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Office of the Bishop

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Human Life: The True, The Good, and The Beautiful
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Dear Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ and all people of goodwill,

In prayer, God prompted me in my role as your spiritual shepherd to provide clear Catholic teachings on spiritual and moral matters. I sensed I should focus on the True, the Good and the Beautiful, sometimes called the “transcendentals” as taught by our awesome Catholic faith. The True, the Good and the Beautiful proceed from God and “spill over” into everything He created. You might think of it this way:

- **The True** or truth is defined objectively as the conformity of the mind to reality (what is true as God knows it to be).
- **The Good** possesses a positive quality or perfection that renders something attractive or worthy of value.
- **The Beautiful** can be perceived with our physical senses, like sight, but also by our interior capacities and spiritual receptivity. Like a diamond, beauty can shine with brilliance, sparkle, and attract with radiance and splendor.

The True, Good and Beautiful are objectively present in all things God has created, and they transcend all other characteristics that one might consider. One such example is that every human person has an inherent uniqueness and dignity from the moment of conception until natural death because God created us that way when He gave us immortal souls. We know from the Book of Genesis God created us in His image and likeness (Gen 1:27). We in turn are to protect, promote and reverence every human life. We know that God is love (1 Jn 4:16) and that we were created in love, for love, and to share that love with Him and others. We love God, others and ourselves when we love as God loves. That is why all Catholics and people of goodwill are to protect, promote, and offer proper reverence to every human person, especially those who are vulnerable.

We are so blessed that God revealed in the Bible and in Tradition the miracle of the dignity of every human life from the moment of conception. When we are attentive to the truth, goodness, and beauty of the human person, we are grieved by the injustice of any disregard for the inherent dignity of every person, including the unborn in our country or other parts of the world. The dignity God gives by “stamping” His image upon every human person is a dignity given to all—it can't be diminished by anything, whether disability or any other circumstance. Recognizing and defending the dignity of every human life from the moment of conception is a pathway of heroic Godly love which seeks the good of the other and a pathway of great joy in God's love.

The human person participates in the light and power of the divine Spirit...capable of understanding the order of things established by the Creator...capable of directing himself toward his true good...[capable of finding] perfection “in seeking and loving what is true and good.” – Catechism of the Catholic Church 1704

Last month, our beloved country unfortunately marked 48 years since *Roe v. Wade*, the tragic Supreme Court decision that effectively legalized the abortion of unborn children. This court decision is a horrible stain on our nation's collective conscience and a serious offense against God and the inherent dignity of those who have been aborted. In reflecting on the spiritual and moral harm to human life, God has prompted me as your shepherd to ask all Catholics and people of goodwill to help protect, promote, and respect every human life at all stages of life. I

humbly ask your help in advocating for innocent souls to be given the dignity they inherently deserve. Through prayer, sacrifices, and education may we help others discover the objective truth, goodness and beauty of every life. I humbly ask all those in positions of authority over decisions regarding the taking of any human life to honor the inherent Godly dignity of every human and discontinue efforts of promoting or taking the life of another, especially the vulnerable, disabled, or disadvantaged—such as an unborn child.

As part of my spiritual and moral responsibilities as your bishop, I want to address the question of the autonomy of the pregnant mother, which is said by some to be absolute, even allowing her to make the choice to end her child's life. Along these lines, some in the world we live in use the language of "women's rights" or "healthcare rights," using these terms in a way that includes unrestricted access to abortion. While Catholic teaching upholds the values of autonomy and self-determination, it also understands that autonomy is not an absolute right without any other considerations. Rather such rights are inseparable from a conscience formed by truth (objective right understanding) so that it is ordered to do the good (objective right actions). If autonomy was not ordered by the truth of basic moral tenets, each person could make a moral law unto him or herself without consideration of others or the common good of society. This results in moral chaos and great physical, spiritual, and moral harm, in many ways not unlike the injustice of racism, slavery, and other tragedies experienced throughout history.

Yet we know, too, that moral principles, even if grasped, may not always be easy to follow because every human has disordered inclinations. With every disordered desire any of us may have we are asked to not give in to the disordered desire. Thankfully, we have God's help through grace to help us rise above any disordered thought, desire, or action. This relates to another idea common today. Some acknowledge that life begins at conception and that it is wrong to kill, but may say "hard cases" such as rape, incest, fetal abnormality, or danger to the life of the mother present ethical dilemmas and exceptions to the commandment God has revealed, "You shall not kill" (Ex. 20:13). Each of these may involve much suffering, which rightly calls for compassion from any and all of us. Rape and incest are very serious crimes that victimize a woman and blaspheme the sexual act, which is a sacred gift from God. And yet, our Catholic faith teaches that one injustice is never healed by another but can lead to additional injustices and harm. Wounds of trauma are never restored by the taking of an innocent child's life who is not in a position to defend their own God-given right to life. Our faith reminds us that it is precisely into such woundedness that Christ desires to enter with his healing compassion and love. May women in such difficult circumstances know of their great worth, and that of their children!

Regarding fetal abnormalities—a term that might encompass a range of disorders—we are likewise invited to heroic love (charity). Children who have "abnormalities" might not live long outside the womb, or even fully develop *in utero*. But whatever their disability, their God-given dignity is never diminished nor should it be compromised by another's choice. Can we think that such children are unworthy, unlovable, or somehow outside of God's creation? No. Such children are great gifts, given to help those of us blessed to know and have such people in our life, to move us to compassion, kindness, and generosity, to move us beyond our own desires to serve someone in need. I thank God for the gift of my disabled uncle Donnie and those with special needs like Thomas and Billy who have taught me how to love as God loves by seeking the good in them rather than focusing on my wants and desires.

Finally, the teachings of our beloved Catholic faith have always protected the health of the mother and the sanctity of her life in addition to the sanctity of the life of the child. In difficult cases where the life of the mother is at risk, operations, treatments, and medications that directly treat the health condition of the mother may be used, but direct killing of an unborn child is a serious offense against God and is never a treatment of a health condition. Other permissible options exist and must be used. It is my hope and prayer that heroic mothers, fathers, and healthcare workers in these situations discern among such options and find strength and wisdom in Christ! It is also essential that those in authority in our country—including lawmakers, clergy, and medical professionals—and all of us, especially us Catholics, humbly defer to the judgment of God on the inherent dignity and sanctity he gave to human life. May we always forgive those who have taken the life of another and help those who have committed such acts to lovingly understanding that they are loved by God and they can be forgiven for taking a human life if they repent of their action and seek God's forgiveness and healing. Rather than attempting to justify harming, killing, or defiling any human being at any time, may we be ambassadors of God's love and goodwill for life.

Please join me in prayer asking God for a great outpouring of His grace (His spiritual help for humans) so everyone may discover the Truth, the Goodness and the Beauty of every human as God created them to be! Let us also support the heroic role of mothers, fathers, and others who protect the inherent and inalienable right to life of all, including those with disabilities and genetic abnormalities.

In the love of God for you and all human life, know of my prayers,



Most Reverend Donald E. DeGroot
Bishop of Sioux Falls

Additional Resources to assist in understanding or explaining our Catholic Faith on Human Life

1. If civil laws fail to protect the unborn, the state is denying the equality of all before the law. (Catechism 2273)
2. Human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception. (Catechism 2270)
3. Freedom is the power, rooted in reason and will, to act or not to act, to do this or that, and so to perform deliberate actions on one's own responsibility. By free will one shapes one's own life. Human freedom is a force for growth and maturity in truth and goodness; it attains its perfection when directed toward God, our beatitude. (Catechism 1731)
4. As long as freedom has not bound itself definitively to its ultimate good which is God, there is the possibility of *choosing between good and evil*, and thus of growing in perfection or of failing and sinning. This freedom characterizes properly human acts. It is the basis of praise or blame, merit or reproach. (Catechism 1732)
5. The more one does what is good, the freer one becomes. There is no true freedom except in the service of what is good and just. The choice to disobey and do evil is an abuse of freedom and leads to “the slavery of sin.” (Catechism 1733)
6. [Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services](#), 6th Ed., Part Four, Issues in Care for the Beginning of Life.
7. USCCB, “[Distinction Between Direct Abortion and Legitimate Medical Procedures](#)”
8. Summary Statement of Ethicists of the NCBC, “[Early Induction of Labor](#),” National Catholic Bioethics Center
9. “[T]here is an everyday heroism, made up of gestures of sharing, big or small, which build up an authentic culture of life....Part of this daily heroism is also the silent but effective and eloquent witness of all those brave mothers who devote themselves to their own family without reserve, who suffer in giving birth to their children and who are ready to make any effort, to face any sacrifice, in order to pass on to them the best of themselves. In living out their mission these heroic women do not always find support in the world around them....We thank you, heroic mothers, for your invincible love! We thank you for your intrepid trust in God and in his love.” (St. John Paul II, [Evangelium Vitae](#) 86)
10. “The moral and spiritual strength of a woman is joined to her awareness that God entrusts the human being to her in a special way.” (St. John Paul II, [Mulieris Dignitatum](#) 30)
11. “[We] should adhere to the highest standards of self-respect and respect for others by embracing, safeguarding and promoting human life until natural death. At work here is a *contemplative gaze* that beholds in one’s own existence and that of others a unique and unrepeatable wonder, received and welcomed as a gift. This is the gaze of the one who does not pretend to take possession of the reality of life but welcomes it as it is, with its difficulties and sufferings, and, guided by faith, finds in illness the readiness to abandon oneself to the Lord of life who is manifest therein.” ([Samaritanus Bonus](#), Part I. Care for One's Neighbor)