



DIOCESE OF ROCKVILLE CENTRE  
OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

February 22, 2020  
Feast of the Chair of St. Peter

My dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

I am happy to be able to send you greetings as you gather together at St. Ladislaus Church to begin this important campaign of “40 Days for Life” in our Diocese. I am very grateful to all of you who have been so active in the defense of Human Life in these challenging times when the Culture of Death is in an all-out at war with the Culture of Life.

It was just over a year ago, on January 22, 2019, the 46<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, that Governor Andrew Cuomo of New York signed into law the “Reproductive Health Act”, which he himself called “the most aggressive” abortion law in the country at that time. It was then “celebrated” by his lighting up One World Trade Center in New York and the Alfred E. Smith Building in Albany. This law should shock the conscience of every person.

The Reproductive Health Act allows for abortion on demand with no restrictions throughout the entire term of pregnancy. This means that an abortion may be performed on a full-term infant even as the mother is going into labor. This law endangers conscience protections, and can be used to force doctors, nurses and other medical staff to perform or to assist in abortions against their beliefs. Governor Cuomo claims that this law protects women’s rights when, in fact, it endangers the lives of women by allowing non-physicians to perform abortions, and it removes any objective standard of care due to the patient. The act has also removed criminal penalties when an unborn child is deliberately targeted for death in a crime.

However, the most shocking provision of this appalling act repeals protections for infants who are accidentally born alive during the course of a failed abortion. This amounts to infanticide, the killing either by direct means or by neglect of an infant who is living outside the womb. Who among us would ever have thought that we would see such an evil passed law in our state or in our country?

Our nation was founded on the principle that every person is created equal, and “that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” These are the words of the Declaration of Independence, and our Founding Fathers placed the “Right to Life” first in that list because it is primary, and is the right from which every other God-given human right flows. When the Right to Life is attacked or denied, all other rights and liberties are imperiled. It is our obligation as citizens and as Catholics, to be well informed and to make our voices heard in the public square when evil and injustice threaten the Sacred Gift of Life at any stage.

One year ago, I wrote to the people of the Diocese and asked that you do three things: First, that you stay informed and educate yourselves on these important moral issues of our time; Second, that you get involved, especially by letting your elected representatives know what you believe and that you will vote based on those beliefs and; Third, that you will storm Heaven with your prayers, because this is primarily a spiritual battle, and we cannot hope to succeed without God’s help.

I cannot think of a better way to put into practice those three calls, than to participate in 40 Days for Life. This international campaign is conducted during the season of Lent, a time when extraordinary graces are available to all of us. It incorporates the traditional hallmarks of Lent in prayer, fasting and almsgiving; this last being done by our public acts of witness to those who do not know or understand the truth. Over the years we know how many graces have been received, especially in our own country, by this campaign. We think of the mothers and babies who have been saved from this terrible scourge; the abortion clinics which have been closed; and those who have been converted to the Culture of Life because of it. Abby Johnson's own conversion was brought about by a 40 Days for Life campaign at her abortion clinic. Just think of the powerful public voice that never would have spoken out in defense of Life, if 40 Days for Life had not been there!

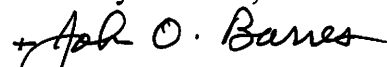
Last year, I have been told, a group of you, having read my letter with those three requests, organized a 40 Days for Life campaign at the Smithtown Planned Parenthood. It was very successful, and at least four women indicated they changed their minds about having an abortion because of the dedication of these courageous witnesses and the prayerful support behind them. Recognizing the wonderful fruit of this forty day sacrifice, I am happy to place the full support of the Diocese of Rockville Centre behind this effort this year. I pray that many Catholics, and others who will join us, will participate in this endeavor. And for every person who can stand outside an abortion clinic to publicly witness, there are many more who can support them by prayer and fasting and Eucharistic Adoration. I will join you in this, and I look forward to celebrating the closing Mass with you on April 3<sup>rd</sup> at St. Patrick's Church in Smithtown.

As you know, in the Diocese of Rockville Centre, we have recently renamed the Office of Respect Life as the new Office of Human Life, Family and Bioethics. With this change we also welcome a new director, Dr. Lisa Honkanen, and a new program coordinator, Donna Crean. I am grateful to them for their great efforts to assist the 40 Days for Life organizational teams in promoting participation at both the parish and individual levels. I thank the team from last year who have been hard at work to expand the vigil at the Smithtown Planned Parenthood, and I am grateful to the Pro Bikers for Life who are coordinating the vigil at the Hempstead Planned Parenthood.

Today we ask for the intercession of Our Blessed Mother Mary, Protector of Mothers, Defender of Life and the Family, to strengthen us so that we may be compassionate, courageous witnesses to the truth. We ask for the intercession of Saint Thomas More, patron of statesmen, politicians, lawyers and judges, that our prayers may move the hearts of our elected officials to undo this terrible wrong and use the power they have in defense of Life. We ask for the intercession of St. Gianna Molla, that the consciences of those in the medical profession will be moved to always use the gifts God has given them to foster Life.

It is God's love that formed each one of us in our Mother's womb. A civilization which fails to protect its most vulnerable members is morally bankrupt and stands on the verge of collapse. But, as St. Paul taught us, "Where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more." [Rom 5:20] We pray for the courage to be good and faithful soldiers in the battle for Life. It is a battle the Lord has commanded us to fight and which, with His help, we will win. May God bless each and every one of you.

Sincerely in Christ,



Most Reverend John O. Barres  
Bishop of Rockville Centre