

Dear Friends in Christ,

Every person asks the question: “What is my purpose on this Earth?”

Here is a general answer: I am here to show God’s love to the world.

By virtue of our very existence, we reflect God’s love. This is true because God, who is love, made us in His image and likeness. If every person is like a valued piece of artwork painted by the hand of God, then we should protect what God has made out of respect for God’s work among us. This calls us forth to act.

This year’s theme for Respect Life Month is “Moved by Mercy.” We have seen God’s mercy in Jesus, the face of God. And having received this great love for ourselves, we are called to extend God’s compassion and love to our neighbors, especially those who are most in need.

As a Pro-Life Church, we support and defend life from its very beginning at conception until its natural end in death.

At one time I was just two cells old, though I did not realize it at the time. I was alive — and the work of God was being accomplished in the growth of my newly created body. That is why we work so hard to support human life, which begins at conception.

I applaud those who pray peacefully to end abortion, vote for politicians who understand the goodness of life in its most innocent and fragile stages and help women find alternatives to ending the life of their unborn child.

I also support and encourage people who help young parents after a child is born. This is extremely important and at the heart of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus — to help those who are struggling in life.

You see, respecting life isn’t just talk. It is action.

Since we live in a culture that accepts ending the lives of our youngest children, we must also reach out to bring healing where there is hurting. Many women,

and yes, even men, live with the shame and regret of an abortion in their past. As a Pro-Life Church, all of us are called to offer the possibility of God's healing love and mercy to everyone in a compassionate, non-judgmental way.

If someone people are brave enough to share their post-abortive suffering with you, pray with them for their healing. Then assure them that it's never too late to seek God's forgiveness. Assist them in finding a priest or other church leader with a compassionate ear. Encourage that person to reach out to Project Rachel or attend a Rachel's Vineyard Retreat, which specializes in post-abortion healing.

Respecting life includes welcoming sinners — ourselves included!

Another increasingly difficult topic today is physician-assisted suicide. Of course, our hearts go out to people who are suffering at life's end. But good palliative care and hospice programs offer better alternatives to intentionally overdosing on drugs in order to find relief from pain. And, although the arguments in favor of physician-assisted suicide are sometimes attractive, the results are not. In countries that have widely adopted the practice, it is increasingly evident that people near death are encouraged to prematurely end their lives so that they will not be a financial and emotional burden on others. This is just wrong.

Respecting life simply means that we don't kill innocent life, because God is the author of life. We are not.

The drug epidemic, which is out of control, is another tragic reality for us. We must pray for those who are addicted to heroin and other death-dealing drugs. We must pray for their families who suffer terribly over the addiction of their loved one. And we must continue to actively engage our community in finding practical and effective solutions through adequate prevention and successful treatment programs.

Respecting life requires that we struggle with those who struggle themselves in life.

Finally, respecting life requires that we take care of our environment. We must leave this world as we found it — ready to be enjoyed by the next generation. Pope Francis has reminded us that we must not be allured by our disposable

culture, which makes us selfishly think only of ourselves in the present moment, instead of being good stewards of creation for the future.

To respect life requires that we take care of the place in which we all live together, our family home.

These are just a few of my reflections on respecting life as we begin this month. I hope you have your own reflections.

In the end, respecting life as a Pro-Life man or woman means that we treat each other with kindness, mercy and love.

I encourage you to take some time today or during the week to ask yourself: "Am I respecting my life; do I respect and care for the life of those around me; and do I appreciate the life of God within me and my neighbors (including those in the womb)?"

Let us pray for each other, and thank God each day for his wonderful gift of life.

God bless you and those you love.

Your brother in Christ,

The Most Reverend Bishop Edward C. Malesic, JCL