

seemingly minor everyday ways, we tear away at the Body of Christ. And when we act this way in front of our children, the family ceases to be a school of love.

That is what family is meant to be: a haven of unconditional love, acceptance, affirmation and consolation, where children learn by modeling their parents to accept others and love generously, to share with and care for those in need. It is a place to learn humility and mercy, to learn to imitate Christ. Like the saints, we can learn to love others sacrificially by recognizing our own weaknesses and littleness, and by begging God to transform us.

It's not just selfishness that makes it difficult to put others' needs and lives ahead of our plans. We fear losing control over the plans that we think will make us happy and fear not having time to do the things that give us pleasure now. The irony is that lasting happiness in this life is found in giving of oneself generously to others, loving gratuitously and seeking nothing in return. The mother of a child who is ill can't help but be moved to comfort her baby through the night, to suffer with him. The son of an elderly parent with dementia can't help but respond with patience and affirmation to the often repeated stories, questions and fears. Those who love need no other reward beyond the happiness they feel in knowing they have brought comfort to another person.

Through prayer and through the celebration of Mass and the Sacraments, we can know and love God better. With his help, we can be more aware of the needs of those around us and open our hearts to all human life. After all, the focus of the New Evangelization isn't on memorizing doctrines. It's about learning to live our Christian life fully and bringing Christ's love, alive within us, to all we meet.



Open your hearts to life!



SECRETARIAT OF PRO-LIFE ACTIVITIES
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
3211 Fourth Street NE, Washington, DC 20017-1194
Tel: (202) 541-3070 Fax: (202) 541-3054
Toll-free order number: (866) 582-0943
Website: www.usccb.org/prolife



Scripture quotations, unless noted, are taken from the New American Bible with Revised New Testament and Revised Psalms © 1991, 1986, 1970 by the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, D.C., and are used with permission. All rights reserved. Pope Francis © Corbis Images. All rights reserved. Baby in utero © iStockphoto. All rights reserved. Mother and baby courtesy of D'Arcy Wills. All other photos © Veer. All rights reserved. Models used for illustrative purposes.

“Open your hearts to life!”

has been a favorite theme of Pope Francis and one that has particular urgency today, as the “culture of death” is gaining an ever wider foothold.

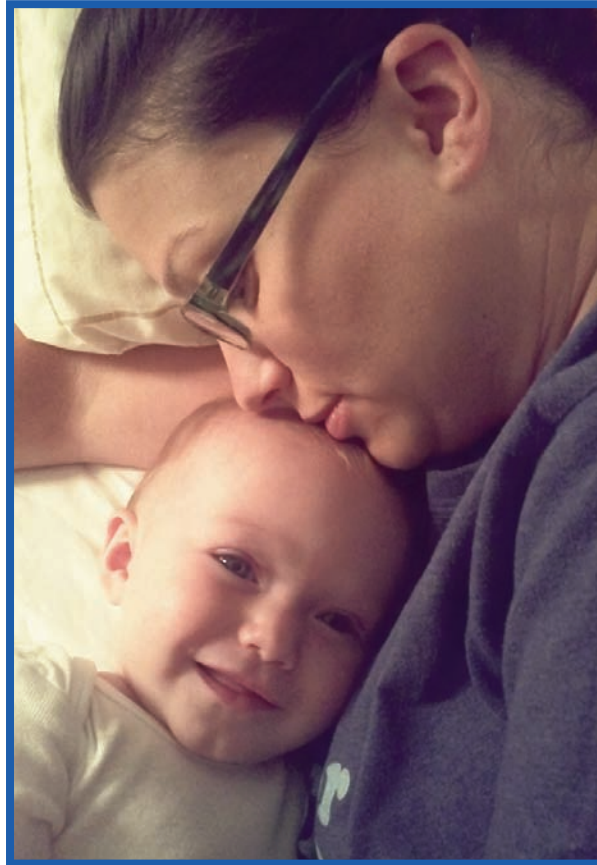
Some may think the phrase “culture of death” is too grim or too exaggerated because, on the surface at least, ours looks like a culture of fun and pleasure. Most Americans are living comfortably, indulging in a tantalizing array of food and drink, and entertaining themselves with high-speed Internet and hundreds of cable channels. And among many young singles, casual sexual encounters are the norm.

We live in a culture dedicated to maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain or inconvenience.

No less than the U.S. Supreme Court has told us that it is our choice to live as we wish—letting nothing and no one stand in our way, including the child who may be growing in her mother’s womb. In upholding legal abortion for any reason or none, the Court declared in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*: “At the heart of liberty is the right to define one’s own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life.”

But when “liberty” leads to the doorstep of Kermit Gosnell and other abortion practitioners who have been in the news, we are forced to confront our culture’s real views about human life.

Although it seems to have fallen out of fashion today, there is, in fact, a way of defining a concept of existence, meaning and human life that has worked exceptionally well for individuals and society wherever it has been tried. Jesus Christ explained this concept in his every word and every action: Our origin and our destiny is God, our Father, who loves



each of us with an infinitely tender and merciful love. The mystery of human life is that we—every one of us—are precious to God even as we are—weak and sinful. As Pope Francis has pointed out more than once, God our Father never stops loving us and never tires of forgiving us. At our least sign of remorse, he fills us with his consolation, peace and hope.

Opening our hearts to life means that we reject the killing of human beings from the moment of conception to their natural death—by abortifacient “contraceptives” and abortion, in destructive embryo research and IVF procedures, by denying life-saving treatment to those with disabilities, and by “hastening death” of the elderly and dying in assisted suicide and euthanasia. Opening our hearts to life means opposing the death penalty, as well as slavery, human trafficking, terrorism and unjust war, and that we work to eradicate the conditions that prevent our brothers and sisters from realizing their full human potential.

To open our hearts to life, however, we must first overcome every tendency to reject people and the demands they make in our daily lives. The culture of death begins and flourishes in a culture of rejection. It begins with seeing oneself as the person whose ideas, interests and wishes should prevail over those of others, even when it will cause them lasting harm. A dramatic but all too common example is the single man who fathers a child, but wants nothing to do with the mother or his baby. Today, unmarried women account for 85% of abortions, and 41% of all children are now born to single women.

Nearly all of us are sometimes guilty of rejecting those who get in the way of our plans or make us feel insecure. We may honk with impatience at the driver in front of us or speak abruptly to a colleague who is slow to learn new skills, and perhaps use harsh words at home when a spouse or child forgot to do a promised task. In all these