



## Respect Life 2017

Archbishop Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap.  
October 12, 2017

*"There are times we may doubt the value of our own lives or falter at the thought of welcoming and embracing the life of another. But reflecting on the healed wounds of the Risen Christ, we can see that even our most difficult trials can be the place where God manifests his victory. He makes all things beautiful. He makes all things new. He is the God of redemption . . .*

*"Building a culture of life isn't something we just do one month of the year, or with one event or initiative – it's essential to who we are. It happens through our daily actions, how we treat one another, and how we live our lives."*

*Timothy Cardinal Dolan*

*Chairman, USCCB Committee on Pro-Life Activities*

*October 2017*

American Catholics mark October each year as "Respect Life Month." Reverence for the sanctity of the human person starts with a defense of the unborn child. The right to life is foundational. Without it, all other rights and all other discussions of justice and human dignity are built on sand. No other issue or collection of issues can eclipse the priority of the fundamental right to life from conception to natural death.

But being "prolife" involves a great deal more than working to end obvious evils like abortion and euthanasia. The poor, the infirm, the disabled and the strangers among us also have a claim on our discipleship. And I'll mention two examples.

Here's the first example: In the United States we live at a time of intense confusion and debate about immigration. And "immigration," as one of many pressing national issues, too often gets stalled in polemics. This obscures the personal suffering of otherwise innocent deportees with no criminal record, and the social cost of fractured immigrant families at the local level.

Moreover, millions of persons have been dislocated in recent years by war and poverty, and they're on the move globally. Wealthy nations have a right to secure their borders and protect their citizens and

societies, but they also have a grave duty to help and to welcome migrants as generously as possible. Pope Francis has called for a “Share the Journey” campaign ([www.sharejourney.org](http://www.sharejourney.org)) to sensitize people of good will to the scope of today’s migrant crisis, and to encourage Christians – as individuals, parishes, dioceses and charitable organizations -- to reach out to assist immigrants and refugees in need.

This is vital work, and a special week of prayer for migrants and refugees is going on right now through October 14. But the effort is just beginning, and a good, simple place to start in understanding the Church’s approach to the migrant crisis is *Welcoming the Refugee and Migrant*, an excellent pamphlet beautifully produced by Catholic News Service and available in parish packets from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops at <http://store.usccb.org/Welcoming-the-Refugee-and-Migrant-p/7-579.htm>.

Here’s the second example: One of the communities that best embodies the full, Catholic, holistic approach to the “respect life” cause is the Little Sisters of the Poor. These are extraordinary religious women who dedicate their lives, not surprisingly, to serving the aged and the poor. They’re a blessing to all and a threat to no one – unless you’re a federal agency determined to impose an unneeded and vindictive contraceptive coverage mandate on nearly all U.S. businesses and non-profits as part of the nation’s health plans. This is exactly what happened to the Little Sisters during the Obama administration, triggering a sardonic *Wall Street Journal* editorial of support for the nuns, titled “Little Sisters of the Government.” The fight over the mandate, with resistance led, in part, by the Little Sisters of the Poor, has consumed massive amounts of time and resources for the past several years.

On October 6, at White House’s direction, the Department of Health and Human Services issued interim rules that will finally allow moral and religious exemptions to the contraceptive mandate that the nuns have fought all along on the grounds of their Catholic beliefs. This is good news. But the struggle isn’t over; the matter is still in the court system. And abortion-friendly “progressive” groups have already filed lawsuits to challenge any easing of the mandate.

As the *Wall Street Journal* noted in yet another editorial, this one on October 9 (“A Nun’s Right to Choose”): “That so many resources in government and so much litigation are necessary to allow nuns to practice their faith is a testament to the toxic identity politics that corrodes American life.”

The moral of the story: Respect for human life comes in all forms of witness. And that’s a glory of our Catholic faith.