



# Catholic Diocese of Victoria

Office of the Bishop

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Dear Brother Knights,

In response to the State Council's request that I provide a reflection on the question of the Sanctity of Human Life, I would say that we as Christians recognize that all life is a gift from God and that it is sacred: *"Human life must be respected because it is sacred. From its beginning human life involves the creative action of God and it remains forever in a special relationship with the Creator, who is its sole end."* (Compendium to the Catechism # 466).

It is for this reason that we are called to respect life at all stages from conception to natural death and every step along the way "from the womb to the tomb", as the saying goes. Because God gave us the gift of life, we are called to recognize its sacredness and treat each other accordingly. We are also obliged to act as stewards of creation that he has provided us with, so to live out our lives in fruitful and life-giving ways: *"God freely confers being and life on everything that exists. Man and woman, created in his image and likeness (cf. Gen 1:26-27), are for that very reason called to be the visible sign and the effective instrument of divine gratuitousness in the garden where God has placed them as cultivators and custodians of the goods of creation."* (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church #26).

In the Diocese of Victoria, we have established a new ministry called the Office of Justice and Life, to work together with parishes, diocesan groups and parish based communities, to help promote the Catholic Church's teaching on social justice relative to integral human development as a central aspect of the proclamation of the Gospel. The genesis of this mission can be found in the writings of the Holy Father in *Caritas in Veritate*:

*Openness to life is at the center of true development. When a society moves towards the denial or suppression of life, it ends up no longer finding the necessary motivation and energy to strive for man's true good. If personal and social sensitivity towards the acceptance of a new life is lost, then other forms of acceptance that are valuable for society also wither away. The acceptance of life strengthens moral fiber and makes people capable of mutual help. By cultivating openness to life, wealthy peoples can better understand the needs of poor ones, they can avoid employing huge economic and intellectual resources to satisfy the selfish desires of their own citizens, and instead, they can promote virtuous action within the perspective of production that is morally sound and marked by solidarity, respecting the fundamental right to life of every people and every individual (no. 28, 4).*

The approach to Justice and Life is based on the understanding that Catholic Social Teaching and Human Rights relative to reverence for human life are, in reality, concerned with human development and are integral to one another—it is all about the human person. In recent years the Church has emphasized this fact through its Magisterium and challenged the People of God to work for integral human development at all levels, including human rights, social justice, environmental and economic concerns.

*One of the most striking aspects of development in the present day is the important question of “respect for life,” which cannot in any way be detached from questions concerning the development of peoples. It is an aspect which has acquired increasing prominence in recent times, obliging us to broaden our concept of poverty and underdevelopment to include questions connected with the acceptance of life, especially in cases where it is impeded in a variety of ways. (no.28, 1)*

The challenge before us as a Diocese is to develop a dynamic, enthusiastic approach to all questions concerning human development.

A temptation we face is that sometimes we can become too single minded on just one of the many issues that we are up against when speaking about life. We need be reminded that in essence, working towards the good of the human person includes all of the various stages of life. *“By means of her social doctrine, the Church shows her concern for human life in society, aware that the quality of social life — that is, of the relationships of justice and love that form the fabric of society — depends in a decisive manner on the protection and promotion of the human person, for whom every community comes into existence.” (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church #81)*

In conclusion, I wish to express my deep gratitude for the work of the Knights of Columbus at the local level all the way to the international level, in support of the Sanctity of Human Life. The Knights of Columbus continue to provide a strong witness to the Gospel of Life, which is so timely and necessary for our country.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Richard Gagnon". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Most Reverend Richard Gagnon  
Bishop of Victoria