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## AN OPTION FOR LIFE

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Despite voices to the contrary, in countries all over the planet, voices are being heard declaring their “option for life”, especially for the smallest and most vulnerable of these lives, that of the unborn. At the Canadian Bishops Conference, the Catholic Organisation for Life and the Family (2500 Don Reid, Ottawa, ON, K1H 2J2; phone: 613-241-9461), promotes respect for life and human dignity, as well as the recognition of the essential role of families. In our province, Birthright New Brunswick (P.O. Box 113, Station A, Fredericton, NB, E3B 4Y2; phone 459-8990) repeats over and over again: “Life for all, and welcome to all.” Birthright’s action reminds us of the respect we must all pay to every human life.

### FACTS AND NUMBERS

Statistics Canada reports that the population of New Brunswick has decreased from 750,000 to 738,000, between 1996 and 2001. The New Brunswick Ministry of Education stated that in June, 2002, school enrolment had dropped from 145,000 to 125,000 in fifteen years, and that we could have another decrease of 95,000 in the next ten years. The New Brunswick birth rate is now at 1.4 children, the second lowest in Canada, while Demographics Canada sets the replacement rate at 2.1 children. In 1999, the most recent year with complete statistics, there were 1061 abortions in New Brunswick (equivalent to two schools full of children), a 13.5% of live births, compared to 31.8% for Canada in general. We cannot remain indifferent to these statistics: we are all convened to a culture of life and not of death.

### GOSPEL OF LIFE

One of the most beautiful writings of John Paul II is surely his encyclical *Evangelium vitæ*. I would like to share with you a few excerpts of this letter, in the early months of the new year. We just celebrated the birth of Jesus a short while ago. For Pope John Paul, by our birth we are not only unique beings created in the likeness of God, but we have become brothers and sisters of Jesus. This twofold reality gives every human being a sacred character. Therefore nothing can keep the Pope from defending every form of human life from conception to natural death. “No one has authority or the right to destroy a human life.” That is his deepest conviction. And to everyone who tries to justify abortion, the death penalty, euthanasia, assisted suicide, and new reproduction techniques, he has but one gospel to offer, the Gospel of Life.

### A HUMAN BEING

For John Paul II, induced abortion is deliberate and direct murder, however it is done, of a human being in the initial phase of its existence, between conception and birth. As soon as the egg is fertilised, a new life is inaugurated, a life that is not the father’s or mother’s, but that of a new human being which is developing on its own. It will never be human if it is not human, now. Genetic science confirms this fact which has always been obvious. The human being must be respected and treated as a person from the very beginning, from its conception, its rights as a person must be recognised, and the first among them is its inviolate right to life.

## **SACRED AND INVIOULATE**

Human life is sacred and inviolate, Pope John Paul II insists. This is so because from its very origin it comprises God's creative action and remains forever in a special relationship with the Creator, its only end. God proclaims Himself the absolute Lord over the life of human beings created in His image and likeness. Therefore, human life has a sacred and inviolate character in which is recognised the sacred character of the Creator Himself. The commandment, "Thou shalt not kill" has a strong negative connotation: it expresses the extreme limit which cannot be transgressed. Implicitly, though, it calls one to develop a positive attitude of absolute respect for life, which leads one to promote it and to progress along the path of self-giving, welcoming, and serving love. The commandment can be stated in this way: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." In giving life to the human being, God requires that being to respect, love, and promote it. In this way the gift becomes commandment and the commandment becomes gift.

## **MULTIPLE PRESSURES**

Pope John Paul II states that to decide to put an unborn child to death, there are often other people, next to the mother. First among these guilty ones could be the father, guilty not only when he expressly pressures his wife to have an abortion but also when he supports her decision, because in this way he leaves her confront alone the problems of her pregnancy: in this way, the family is mortally wounded and violated in its nature of a community of love and its vocation of being a sanctuary of life.

## **MORAL RESPONSIBILITIES**

The Holy Father continues by stating that one cannot keep silent about pressures which sometimes come from within the family circle and one's friends. The woman is frequently submitted to such tremendous pressure that she feels psychologically forced to have an abortion: in this instance it is clear that the moral responsibility weighs heavily on those who directly or indirectly forced her to have an abortion. Abortion goes beyond the responsibility of individuals and the damage caused, to take on a strongly social dimension: it is a very grave wound to society and culture, by those who should be their constructors and defenders.

## **A WISH**

May we always promote the culture of life! Let us marvel at the gift of life! Let us discover together the Gospel of life!

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