

FROM THE ARCHBISHOP

Every life must be respected, loved

Last week when I visited my doctor for routine tests, I was ushered into a cubicle to change. A small sign on the wall reads: "If you are pregnant or think you may be pregnant, inform the technologist prior to the exam. Safety measures can be taken to ensure the protection of your unborn child."

The sign made me very happy because of the phrase "*the protection of your unborn child.*" Those are the right words, for the right reasons. Everything must be done to protect an unborn child.

I rarely have an emotional reaction to television commercials, but there is one that gets me every time. A real-life pharmacist for a national chain explains that it is important for family members to help their elderly loved ones understand the intricacies of Medicare and prescription options. Once he suggested to an elderly customer that she speak with her family about these matters, but when tears welled up in her eyes he realized that she was alone and had no family. He took her under his wing and became her "son."

I react emotionally to that commercial because it reminds me of my own mother just a few years ago, as her mind and body began to fail. Once sharper than any of her kids, in the last few years of life she needed help to navigate everything from insurance forms to grocery shopping. I will always be grateful to my sisters who lived close by and dedicated much of their time to her. They cared for her gracefully and lovingly, as every child should care for an elderly parent.

There is truly no question about what God thinks of us, his children. Each of us is of incomparable value to



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him, and he loves each of us with infinite love. Even when we turn away in sin, even when we ignore him, even if we are ignorant of him, he loves us. Old or young, sick or healthy, poor or wealthy, famous or unknown, brilliant or average, friend or enemy, guilty or innocent, each of us is his beloved, his jewel. Because we are precious to him, he teaches us through his Son Jesus to love another with his love, as he loves.

Life is God's gift

It has been the constant teaching of the Church that life begins at conception. In fact, it was not the birth of Jesus that was first announced by an angel — it was his conception in the womb of Mary! From the beginning, Christians sharply distinguished themselves from the cultures that surrounded them by rejecting abortion and infanticide. It would have been inconceivable to profess that we are made in God's image and likeness and then snuff out a human life.

October is traditionally observed as Respect Life Month by the Catholic Church in the United States, a time when we reinvigorate our awareness that life is God's gift, that it is sacred, and that we are beloved to him from

conception to natural death and all the way to eternity. Our proud pro-life stance impels us to work for an end to abortion both near at home and across the globe, and it challenges us to examine whether we respect our own lives and the lives of others — whether we mirror God's love, God's fidelity and God's own respect for life by the way we live.

The vast spectrum of God's love begs for complete expression in unbounded solidarity with every human person — not only family and friends, but also those whose names we will never know and those who die too young to have been given a name. Our Heavenly Father knows them all. Every hair of their heads has been counted.

Life-giving alternatives

We vehemently oppose abortion, embryonic stem cell research and euthanasia because they snuff out the gift of life. The Gospel and church teaching form a prism which sheds light on all life issues — including the evil of abortion, our care of the elderly and terminally ill, capital punishment, the plight of refugees and immigrants, human rights, the care of the poor, justice and peace, and the moral formation of children, just to mention a few of those issues.

The church sponsors and collaborates in a wide range of pro-life activities which offer help and comfort to pregnant mothers, provide life-giving alternatives to abortion and lend a healing hand to mothers and fathers who have discovered that a legal choice for abortion left their lives deeply scarred. We also sponsor and promote outreach

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You may send it to him at Archbishop Sartain's Prayer List, Archdiocese of Seattle, 710 Ninth Ave., Seattle, WA 98104.

to the poor, the homeless, the sick, the uninsured, refugees and immigrants, adoptive parents, the imprisoned, the handicapped and mentally ill — all of whom are beloved to God, all of whom have a claim on us because we are disciples of the Lord Jesus.

Catholic Community Services and the extensive network of Catholic health care institutions in Washington are a critical and necessary part of our respect-for-life outreach — for whenever we honor and strengthen the gift of life, whenever we care for the poor and sick, we care for Christ himself. They are extensions of the bedrock Catholic stance that life is sacred from the moment of conception — and continues to be sacred for every moment of life, up to natural death.

God created us, knows us and loves us. As we observe Respect Life Month, may his grace open our eyes to see as he sees each and every one of his beloved. And may he strengthen each marriage, each family and each human person.

My doctor's office has it right: Every measure must be taken to ensure the protection of an unborn child. And every measure must be taken to respect and love every life from the moment of conception to natural death.