

NCPD Board: Resolution on Defending and Celebrating the Culture of Life

We the directors of the National Catholic Office for Persons with Disabilities (NCPD) reaffirm our commitment to promote the culture of life. We also underline the necessity and expectation that each member of our network of diocesan leaders understands and carries out their responsibility in consistently celebrating the gift of all human life.

We have heard the call of John Paul II in his 1995 encyclical, *The Gospel of Life*, in which he affirms:

We are facing an enormous and dramatic clash between good and evil, death and life, the "culture of life" and the "culture of death." We find ourselves not only "faced with" but necessarily "in the midst of" this conflict: we are all involved and we all share in it, with the inescapable responsibility of choosing to be unconditionally pro-life. (No. 28)

Therefore, we call upon all of those involved in ministry with our brothers and sisters of all ages and of every category of disability within the Roman Catholic Church in the United States to unite in promoting the culture of life. We recognize disability and vulnerability as a normal, anticipated reality of the living process. In sharing this truth, we can allay society's fears and alleviate misjudgments about the quality of a life lived with disabilities. We stand in opposition to abortion, infanticide, direct and indirect euthanasia, assisted suicide, capital punishment, and every form of violence and abuse against human beings. While advocates for the culture of death play on society's growing abhorrence of dependency and disability, we can demonstrate the power of vulnerability as a catalyst for building community. While they manipulate words, offering a false sense of dignity and an empty choice, with both resulting in death, we offer life in a loving community. It is incumbent that those within the NCPD network add our knowledge, compassion, and experience to the debate.

We are acutely aware of the many dangers faced by people with disabilities or advanced age in the current climate of death. Many who seek the final solution of assisted suicide do so because of depression and fear of dependency and abandonment. Expectant parents are counseled to abort a less than perfect child. Some children born with disabilities are left to die without benefit of medical care, nutrition, or hydration. Health care systems intent on cost containment and assuring "quality of life" deny needed medical services. People with mental retardation or mental illness who are accused of committing a violent crime are often convicted, incarcerated, and sometimes sentenced to death without benefit of an adequate and appropriate defense. Rather than succumbing to these evil practices, we must educate the public that life with disabilities and fragility is a gift to be shared within an accepting and loving environment.

The NCPD network of outreach, accommodation, welcome, and inclusion offers alternatives to these many forms of "final exit" championed by the culture of death. Those who value God's gift of life and who can share their positive experiences of physical, sensory, and cognitive disabilities are powerful allies in the struggle to promote

the culture of life. Our accounts can quiet the anxieties generated by the advocates of death. We urge diocesan leaders to create understanding and awareness of the gifts which all people offer to our total church and community, no matter their disabilities. In so doing, we can counter the evil campaigns of proponents of death which demean and devalue the potential and promise of each of us.

Approved by NCPD Board of Directors

March 28, 1998