make the decision toward life. Birth Choice also assists families with babies in crisis situations, with goods such as maternity clothes, diapers, formula and baby clothing. Staff members also aid clients with other resources available in the community. In these hard economic times, many more families are requiring more Birth Choice services.

LAWTON — The new Birth Choice headquarters Archbishop Paul S. Coakley blessed recently in Lawton was a “prayer answered,” according to the new director of the Catholic-dominated pro-life effort.

Rosalia Jaume took over as director of Birth Choice in Lawton about three months ago. She said the organization was in desperate need of a larger space to work. Volunteers had helped pregnant women and their children for 20 years out of a small office, and with the need in the area growing on what seemed like a daily basis, the new home could not have come at a better time.

Parishioners at Holy Catholic Church who operate a medical imaging company in Lawton provided the new space to Birth Choice. The new headquarters is located at 5108 W. Gore Blvd.

“No only did they donate the office space to Birth Choice,” said Jaume (pronounced How May), “they have also donated an ultrasound machine.”

Jaume said she saw a notice in the Holy Family bulletin announcing the need for a Birth Choice director. She said immediately she knew God was calling to her.

“I have always been pro-life and I was so happy that I could help Birth Choice and help save babies,” she said.

Like all Birth Choice centers, Jaume said more volunteers are always welcomed. She said currently 10 volunteers help at the center. Most are from Holy Family, while one is a parishioner at Blessed Sacrament and two are Protestant.

The Lawton Birth Choice Center is open Monday through Thursday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. and Saturday from noon to 2 p.m. The phone number is (580) 248-3110.

Archbishop Paul Coakley blesses the new Birth Choice office in Lawton as Father Joe Ross, right, assists. In the inset, Birth Choice director Rosalia Jaume holds an infant, surrounded by volunteers.
Elizabeth Lofties Named School Educator of the Year

At the recent Fall Teacher In-Service Day at the Catholic Pastoral Center, the Catholic Foundation awarded its 2011 Archbishop Paul S. Coakley Catholic School Educator of the Year award to Elizabeth Lofties. Elizabeth is a fourth-grade teacher at St. Charles Borromeo Catholic School in Oklahoma City. She has taught for 29 years in Archdiocesan Schools and the last 22 years have been at St. Charles. Her constant preparation, grading, consistent communication with parents and ability to teach meaningful lessons to her class make Elizabeth a dedicated and loving classroom teacher.

Her classroom style includes students’ projects such as electronic slide show presentations and a gecko multi-week experiment, while keeping a constant rigor in core subjects. Elizabeth understands that learning is individual and her teaching style is adaptive to each student. She served last year as the “Administrator in Charge” when the principal was away from the building. She has been the school’s yearbook sponsor for 29 years and serves on the Textbook Review Committee.

Elizabeth is exemplary in her commitment to her faith by action and words. She is a role model to her students and teaches them to treat all with respect. Her nominator says, “She makes great decisions, gets positive feedback from her faculty peers, demonstrates excellent commitment to Catholic education and is a beacon of consummate professionalism.”

Annually, the Catholic Foundation of Oklahoma utilizes its discretionary funds to support educational programs including the Catholic School Educator of the Year Award along with the Religious Educator of the Year Awards. Applications were narrowed down to three finalists from which the Foundation Committee selected an ultimate award winner. The 2011 finalists were Suzanne Lewis, junior high language arts teacher at Christ the King School, and Deborah Bergman, kindergarten teacher at Sacred Heart School, Oklahoma City.

The award winner receives a $500 award and her school receives a $5,000 grant from the Catholic Foundation and a recognition in her honor at her school. The finalists also receive a $500 award.

Finalist Suzanne Lewis is the junior high language arts teacher at Christ the King School. With a bachelor’s degree in English from OU and a master’s degree in Curriculum and Instruction, Suzy has taught the last eight years of her 33-year teaching career at Christ the King School. Her love for the students she teaches shows in the time she spends preparing and planning her lessons. She is committed by arriving early, taking on many extra duties and working to make the school environment a wonderful learning experience for her students and a great work environment for her fellow teachers. She coordinates the students who present the daily announcements for the entire school and makes the changes to the outdoor marquee sign. She sponsors the National Junior Honor Society Chapter. Her nominator concluded that “Mrs. Lewis is truly a Master Teacher whose energy and asssm for her work has not diminished over time. She is truly a gift and a blessing to all.”

Finalist Deborah Bergman is a kindergarten teacher at Sacred Heart Catholic School in Oklahoma City. Deborah has taught in Catholic schools for 13 years with the last eight years being at Sacred Heart. She is passionate about teaching and provides the best for her students. She has high expectations for student learning and achievement and helps her students accomplish their goals in a fun and nurturing way. She is a life-long learner by attending continuing education courses and freely shares her time and many gifts with her colleagues. In her 13 years as an Archdiocesan teacher, Deborah has only been absent eight days. This past year, 16 of the 17 students in her class were English Language Learners. By the end of the school year all 17 students were reading books and were able to take Accelerated Reader comprehension tests on the computer.

All of the teachers nominated are superb examples of what Catholic teachers should be — living examples of what Catholic teachers are dedicated role models for their students and are all to be commended.
Javier Solis Named Religious Educator of the Year

Over the past eight years, the Catholic Foundation has recognized outstanding educators in the Archdiocese as an extension of its focus on education. The Foundation has awarded the 2011 Archbishop Paul S. Coakley Religious Educator of the Year Award to Javier Solis, Youth and Confirmation Catechist at St. Philip Neri Catholic Church in Midwest City. The award was presented at the Catechetical Congress on Sept. 17 at the Catholic Pastoral Center.

Javier works full time at Tinker Air Force Base. He received a bachelor of business administration in management at Texas A&M University in Kingsville, Texas, before coming to Oklahoma four years ago. Javier has taught every grade from seventh through 12th grade in St. Philip Neri's Religious Education program, has led Confirmation retreats, and attended the last two National and Regional Catholic Youth Conferences as a chaperone. Javier is active in his church as a member of the Knights of Columbus, a communion minister to the home-bound, a member of the parish's Social Justice Committee, and as a consistent participant at the parish's weekly Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. He also involves the youth of the parish in all of his activities. He successfully and seamlessly combines the catechesis in his classroom with teaching his students by example as well as by personal experience. His nominator says, "All of Javier Solis' actions reflect his devotion to the educational and spiritual development and formation of the people of our parish, regardless of age. He is a true witness to the Gospel message of Jesus Christ and is totally deserving of this award." He also completed all the requirements for his Advanced Certification in Youth Faith Formation in a little over a year.

The finalists for the 2011 Religious Educator of the Year Award include Kathleen Maher, high school Catechist at St. Mary Church, Ardmore, and Barbara Steelman, Sacramental Catechist at St. Francis of Assisi Church, Oklahoma City. These finalists were selected from nominees submitted earlier this summer and were interviewed in late August by the selection committee. The accomplishments and dedication of all three finalists made the choice of a winner an extremely difficult task.

Finalist Kathleen Maher is the ninth- and 10th-grade Catechist at St. Mary Church in Ardmore. Besides working her farm, Kathleen is a full-time administrative assistant at a nursing home management company in Sulphur. She has volunteered for the last 21 years as a Catechist at her parish, teaching in the third, fourth and sixth grades and as a Confirmation Catechist before moving to the ninth- and 10th-grade level.

Currently Kathleen teaches the "Old Testament" one year and the "New Testament" the following year so students leave her class with a good knowledge of the Bible. She recognizes the various learning styles of her students and plans activities around the needs of her students. Kathleen is president of the St. Mary's Women's Club, is a lector at Mass, sings in the choir, is a monthly Sacristan and ushers when needed.

Finalist Barbara Steelman has been the second-grade Sacramental Catechist at St. Francis of Assisi Church in Oklahoma City, along with being the second-grade teacher at Rosary School for the past 15 years. She reflects the great qualities of a children's educator. She is very conscientious and devoted to helping her students prepare to receive the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist. She makes sure they understand the materials and the prayers, she involves the parents through parent meetings, has activities such as making banners and rosaries, and emphasizes the children's good attendance in the program.

Norman Walkers Turn Out to Support St. Vincent de Paul

NORMAN — A group of dedicated people walked together in a symbolic gesture to “Walk a mile in my shoes,” the theme for this year’s fundraiser for St. Vincent de Paul Society’s Annual Friends of the Poor Walk. This was the fourth year that the South Central Conference organized a walk, and over 250 people gathered at All Saints School here to support the annual event. The walk as well as a silent auction raised more than $35,000 for the district’s five conferences or parishes.

Father James Goins led the walkers in prayer and encouragement in their commitment to helping the poor. He applauded the efforts of the Vincentians and their direct community involvement assisting the poor with food, clothing, furniture and money for utility bills. Michael McInerney, chairman of this year’s event, stated, “It was a great surprise to have the turnout of supporters. There were so many donors that made this event a success.”

The Society offers tangible assistance to those in need on a person-to-person basis. Last year the Oklahoma South Central District Council of St. Vincent de Paul distributed $282,000 to needy families and individuals, helping 12,980 people.
promote a selfish and demeaning view of human sexuality, by extolling the alleged good of sexual activity without love or commitment. This view of sex as "free" of commitment or consequences has no place for openness to new life. Hence contraceptives are promoted even to young teens as though they were essential to women's well-being, and abortion defended as the "only "choice" for sex outside marriage and all FDA-approved contraceptives fail. And fail they do. Studies report that most women seeking abortion are using contraceptives in the month they became pregnant. Again and again, studies show that increasing access to contraception fails to reduce rates of unplanned pregnancies and abortions.

Both these trends — a distorted view of sexuality and a disdain for the role of religion — are exhibited by the Department of Health and Human Services' recent decision on the "preventive services" to be mandated in virtually all private health plans under the new health care law. The department ruled that such mandated services will include surgical sterilization and all FDA-approved contraceptive drugs and devices — including the abortifacient drug "ella," a close analogue to the abortion pill RU-486.

The decision is wrong on many levels. Preventive services are aimed at preventing diseases (e.g., by vaccinations) or detecting them early to aid prompt treatment (e.g., screening for diabetes or cancer). But pregnancy is not a disease. It is the normal, healthy state by which each of us came into the world. Far from preventing disease, contraceptives can have serious health consequences of their own, for example, increasing the risk of acquiring a sexually transmitted disease, such as AIDS, increasing the risk of breast cancer from excess estrogen, and of blood clots that can lead to stroke from synthetic progestins. Providing such contraceptives shows neither respect for women's health or freedom, nor respect for the consciences of those who do not want to take part in such problematic initiatives.

The "religious employer" exemption offered by the department is so extremely narrow that it protects almost no one. Catholic institutions providing health care and other services to the needy could be forced to fire their non-Catholic employees and cease serving the poor and vulnerable of other faiths — or stop providing health coverage at all. It has been said that Jesus himself, or the Good Samaritan of his famous parable, would not qualify as "religious enough" for the exemption, since they insisted on helping people who did not share their view of God.

All these misguided efforts to foster false values among our youth, to silence the voice of moral truth in the public domain, and to deprive believers of their constitutionally-protected right to live according to their religious convictions, must be resisted by education, public advocacy, and above all by prayer.
Calendar

OCTOBER

11 Catholic War Veterans (of any war/Conflict) will meet the second Tuesday of each month in the community room of St. Ann Retirement Center at 7 p.m. For more information, contact Father M. Price Oswalt at (405) 567-3404.

12 Learn the Sympto-thermal Method of Natural Family Planning with, Jeanne Blasi, certified instructor, on Wednesday night, Oct. 12, Nov. 9 and Nov. 30 at 7 p.m. at St. John the Baptist Church, 9th and Boulevard, Edmond. You must register for the class online at www.celi.org.

12 Catholic War Veterans USA. Oklahoma Memorial Post 168 meets every second Wednesday of the month at 7 p.m. in the Sunnylane Family Reception Center located at 3900 S.E. 29th St. in Del City. For more information, contact Ken at (405) 739-0636 or er by email at OklaPost168 Cox.net.

13 The Catholic Woman's Activities Club, a club made up of women from all parishes, is a group who enjoys programs on Gardening, Music, Civics and the Arts. We meet on the second Thursday of each month at noon from September through May in the Patio Room of Epiphany of Our Lord Church (7338 W. Britton Road). All Catholic women are invited to join us. For more information, call June at 608-0232 or Pearl at 524-3841.

14 Bingo Night at St. Joseph's Church in Norman. Light supper served at 6:30 p.m. Games begin at 7 p.m. with a first session; second session at 8:30 p.m. $5 per session, no limit on blackout cards, group photo of all the winners.

15 The Lay Missionaries of Charity, the Secular (Lay) Order of Blessed Teresa of Calcutta meet at St. John the Baptist Parish, Edmond, on the first and third Saturday of each month beginning with Holy Mass at 7:30 a.m. in the chapel. For more information, contact Toni Harrelson, LMC, at (405) 341-2199 or tmoklahoma@sbcoxglobal.net.

15 Aging Gracefully, a series for seniors, their children and caregivers, begins on Saturday, Oct. 8 and ends on Oct. 22 at St. James Church, 4201 S. McKinley, from 10 a.m. to noon. The topic of the first session will be Medical and End of Life Issues: Palliative Care, the Church's Teaching and Pastoral Care. A panel led by Dr. Dianne Gasbarra, Mary Diane Steltenkamp and Father Bill Pruett will present the topic with questions to follow. Don't miss this opportunity to become more informed about these pertinent issues. To register or for more information, please call the Office of Family Life at 721-8944. There is no cost for the program.

16 The Community of the Secular Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mt. Carmel and St. Teresa of Jesus - Oklahoma Community and Province of St. Theresa meets at St. Joseph Carmelite Monastery in Piedmont from 1 to 4 p.m. For more information, call Susan Staudt at (405) 282-6624 or Sister Silvia Negrete at (405) 232-7926.

16 The Secular Franciscan Order of St. Francis Fraternity meets at 1:15 p.m. at St. Anthony's Hospital Chapel. For more information, call Jim Dishrow at 830-8688.

17-25 Monthly Novena to The Infant Jesus, the 17th-25th of each month. Nine days of novenas to Infant Jesus of Prague monthly. During these nine days, the novena prayers will be as follows: Monday-Friday following noon Mass, Saturday following 6 p.m. Mass, and Sunday following 11 a.m. Mass. National Shrine of the Infant Jesus of Prague located at St. Wenceslaus Catholic Church, 304 Jim Thorpe Blvd. in Prague. (405) 567-3080 or www.shrineo infieldjesus.com.

20 TAP into FAITH! This month's topic: The Death Penalty with Father M. Price Oswalt. Single or married, ages 21-12. 8 p.m. talk, 8:45 p.m. Q & A. TAP into Faith is held at Lottinville's, located on South Kelley, just south of 15th in Edmond. We have a private room in back. For more information, call Mary Lacher at 401-4105.

21 Retreat - Entering the Heart of Autumn at the Red Plains Spirituality Center in Piedmont, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. In response to the longing our soul has for the Sacred, we are offering a contemplative fall retreat. The cost is $75 plus $25 deposit (non-refundable). Bring a sack lunch, outdoor jacket, journal and pen. To register, call Katrina at 321-8747.

22 Aging Gracefully, a series designed to help seniors, their children and other caregivers in the practical realities of growing older. This free three-part series meets from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. Saturdays, Oct. 8-22, at St. James the Greater Church, 4201 S. McKinley in Oklahoma City. For more information and to register, call the Office of Family Life at 721-8944.

Jobs Box

Director of Family Life, Marriage, and Respect Life

The Diocese of Tulsa currently seeks a Director of the Office of Family Life. The Director of Family Life will oversee the efforts of the Diocese of Tulsa in regard to building strong marriages and forming Catholic families. The Director of Family Life will also direct, oversee and implement all of the Respect Life initiatives of the diocese. Candidates should have a bachelor's degree in theology, marriage studies, family studies, counseling or a related field. A master's degree is preferred. Candidates should also have experience in marriage preparation, seminars related to marriage and family life, and pro-life and Respect Life ministries. Candidates must be practicing Catholics in good standing, and must support all of the teachings of both ecclesial and divine law. Candidates must also be able to form and inform through education and explanation the teachings of the Church in regard to marriage, family, and respect for human life. Send a resume and list of references to dcn.john.johnson@dioceseoftulsa.org.

Chapel Part-Time Position Available

Catholic Community Coordinator:

This position is for a civilian contractor and not a federal position. The Statement of Work, explanation the teachings of the Church in regard to marriage, family, and respect for human life. Send a resumé and list of references to dcn.john.johnson@dioceseoftulsa.org.

Chapel Part-Time Position Available Catholic Community Coordinator:

This position is for a civilian contractor and not a federal position. The Statement of Work, explanation the position and necessary qualifications for this job (average 20 hours per week), is available at the chapel weekdays. If interested, please pick up a Statement of Work at the chapel or download it from https://cs.eis.afmc.af.mil/sites-/1017/Tinker/Lists/Announcements/AllItems.as or if you are unable to access, you may request one from 72ahw.be.crewd/flow@tinker.af.mil. Please submit your résumé before Oct. 17. Once all resumes are collected, the applicants will be contacted to set up a time for an interview, valid applicants will be asked to formulate and submit a bid. The committee will score applicants and their bids on the basis of skills, education, experience, organizations/administrative ability and motivation, ministry-focus, people-focus, and whether reasonable/within budget and value received for the amount paid. Interviews/ demonstrations will be scheduled for Oct. 24 and 25 at the base chapel during duty hours. If you have any questions, please contact the chapel at 734-2111.

For up-to-date job listings, visit the archdiocesan website at www.catharchdioceseokc.org.
La Vida Importa: Personas con Discapacidad

Dice mucho sobre una sociedad cuando a un grupo de obstrucentes y genetistas una niña de 11 años que tiene que decirles que su vida vale la pena vivirla. Según The New York Times, “Sarah” contó a una sala colmada de especialistas médicos que a ella le gusta leer.

Matemática era difícil, pero se hace más fácil. Toca el clarinete en la banda de su escuela. Es una niña exploradora y tiña, y le gusta organizar. Por lo tanto su dormitorio está muy limpio. El año pasado ganó tres medallas en las Olimpiadas Especiales.

“Tengo tanta suerte de poder hacer tantas cosas”, concluyó. “Quiero que sepan, a pesar de que tengo síndrome de Down, está bien.”

¿Por qué sería necesario tal reunión? Porque muchos de estos especialistas, al igual que muchos otros en nuestra sociedad, han comenzado a pensar en los bebés como bienes materiales, como productos que los adultos crean para mejorar sus vidas. Y si el “producto” tiene fallas y excede el poder de corrección de la medicina, simplemente lo devolvemos. Trágica mente, la actitud de esos expertos tiene un peso enorme cuando las parejas se enfrentan a un diagnóstico de discapacidad en su hijo por nacer. En un intento de ofrecer a las parejas un pleno conocimiento de los posibles daños de salud y de aprendizaje, muchos especialistas presentan un panorama negativo de las perspectivas del niño. Y muchos instan a los padres a que consideren abortar, y así contribuyen a un hecho vergonzoso de que alrededor del 90 por ciento de los niños que nacen diagnosticados con síndrome de Down son abortados. Dada esta alta tasa de “terminación”, en el futuro será incluso menos probable que los padres y especialistas que los bebés puedan vivir personalmente el amor y la alegría que los niños con esa condición u otras discapacidades pueden llevar a su familia y comunidad.

Los niños por nacer diagnosticados con limitaciones físicas o mentales están particularmente en riesgo de ser asesinados porque el aborto está disponible legalmente en todos Estados Unidos, y muchas personas creen que los padres tienen “derecho” a decidir acabar con la vida de un niño por nacer que no cumpla con sus expectativas. Pero la amenaza a la vida de las personas con discapacidades no termina en el nacimiento. Los padres de niños con necesidades especiales, y los adultos con discapacidades que pueden buscar su propia atención médica, a menudo tienen que luchar por tratamiento médico que generalmente se da a alguien que no tiene una discapacidad manifiesta. Es como que las personas con discapacidad llevan la carga de probar al personal médico que es mejor estar vivo que muerto!

Y por supuesto, millones de estadounidenses que han gozado de una excelente salud y estado físico en la mayor parte de su vida tal vez descubran directamente en sus últimos años el prejuicio dominante en contra de dar tratamiento a quienes tienen habilidades mentales y físicas disminuidas. Asimismo, cuando la demencia le roba a un individuo la capacidad de una comunicación “coherente”, hoy día muchas personas consideran equivocadamente a esa persona prescindible. Esto debe cambiar.

En su encíclica El Evangelio de la Vida, el Beato Juan Pablo II identificó como el “centro del drama vivido por el hombre contemporáneo: el eclipse del sentido de la vida” (no. 21). De hecho, “perdiendo el sentido de Dios, se pierde el sentido de la vida” (no. 21). Con cuánta frecuencia nos recordó el Papa Juan Pablo II: “cada persona humana –sin importar lo joven o anciana que es, sin importar su salud, es discapacitada o está enferma, sin importar cuán útil o productiva sea para la sociedad– es un ser de inestimable valor creado a imagen y semejanza de Dios.”

Dramáticamente, en algunos aspectos nuestra sociedad ha hecho un progreso considerable en reconocer, aceptar y promover la igualdad de las personas con discapacidades. Del mismo modo, la ciencia médica ha encontrado curas, o al menos formas de aliviar, para algunas discapacidades, pero tanto las personas con ella pueden vivir su vida lo más plenamente posible mientras realizan aportes extra ordinarios a la sociedad.

Pero existen muchas tendencias preocupantes hoy que reflejan un temor y una incapacidad de abrazar a las personas con discapacidades como hermanos y hermanas. Nos estamos volviendo más utilitarios, menos compasivos, y menos generosos en hacer los sacrificios necesarios para tratar a todas las personas con dignidad y respeto. A menudo, se habla de quienes tienen discapacidades, los que están muy enfermos y los ancianos como cargas, y se evalúa su cuidado mediante un análisis de costo/beneficio que ignora su dignidad igual e inherente.

Considera a la famosa experta inglesa, Virginia Ironside, que anunció al aire al moderador sorprendido de un programa de debates televisivo: “Si yo fuera la madre de un hijo que sufre... sería la primera en querer ponerle una almohada en la cara.” A agregó que cualquier “madre que ama” se sentiría de esa manera. Y si asfixiara a su hijo, alegando que actuó por compasión, su asesinato quedaría impune, como pasó con otra inglesa en 2010. Aunque los hechos eran evidentes, un jurado absolvió a la madre de ayudar en el suicidio de su hija de 31 años, una hermosa joven que tenía síndrome de fatiga crónica. El juez de instrucción aplaudió el veredicto porque mostraba “ese sentido común, decencia y humanidad lo que hace que los juicios por jurado sean tan importantes en un caso de esta clase”. Perdonar a una madre por la muerte de su hija con términos como decencia y humanidad es quitarle a estas palabras todo su significado.

La tendencia a deshacerse de estas vidas refleja un temor de abrazar a las que implican un desafío a nuestro amor y generosidad, que perturban nuestros niveles de confort. Y es una medida de nuestro valor como personas cómo abrazamos ese desafío, según lo explica el Beato Juan Pablo II: “La medida de la civilización, una medida universal, perenne, que abarca todas las culturas, es su relación con la vida. Una civilización que rechace a los indefensos merecería el nombre de civilización bárbara, aunque lograra grandes éxitos en los campos de la economía, la técnica, el arte y la ciencia. No toda persona con una discapacidad puede hacer un aporte concretamente medible a la sociedad. Muchos simplemente necesitarán de nuestro cuidado y servicio. Pero al satisfacer esta necesidad, descubriremos una gran verdad. Las personas con discapacidades nos desafían a ser plenamente humanos y compasivos, a reconocer la presencia de Dios en cada ser humano. Esto nos exige sacrificarnos, a “extender nuestro corazón”, como dijo el Papa Benedicto XVI. Esto nos exige convertirnos gradualmente en más semejantes a Cristo, que después de todo es el objeto de toda vida cristiana.

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