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A Vote for Life

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This is a time of opportunity in the state of North Dakota. Right now, we have an opportunity to establish a culture of life in our state and even in our nation. Our state legislature voted last year to place a constitutional amendment on the ballot, which is often called the Human Life Amendment. For very good reasons, our lawmakers believed this constitutional amendment was needed to protect the laws that already offer many protections for women and unborn children. The legislators were concerned that these common sense laws would be overturned by individual judges, and they were right. Some of our pro-life laws have already been overturned, and others are at risk. That is why the Human Life Amendment will be on the ballot this November as Measure 1.

The language of Measure 1 is simple and completely consistent with our understanding of the dignity of all human life. It reads, “The inalienable right to life of every human being at any stage of development must be recognized and protected.” It would seem hard to argue with the simple, self-evident truth contained in those words. And, it is hard to imagine why such a clear affirmation of the value of life should be excluded from the constitutional principles that will shape our laws.

Although the proposed amendment is a legal statement, it is remarkably similar to the stated beliefs and teachings of the Church. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states, “Human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception.” (2270) And, the *Catechism* goes on to say, “The inalienable right to life of every innocent human individual is a constitutive element of a civil society and its legislation.” (2273) Moreover, within this past year, Pope Francis tells us that “a human being is always sacred and inviolable, in any situation and at every stage of development.” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 213) The wording of Measure 1 is eminently sensible, and deserves the support of all persons who respect the right to life.

There are some who oppose the passage of Measure 1 who have grossly misconstrued its meaning and its possible consequences. One of the most significant mischaracterizations is the assertion that Measure 1 would interfere with end of life care and advance directives. In fact, a group of elder care experts have made it clear that Measure 1 will not affect end of life decisions, and will actually strengthen a person’s ability to stop third parties from denying them the care they need. And, keep in mind that the bishops of North Dakota and the North Dakota Catholic Conference have publicly and vigorously supported advanced directives and patient directed end-of-life care. I can assure you that the bishops of our state would never support Measure 1 if we believed it would jeopardize the rights of the elderly, the ill or the dying. It seems to me that some of the opponents of Measure 1 are simply using scare tactics to divert attention from the actual language and the real purpose of this proposed constitutional amendment. The facts can be found on the website www.NDChooseLife.org. I hope you will take a few moments to read what it has to say.

Some might argue that the Church and its pastors, including this bishop, should stay out of politics and should not tell people how to vote. But, the right to life is more than a matter of politics. It is a matter of truth and moral principle. Political activity shapes public policy, which is the concrete expression of ethics and morality, and affects the lives of all of us. Public policy decisions are too important to be divorced from morality, and the Church has always tried to bring her understanding of the eternal truths to bear on the shaping of culture and public life. For centuries, the Church has worked in the public square for justice, peace, the dignity of workers and the rights of the poor, the sick, the unborn and the elderly. This moment in the history of our state is no different. As some try to diminish the dignity of human life and its protection, the Church reaffirms her constant teaching that all human life is sacred. Pope Francis himself tells us, “An authentic faith - which is never comfortable or completely personal - always involves a deep desire to change the world, to transmit values, to leave this earth somehow better than we found it.” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 183)

As people of faith, we have a responsibility to work for the common good, and this must undoubtedly include working for the protection of life, the most fundamental good of all. Will we allow outside forces to impose a culture of death upon our state? We have a chance to keep this from happening. Don't be afraid to stand up for life in a public way, and if you can, tell others about this important issue, or even volunteer to help with the campaign. Once again, this is a time of opportunity, and I hope you will join me in voting for Measure 1 this fall, so that our state of North Dakota might continue to move towards a culture of life.