

The Hardest Job in the World: Supporting Parents for the Good of Us All

Throughout our diocese, Catholic Charities agencies support families through material and financial aid, and also through emotional guidance and mentoring. This help includes parenting skills training and information on nutrition and developmental needs of children. Catholic Charities staff provide parents whose children have been placed under protective services the opportunity to see and interact with their children during supervised visits. Other programs coach parents in making the difficult life changes necessary so they can live up to their responsibilities and be reunited with their children.

It is hard work helping parents who may never have had good role models themselves, but strengthening families is imperative to strengthening our society.

This year, our Diocesan Public Policy Committee is focusing our advocacy efforts on supporting two NY State-funded programs that empower parents in tackling “the hardest job in the world.”

Healthy Families makes home visits to parents even before the birth of the child which can continue until the child enters Head Start or kindergarten. Through this program, parents learn about labor and delivery, nutrition, family activities that promote child development and other aspects of raising safe, healthy children. Healthy Families has been proven to reduce by 50% the number of low birth-

weight babies. Children in the program are less likely to repeat a grade and or to score below average on a standardized vocabulary test. Mothers with prior involvement in child protective services were much less likely to be physically abusive after participating in Healthy Families. Catholic Charities in Steuben County runs the Healthy Families program for that area, and other agencies provide the service in five other counties in our diocese.

The **Maternity and Early Childhood Foundation** funds programs across the State for low income expectant and new parents, with a special focus on teens. In our diocese, MECF had funded a Birthright pregnancy care center and several parenting programs run by Catholic Charities and other agencies which included counseling, prenatal health information and transportation to appointments. Unfortunately MECF’s budget was slashed by 75% in recent years, and it hasn’t been able to maintain this level of support. Our voices can change this!

On February 8 & 9 in our parishes across the diocese, Catholics will be asked to sign petitions urging New York State officials to invest greater funds in these programs. Please ensure that your parish is gathering signatures and encourage people to speak out on behalf of these programs and the families they strengthen! To learn more, visit:

<http://www.dor.org/index.cfm/catholic-charities/public-policy/strengthening-families/>



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The God-Bearer

"You are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God." Galatians 4: 7

Out of the corner of my eye
I saw her, standing on the corner of our street,
her life-breath hanging frozen in the sunlight.
Still young, though cradling an even younger life,
swaddled against the cold,
she was watching, waiting for the bus.
The colorful headscarf and batik layers
wrapped tightly around her
revealed distant origins.
For the briefest instant,
before the turning of the traffic light,
our eyes met.
In that glance I saw weariness and worry,
the weight of life yet to be lived,
in a strange new place.
So, I pondered her woes.
How did she come to be here? Where was she headed?
Who would help her?
How would she manage this fragile new life?
No angel song to herald them.
No shepherds to visit.
No watchful Joseph to protect this fragment of a family.
But, stepping onto the bus,
she flashed a brilliant smile and warmly waved
to another watchful mother on the other side of the street.

"May the Lord bless you and keep you." Numbers 6:24

Her infectious smile
blessed the morning
with radiant hope.
And isn't this just how God comes to be with us,
in the vulnerability of a girl,
bearing life into a cold world?
Who knows what promises, problems, possibilities
await this young mother
and her infant?
What kind of world
welcomes young girls and their babies
on any corner of God's Good Earth?
In this fresh new year to come, who will herald them,
who will watch over them, who will visit them,
who will listen to them?
Who will shower them with gifts,
guide them out of harm's way,
and bless them with opportunities?
If not we, then who?
And how richly blessed we will be
should we make room for
another mother and child, gift from God.
*"But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them
in her heart."* Luke 2: 19

~Joe Grant

Director of Engaging Spirituality, JustFaith Ministries



January 22 marks the 41st anniversary of the Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion in the United States. Our Catholic Bishops are calling on us to join them from January 18–26 in a novena of “intercessions, reflections and suggested acts of reparation each day for the healing and conversion of our nation and people impacted by the culture of death.” Click on the link below to sign up to receive the daily reflections by app, text message, e-mail or as a downloadable document:

<http://www.usccb.org/about/pro-life-activities/january-roe-events/nine-days-of-prayer-penance-and-pilgrimage.cfm>

Anniversary of Roe v. Wade: A Novena to End Abortion and A Pilgrimage to Washington D.C.

You can also join pro-life advocates from across the country at the **March for Life** in Washington D.C. on January 22. Busses are leaving from several points around our diocese to make the trip. Why not make this the year you go to be part of this beautiful public witness to the sanctity of life?

Even if you can't attend, consider making a financial contribution to support those who are representing our diocese at this event.

To find contact information for the bus organizers from your area, go to the diocesan web site home page <http://www.dor.org>, scroll down past the photo of Bishop Matano (who'll be joining the March in DC!) and click on the March for Life flyer.