

# celebrate**LIFE** magazine

A PUBLICATION OF AMERICAN LIFE LEAGUE  
BUILDING A CULTURE OF LIFE

## Father Mike Schmitz

Teaching the next  
generation to uphold  
the faith and protect  
the vulnerable

PAGE 13



Guiding your family through a miscarriage  
PAGE 16

Courageous mom chooses life after rape  
PAGE 25



# What Is Christianity? The Last Writings of Benedict XVI

This final work by Benedict XVI takes up an array of themes close to his heart: the Christian faith's relationship with other religions, especially Judaism and Islam; the theology and reform of the liturgy; the priesthood; the saints; the Eucharist; the travesty of abuse; the beauty of nature; Italian and German culture; and much more.

With prophetic insight into our times, Benedict XVI warns of a "radical manipulation of man" in the name of tolerance, insisting that the only "authentic counterweight to every form of intolerance" is Christ himself—and Christ crucified. He also pays tribute to some giant figures of Christianity who have been his guiding stars, including Pope John Paul II, the 20th-century German Jesuit martyr, Fr. Alfred Delp, and the silent carpenter St. Joseph, his patron saint.

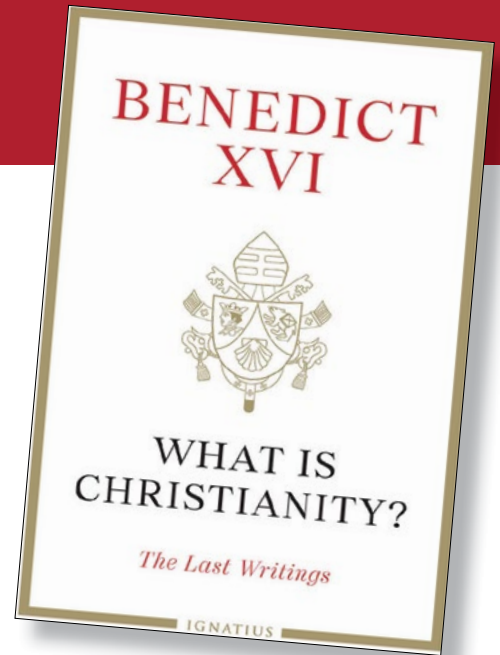
This book is a frank spiritual testament from a theological master, a churchman who loved the faith of simple Christians but who always stood ready, even in his last days, to dialogue about every aspect of human life—in love and in truth.

WCSTH . . . Sewn Hardcover, \$24.95

"May all who draw from Pope Benedict's last book come closer to Jesus Christ, whom he knew to be the definitive revelation of God in human history."

— **Cardinal Robert Sarah**, Author, *The Power of Silence*

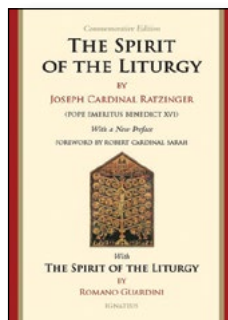
"The texts in this volume—in their clarity of expression, felicity of style, and depth of insight—remind us how much we miss Pope Benedict XVI. Anyone who loves theology and good writing will delight in this collection." — **Bishop Robert Barron**, Founder, Word on Fire Catholic Ministries



"For decades I have treasured every word published by this man. These last words are among his greatest."

— **Scott Hahn**, Author, *Rome Sweet Home*

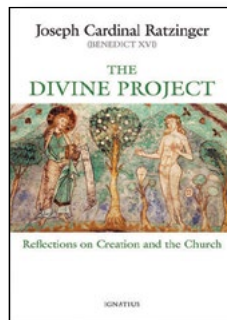
## Other Important Works of Benedict XVI



### ◆ THE SPIRIT OF THE LITURGY

A profound, beautifully written work on the liturgy, this Commemorative Edition includes a new foreword by Cardinal Robert Sarah, and the full text of the classic work of the same title by Romano Guardini, which helped Ratzinger rediscover the beauty and grandeur of the liturgy.

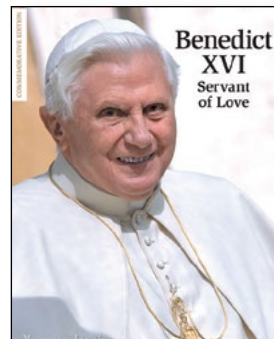
SPLCEP . . . Sewn Softcover, \$19.95



### ◆ THE DIVINE PROJECT

A forgotten box of cassette tapes was found after 30 years in an Austrian abbey, and on these remarkable recordings, the voice of Joseph Ratzinger walks us through the thick terrain of contemporary theology. With his profound insights on creation and the Church, this treasure is an accessible tour of the whole theological world of Joseph Ratzinger.

DVPP . . . Sewn Softcover, \$18.95



### ◆ BENEDICT XVI: Servant of Love

Through stunning photographs, glorious art, insightful commentary by Benedict, and others, this deluxe special commemorative book celebrates the extraordinary life and legacy of Pope Benedict XVI. **Lavishly illustrated.**

BSLP . . . Large Deluxe Softcover, \$17.95



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# JUST BETWEEN YOU & ME

celebrate**LIFE**  
magazine



“Help me to journey beyond the familiar and into the unknown. Give me the faith to leave old ways and break fresh ground with You.”

— St. Brendan  
the Navigator

St. Brendan the Navigator prayed these words to the Lord: “Help me to journey beyond the familiar and into the unknown. Give me the faith to leave old ways and break fresh ground with You.”<sup>1</sup>

We have contemplated this simple prayer in these days of so much confusion over the end result of the Supreme Court’s *Dobbs* decision. Knowing that this decision left the nation a bit worse off than it was before *Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Bolton* were handed down by the court in 1973, we see many challenges before us. We are truly living in an unknown time—an era of confusion regarding sexuality, pregnancy, and the identity of our fellow human beings as men and women.

It seems to me that we must be bolder than ever. We are called in our pro-life work to teach the truth simply but with greater fervor. As St. Paul taught in Colossians 2:8, “Make sure that no one captivates

you with the empty lure of a ‘philosophy’ of the kind that human beings hand on, based on the principles of this world and not on Christ.”

In my mind, that is the great fallacy of the *Dobbs* decision. It is based on the shifting sands of man’s concept of what is possible rather than on Christ’s call to be radical, to be devoted to Him, and to never tire of doing what is right in defense of His babies and His immutable truth.

In Jesus is the victory. So while the world panders to the prevailing winds of the day, we are steadfast in our desire to help others see that only when every innocent preborn child is protected by law and the culture itself will we truly be able to achieve a lasting victory for our most vulnerable brothers and sisters.

Fight on, my friends!

1. “Catholic Prayer: Prayer of St. Brendan the Navigator,” *Catholic Culture*, Accessed September 24, 2023, catholicculture.org/culture/liturgicalyear/prayers/view.cfm?id=1467.

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# letters

## OUR READERS RESPOND

“From Abortion to Adoption” by Serena Farace (Spring/Summer 2023)

Wow, how this story called “From Abortion to Adoption” moved me and teared me up. Serena, being only 14 years of age, was brave enough to have written and presented her memoir to her classmates about almost getting killed in the womb. Then I had to read it twice to make sure I read it correctly when she states, “In the end, not one student in my class stood up for life.” I thought the “not” was a mistake. It wasn’t a misprint. Serena continued after this disappointment to be brave, just like her birth parents who were brave in giving her life and a great new set of parents. This is a beautiful story that should be read by all.

*Jennifer Minnick*

### Online comments

**Dr. John Bruchalski: A Divine Pro-Life Journey (Spring/Summer 2023)**

Such an amazing, wonderful story of God changing people and finding his true purpose. Nothing is impossible with God. Very interesting information, well written story and publication. I pray for Dr. Bruchalski and his work, as well as his illness.

*Rebecca Stacy-Kester | CLMagazine.com*

### Updates

In the **Spring 2021** issue, we introduced you to a new children’s book by Contend Projects that teaches fun scientific facts about how a human being begins. We recently talked with the founders and can’t wait to share what they are doing now. Find out in our next issue!

In honor of the birth of Our Lord, the **Fall 2021** issue focused on an amazing hospital in Bethlehem offering medical care to every mother without exception. While the atrocities of the war in the region surrounding Holy Family Hospital have instilled chaos and fear in local residents, the hospital itself remains open and free from harm. Staff are working around the clock to ensure the safety of everyone within the hospital and will continue caring for the vulnerable with love and compassion. Please keep them all in your prayers. Visit [birthplaceofhope.org](http://birthplaceofhope.org) for more information.

Looking for pro-life articles, important pro-life news, and an insightful Editor’s Blog each Friday? Visit our website at [CLMagazine.org](http://CLMagazine.org) or “like” us on [Facebook.com/CelebrateLifeMagazine](https://www.facebook.com/CelebrateLifeMagazine).

### EDITOR’S NOTE

When a child leaves the faith or goes to college and falls prey to the secular world, heartbroken parents seek answers and guidance. Thankfully, God has blessed us with holy and faithful priests who understand the pain and who truly care about the souls of our children. In this issue, we learn what Fr. Mike Schmitz advises regarding faithfulness and college-aged adults. Don’t miss this interview (page 13)!

We also want to share some exciting news! In keeping up with the digital age, we have made it possible for you to download a PDF of the entire *CLM* issue free of charge from [shop.all.org/clm](http://shop.all.org/clm). This is just one more great way for you to read our amazing pro-life articles.

### Reactions?

We want to hear from you! Please send your thoughts on the magazine.

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■ **WRITE:**  
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Falmouth, VA 22403

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# Build a Legacy for Life

What will be your legacy — that lasting remembrance of the good that God accomplished in this world through your cooperation?



American Life League exists to serve God by helping to build a society that respects and protects individual human beings from creation to death — without compromise, without exception, and without apology.

We invite you to join us in this mission for life, as part of your own legacy!



For more information on how you can help American Life League and build your own personal legacy for life, please contact us by email at [legacy@all.org](mailto:legacy@all.org), call **540-659-4171**, or visit our website at [all.org/donate](http://all.org/donate).



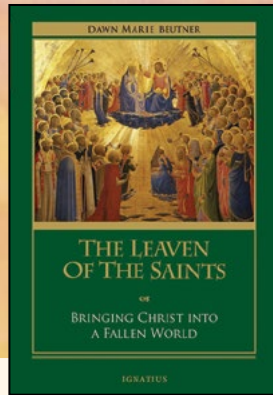
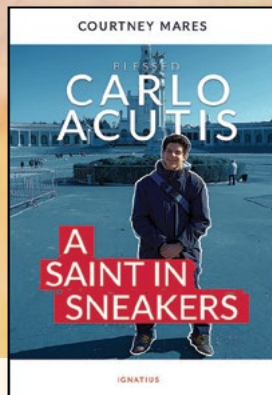
SCAN WITH YOUR SMART PHONE TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE WAYS YOU CAN SUPPORT **ALL**

## Here are just a few ways you can help us build and sustain a culture of life:

- Make a Required Minimum Distribution (RMD) from your IRA or 401(k) accounts directly to American Life League to help us, and help yourself avoid tax on the RMD.
- Include ALL in your will or estate plan.
- Make ALL the beneficiary of a life insurance policy or annuity.
- Provide a generous donation as a memorial gift or tribute to a loved one.
- Make a donation of appreciated stock, securities, or cryptocurrency such as Bitcoin, and you may receive a charitable gift deduction and avoid capital gains taxes.
- Use your family foundation or a donor-advised fund to contribute directly to one or more of ALL's pro-life projects.

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# INSPIRATION FROM SAINTS FOR US TO BE SAINTS



## ◆ Blessed Carlo Acutis: A Saint in Sneakers

How does a city boy who only lived to the age of 15 “go viral” more than a decade after he died? Discover the story of Blessed Carlo Acutis, the first millennial to be beatified by the Church. Born in 1991, the tech-savvy teen is hailed by the Church as an example of holiness in our complex digital age, witnessing that computer coding and video games are no obstacle to sainthood.

From a young age, Carlo’s enthusiasm for Jesus was contagious. He called the Eucharist “my highway to heaven”, and used his computer to design an exhibition dedicated to Eucharistic miracles that has traversed the globe. Vatican journalist **Courtney Mares** traveled in the footsteps of Acutis across Italy to tell his story in depth, interviewing many whose lives he helped transform. Includes an 8-page photo insert and an account of the miracles attributed to Acutis’ intercession.

SSCAP . . . Sewn Softcover, *Illustrated*, \$17.95

“A superb delivery of the inspiring life of Carlo Acutis. Easy to read and packed with details about his story.”

—**Edward Sri**, Author, *The Art of Living*

“Carlo teaches us an important lesson. God has called us all to be saints wherever we are—online, on the ski slopes, in sneakers.”

—**Mike Aquilina**

Author, *The Fathers of the Church*

## ◆ The Leaven of the Saints: Bringing Christ into a Fallen World

The lives of saints teach us how we can be part of the kingdom of heaven now, and spread it to others like leaven causing dough to rise. Over the past two millennia, the saints have loved and imitated Christ so wholeheartedly that they transformed the world around them.

Saints come from every background, and era. In this acclaimed book, **Dawn Beutner** groups them according to the kind of Christian witness they’ve given —as martyrs, Fathers & Doctors of the Church, priests, religious, popes, bishops, national heroes, married persons, and more. Each saint is a unique individual with a unique mission to grow in the knowledge and love of Christ, and to make him better known and loved in the world.

LVSP . . . Sewn Softcover, \$19.95

“Sanctity can seem impossible to many people. This book reminds us that it is God who makes saints through his grace and love, and just as He has transformed so many others, he can do the same for us!”

—**Fr. Sebastian White, O.P.**  
Editor-in-Chief, *Magnificat*

“A fresh presentation on the importance of the saints in our lives. Dawn weaves a tapestry from saints of all ages, nationalities, and vocations to show what they teach about vocation, virtue, and daily living.”

—**Bishop Michael Burbidge**  
Arlington, Virginia

## ◆ Memoirs: József Mindszenty

These moving Memoirs reveal the full story of the legendary Hungarian hero-priest Mindszenty, whose brave, uncompromising leadership against the atheistic Communist government laid the foundation for the strong Christian leadership in Hungary today.

Imprisoned, and physically and psychologically tortured by the Communist government, Mindszenty spent eight years in solitary confinement. This work is an extraordinary contribution to contemporary history and an eyewitness account of a Church and country under brutal Communist domination in the Cold War era.

MMRP . . . Sewn Softcover, *Illustrated*, \$22.95

“These memoirs are enthralling, evidence of a terrible time, to be set with Solzhenitsyn’s tales of the Gulag. Mindszenty was a hero for me as a teenager.”

—**Cardinal George Pell**  
Author, *Prison Journal*

“Mindszenty’s memoirs are among the great Catholic testimonies of the 20th century, as the great Hungarian martyr-confessor was one of the century’s great Catholic witnesses.”

—**George Weigel**  
Author, *The Fragility of Order*



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## What is abortion?

When we speak or write about abortion today, we have to be extremely careful with the words we use, starting of course with that deadly word itself. Clearly abortion is no longer controversial, and the death peddlers have done a very good job of deceiving the uninformed. So what exactly is abortion?

Abortion is an act of murder. Thus, we should never refer to it as we would a surgery, which is “performed.” It is not a medical procedure intended to preserve life; abortion always takes at least one human being’s life.

There are three types of abortion:

**1** Surgical abortion is the killing, dismemberment, and removal of a baby via suction, medical instruments, injection, or other surgical procedure. Methods of surgical abortion include suction, dilation and curettage, dilation and evacuation, dilation and extraction (also known as D&X or partial-birth abortion), saline injections, and hysterotomy. The method used is determined by the age of the baby.

**2** Chemical abortion is the chemical killing of a baby, either before or after he implants in his mother’s womb. Preimplantation chemical abortion can be caused by hormonal birth control drugs and devices, while postimplantation chemical abortion is primarily caused by the abortion pill regimen. This two-pill regimen (formerly called RU-486) combines mifepristone and misoprostol to kill and then expel the dead baby.

**3** Laboratory abortion is the destruction of human embryos through embryonic stem cell research and the discarding of “defective” and “unwanted” embryos by in vitro fertilization facilities.

These types of abortion could be called stealth practices because after nearly 50 years far too many people don’t think twice about the practice or about the result. As John C. Willke, MD, the grandfather of the pro-life movement, once wrote:<sup>1</sup>



Since when does anyone’s right to live depend upon someone else wanting them? Killing the unwanted is a monstrous evil. . . . So should a woman have the right to choose? I have a right to free speech, but not to shout “fire” in a theater. A person’s right to anything stops when it injures or kills another living human. . . . The pivotal question is, should any civilized nation give to one citizen that absolute right to kill another to solve that first person’s personal problem?

Dr. Mildred F. Jefferson once presented this challenge in a different but equally passionate way, telling an audience:

Our revolution will not depend upon the weapons of war, as other revolutions have done. Without using killing weapons, we are going to try to stop the killing. Without using the kind of harsh or mean language that they use, we are going to try to stop the perilous unconcern for the feelings of people. We are going to try to overturn the kind of selfishness that is becoming rampant through our land. And our Right to Life revolution will be different from any revolution that the world has ever seen or ever known. In the revolutions of the past, the French Revolution, the Bolshevik Revolution, the revolution that brought communism to mainland China, it was necessary to



destroy human affection. When the orders go out to the revolutionaries, for example, they must be carried out without question, even if it meant rising against a member of one's own family.<sup>2</sup>

The dire situation that Doctors Willke and Jefferson were so passionate about still produces grave injustices. Cardinal John O'Connor understood this, writing, "Some people argue that changing laws will not eliminate abortions. It is certainly true that a change of heart is more important than a change of law. What is forgotten, however, is that the law is the great teacher. Children grow up believing that if a practice is legal, it must be moral."<sup>3</sup>

And there lies the crux of the problem. The law protects what can honestly be described as decriminalized murder. Abortion is not a debate topic, nor is it a subject on a high school biology test. It is a demonic act and one so heinous that it blows the mind of the sane person who understands that babies are to be welcomed and loved not killed.

Yet one of the most common arguments that we hear is that abortion must be legal because of rape, incest, and threats to the life of the mother. To this we say that murder will not resolve the violation of a female by a male attacker; it actually violates her again. In no other situation is a child legally killed for the sins of his father. Further, when

faced with a traumatic situation, a doctor treating a pregnant mother should always try to save both the mom and the baby. It is never necessary to intentionally kill the baby to save the mother.

Every single act of abortion—whether in a test tube, at his natural creation, or in the womb—is an act of terror. A human being dies as our nation looks on, and that is why we need people like you who have chosen to stand up and fight this injustice head on.

Teach, preach, act, and pray that the travesty of abortion will end.



Judie Brown is president and cofounder of American Life League and a three-time appointee to the Pontifical Academy for Life. You can submit questions to Judie at ALL.org.

1. "Scriptures and Famous Quotations," Wisconsin Right to Life, Accessed September 24, 2023, wisconsinrighttolife.org/scripture-famous-quotations.
2. "Mildred Jefferson Addresses the National Right to Life Conference," Harvard Radcliffe Institute, October 21, 2020, radcliffe.harvard.edu/news-and-ideas/mildred-jefferson-addresses-the-national-right-to-life-conference.
3. "Pro-Life Quotes," Churches of St. Paul and St. Michael, Accessed September 24, 2023, stpaulstmichael.com/copy-of-prayers-reflections.

## Are you struggling to explain the "hard cases"?

Our newly revised set of no-exceptions brochures can help!

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# WHAT WOULD YOU SAY If a Mother Told You She Wanted an Abortion?

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By Sarah Vestrat

As we continue to thank God that abortion is now illegal in many states, our prayers and actions are still desperately needed for women in all states who are considering abortion. If a woman cannot get an abortion in the state where she lives, she may travel to a different state where it is legal, or she may order the abortion pill online to take at home to end her pregnancy. This calls for our continued vigilance and readiness to give hope and help to women in our midst who are experiencing a surprise pregnancy. And in doing so, not only might we save the life of a preborn baby, but we would also help spare a young mother from the detrimental effects abortion would inflict upon her life.

During my 18 years of serving in two pro-life pregnancy resource clinics, I spoke with hundreds of women who were considering abortion. I would do my best to help them choose life, but

if a woman left without a commitment to life, I knew that God would use our time together and my efforts for her spiritual benefit—and mine. And all thanks be to God when a woman considering abortion chose life instead!

Sidewalk Advocates for Life, a national pro-life organization, trains volunteers to reach out with a loving heart to women in front of abortion facilities and encourage them to choose life by offering life-affirming alternatives. Lauren Muzyka, the executive director and founder of Sidewalk Advocates for Life, says in her sidewalk advocate training that speaking with love and sincerity is of utmost importance because “if people do not feel like we love them, they will hear nothing we have to say.”<sup>1</sup>

Since its inception in 2014, Sidewalk Advocates for Life has saved thousands of babies nationwide. Only God can give us this gift of love to share

with our neighbor. Prayer is vital. His grace will enable us to do good things that we could never do on our own.

## The Research

Understanding why women choose abortion is a first step in helping a mother choose life. Commissioned by the Vitae Foundation (formerly The Caring Foundation), research conducted by the Right Brain People concerning the psychology of pro-abortion women has given the pro-life movement crucial insight. In his article summarizing this study, Paul Swope writes about women who choose abortion: “The sudden intrusion of motherhood is perceived as a complete loss of control over their present and future selves . . . and thereby paralyzes their ability to think more rationally or realistically.”<sup>2</sup>

The research also notes that these women know, although often uncon-

sciously, that abortion kills a human being, but they view it as a “necessary evil” to preserve their self-identity and future. In other words, a woman’s problems and concerns can overwhelm her to the extent that she believes abortion, while not a good choice, is the choice she must make, given her situation.

Muzyka uses this Right Brain Research in her sidewalk advocate training. She teaches that to be most effective, the order of topics for the conversation with a woman considering an abortion should be Mom, then Baby, then God to effectively address the woman’s pattern of thinking. Muzyka further explains that since a woman in crisis is consumed with her problems and worries when faced with a surprise pregnancy, if we help her solve the problem(s) causing her to consider abortion, she may then be open to listening to facts about the baby’s development and God’s love for her and her baby. Muzyka states, “The research admonishes us to, first, really connect and empathize with the mother’s situation, not excusing the choice of abortion, but showing how each choice will truly help or harm HER.”<sup>3</sup>

When sidewalk counselors compassionately offer real, concrete help and alternatives, plus encourage an outlook regarding how a mom can have her baby and still have the future she desires, many obstacles can be removed that are weighing upon the mom’s decision.

## The conversation

So what would you say if your daughter, friend, or coworker told you she wanted to have an abortion? When focusing on “Mom,” it can be helpful to first ask the woman, in a calm, nonjudgmental way, why she wants an abortion. You could ask, “Why do you think ending your pregnancy is

what you should do?” Then listen to her response. Based on her answer, acknowledge her concerns, then assure her that she is not alone and that she has other options.

What follows are some reasons women give for considering abortion and some suggestions for responding.

## Understanding why women choose abortion is a first step in helping a mother choose life.

### MONEY

If she is worried about money, you can let her know that a local, pro-life pregnancy resource center can help her find the assistance she needs to have and care for her baby, which could include financial aid and baby items, such as formula, clothing, and furniture. Many churches and most cities have food pantries to help families save on grocery bills. A little exploration on the Internet can uncover a wealth of resources.

### RELATIONSHIPS

Sometimes a young woman may think her parents will be angry. You could tell her that this baby is their grandchild, and although they may be upset at first, they love her and will love her baby. But if the extreme happens, and she is forced to move out of her parents’ home, there are maternity homes in most states where she would be welcomed. Point out that this is a temporary situation. She will get through it and be a stronger person.

If she is in a bad relationship or being pressured by a boyfriend to abort, you could explain that it would be best

to remove herself from that situation rather than aborting her baby. Because studies from the Pew Research Center indicate that the typical woman seeking an abortion is unmarried, a young woman needs support to withstand the pressure from those who think she should choose abortion.<sup>4</sup>

This may be the time in the conversation to share with her some of the harmful effects—physically, emotionally, and spiritually—that abortion can have on women. Some of these effects include an increased risk of breast cancer, infertility, infection, perforation of the uterus, depression, regret, nightmares, self-destructive behavior, low self-esteem, and feeling and/or becoming distant from God.

### TIMING

A woman considering abortion may say, “This is just not the right time for me to have a baby.” Take this opportunity to help her envision how she can have her baby and still have a great future. Maybe she wants to finish school and cannot see how a baby will fit into her plans. You can explain that there are online options for school, and many campuses have childcare available if she wishes to attend in person. If she needs to work a full-time job, many companies allow employees to work remotely, and her local pregnancy resource center may be able to recommend reputable childcare after the baby is born if she needs that option.

You could speak about the uniqueness of every human being. This baby cannot be replaced by another child later on when the timing seems right. The clock cannot be turned back as though this baby never existed, and she will always remember this child. You can point out some facts about her preborn baby’s development by saying, for instance, “At just three weeks, your baby has a heartbeat,” or “At nine weeks, your baby can yawn

and suck his thumb.” Encourage her to get a free ultrasound at a pro-life PRC. If she is around at least six weeks’ gestation, she may be able to hear the heartbeat during the ultrasound and watch her baby moving. This will make the pregnancy “more real” to her and can lead her to a decision for life.

You can let her know that God loves her and knows her situation. He will care for her and this child He created. His timing is always right. Many women have had an unexpected pregnancy, and they later see their child as a huge blessing.

### HEALTH CONCERNS

Some women consider abortion because of health problems, a previous difficult pregnancy, or because they already have a child with health issues or special needs and fear they cannot handle another child with these challenges. In such cases, it is crucial for a woman to get a second opinion, especially if she says that her doctor advised her to get an abortion. Most PRCs can give women a referral to a pro-life doctor for a second opinion. You could point out that she will love the child she is carrying just as much as she loves any other child she has,

regardless of health challenges that may or may not exist.

### ADOPTION RELUCTANCE

As pro-lifers, we typically think that adoption is a great option. The Right Brain People found, however, that adoption is the least attractive choice to most women with a surprise pregnancy. Among other reasons, the woman fears that if she chooses adoption, she will lose her identity by having to carry the baby to term and feels that she would be abandoning her child. This option does not give her the resolution she seeks.

Presenting a positive picture of adoption can help a pregnant woman in crisis view it as a realistic alternative. It is helpful to use language that sounds positive, such as “place your baby in a loving home” instead of “give up your baby for adoption.” You can tell her that birth mothers can choose the adoptive parents and communicate with their child through the years if they desire. Many couples long for a baby but cannot conceive, so her child will be very much wanted and loved.

### No Coincidence

I believe that anytime we find ourselves in a position to have a conver-

sation with an abortion-vulnerable woman, God has placed us there. It is not a coincidence. You can confidently call upon His grace, His love, and His guidance, and regardless of the outcome, His presence will be with you—and with her.

We are called to be the hands and feet of Jesus Christ and to love the mother as well as the preborn baby. If she believes that we love her and truly care, then we have the foundation for a fruitful conversation that can pave the way for her to turn from abortion and choose life instead.

**Sarah Vestrat previously served as the director of Sidewalk Advocates for Life of Tulsa and codirector of Go Life Mobile Medical. She also served for 13 years as a pro-life counselor for the White Rose Women’s Center in Dallas, Texas. Sarah lives in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma.**

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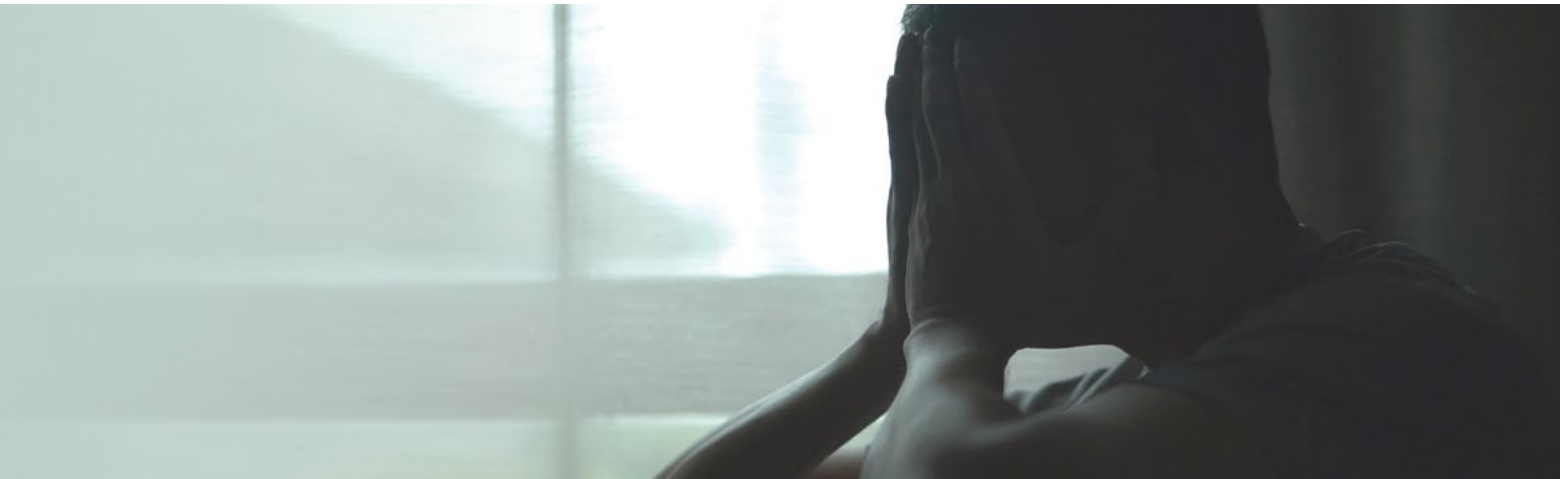
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## Moral Dysphoria

Dysphoria is a state of unhappiness, uneasiness, or dissatisfaction. The current state of the nation suggests that in matters of morality, the citizens of the United States are suffering from a debilitating state of moral dysphoria.

Americans are now living with a president—allegedly Catholic—who is working to make contraception more widely available and abortion permissible for any reason. In other words, he is a Catholic-in-name-only who supports all manner of sexual sin as defined by the Church in which he claims membership.

But Biden’s moral dysphoria is also suffered by countless numbers of people who seem to be confused about the first-grade lesson that there is a difference between good and bad—the bad being sin, an offense against God.

If we put that truth in the context of a recent headline, you can see where this is going.

According to a recent report, Republicans in Congress, hoping to win reelection, are scrambling to “limit electoral backlash against abortion bans.”<sup>1</sup> One commentator even noted that politicians who stand against abortion will lose votes. So this statement begs the question, *Why is killing people consistently defined as a political hot potato?* Oh, that’s right.

Abortion is about a human right not about a human being destined to die because of that alleged “right”!

On a related matter, which sick perspective dictates that it’s wrong for people to not agree with the transgender canon mandating multiple sexes? Do we no longer accept the biological fact that there are two genders—male and female? Or that procreation requires two people—a male and a female—who are responsible for the children they procreate?

The Mayo Clinic has addressed gender dysphoria in a way that underscores the actual answer to these questions. It states: “Gender dysphoria is the feeling of discomfort or distress that might occur in people whose gender identity differs from their sex assigned at birth or sex-related physical characteristics.”<sup>2</sup>

In case you missed it, Mayo is suggesting that God has nothing to do with creation and that the words from Genesis (“male and female He created them”) are no longer culturally relevant.

In this age of moral dysphoria, we continually witness these inane positions, now often taken by once-respected institutions, and sadly, mainstreamed by the less-than-respected media.

This is one of the many reasons why we are so grateful for the pastoral letter issued by Archbishop Paul S. Coakley of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. His

insights on gender dysphoria are significant. Here he explains the purpose of his message:

To provide pastoral guidance on how the Church, its ministers and the lay faithful can accompany—walk with—those who struggle with their gender identity, especially those who identify as transgendered. Following Pope Francis, I distinguish “between what pastoral care is for people who [identify as transgendered] and what is [trans]gender ideology.” Persons who identify as transgendered are created by God, are loved by God, and we as faithful Christians are called to love each of them as our neighbor (cf. Mark 12:31). To love others means at its heart to will and desire their good.<sup>3</sup>

This distinction should not be lost on anyone. The fundamental reason why we strive to reflect the teaching of St. Augustine to hate the sin and love the sinner is the essence of Coakley’s message. He states:

The culturally dominant transgender movement has an understanding of nature and purpose radically at odds with the Catholic understanding of the human person.

The transgender movement is rooted in a modern form of dualism where body and soul/mind/spirit are separate realities. In this view, the human person is the immaterial inhabitant of a physical host. The material body therefore can be manipulated in service to the immaterial soul/mind/spirit. Where the transgender movement sees a disconnect be-

tween the material and immaterial, Catholics see a beautiful unity.<sup>4</sup>

It is this rich teaching on the value and dignity of the human person that makes Coakley’s pastoral message so necessary and timely.

Regardless of whether we are considering the question of abortion, contraception, transgender ideology, or any other attacks on human nature as designed by God, we must be mindful of the archbishop’s words. It is no small feat to reflect the love of Christ at times like this, but it is the only way to touch a soul with truth in a way that, please God, inspires him or her to embrace truth and reject the siren song that creates moral dysphoria.

**Judie Brown is president and cofounder of American Life League and a three-time appointee to the Pontifical Academy for Life.**

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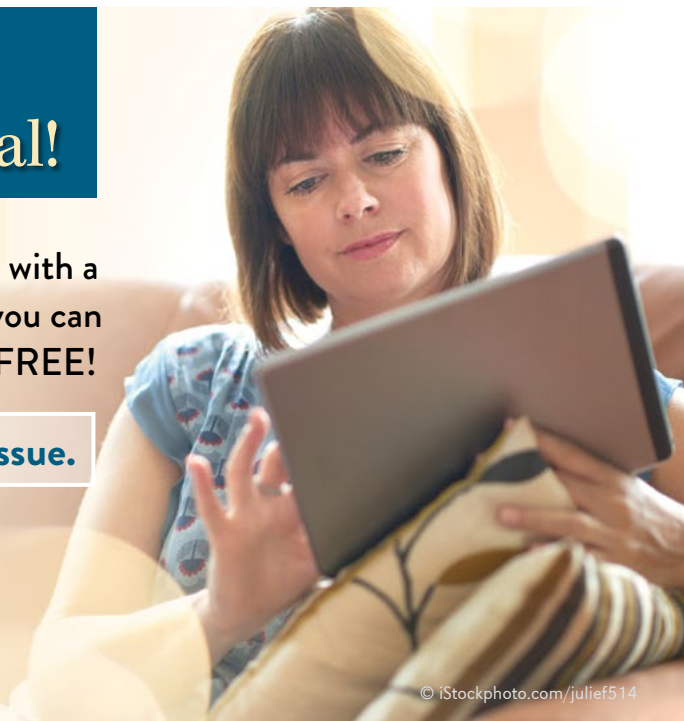
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# Father Mike Schmitz

## FAITHFUL GUIDANCE FOR TODAY'S YOUTH

Photo courtesy of Bulldog Catholic

By Susan Ciancio

“Abortion . . . has broken our hearts.” When I heard Fr. Mike Schmitz speak those words at the 2022 March for Life, my heart felt the pain in his voice. Like those of us within the pro-life movement, he understands the tragedy that comes with the loss of every preborn baby. It’s a truth we must all take responsibility for teaching.

Most people know Fr. Mike Schmitz from his Ascension videos about the faith or from his widely popular *Bible in a Year* and *Catechism in a Year* podcasts. But the speech he gave at the March for Life showed us another side of Fr. Mike, who also serves as the chaplain for the Newman Center at the University of Minnesota Duluth and as the director of Youth and Young Adult Ministry for the Diocese of Duluth. In those roles, he offers spiritual direction and formation in the faith to young people—something that is crucial in today’s society

and something that is at the heart of American Life League’s mission.

At ALL, we understand the importance of building a foundation of faith so that youth can continue to build upon it as they grow. We have seen the heartbreak that results from a disregard for human life, and we feel the heartbreak that comes when children walk away from their faith.

As kids grow and move from their parents’ houses to a dorm or to their own home, they become more susceptible to the culture of death. Their circle of friends widens, the temptations grow, and it becomes more difficult for them to live an authentically faithful life. That is why they need solid pro-life people to emulate, strong examples of people living their faith, and supportive groups that help solidify these values.

We know that parents are worried, and we know today’s culture is

both complicated and confusing for young people, so we wanted to chat with Fr. Mike to seek his advice for not only strengthening the faith of today’s youth but for helping them understand and promote the dignity of every person.

### Personal responsibility

In a recent *Catechism in a Year* podcast about strengthening faith, Fr. Mike explained that one of the things he teaches the students at the University of Minnesota Duluth is to take personal responsibility for their own spiritual growth. While in college, students are responsible for getting themselves to Mass, for receiving the sacraments, and for learning about the faith. Parents have laid the foundation, but now it is up to the kids to continue. For the most part, the parents’ role has gone from teaching to simply praying that their children make good decisions.



Photo courtesy of Bulldog Catholic

But a good parent knows that teaching about the faith never stops, so we asked Fr. Mike if he had any advice for parents of college-aged students or any ways in which parents could guide from afar. He responded, “Keep praying for your children. Fast for them. Ask them about where they are with their faith. But then listen. So often, in the midst of the pain that accompanies children drifting away from the faith, parents will either numb themselves and pretend that they don’t care, or they will not listen to the *actual* questions and ideas that their children are wrestling with. I would encourage parents to be persistent in their encouragement but patient in their listening.”

This patient love that truly listens and then teaches the truth is what young people today need. Judgment is God’s job. When it comes to our children, we simply must love and guide them toward the truth as best we can, especially when they wrestle with difficult questions regarding faith.

We then asked Fr. Mike what advice he would share with kids in college—especially secular colleges—about staying faithful to Catholicism. He responded, “The good thing about going to university (and the challenge with going to university) is that no one can make you do the right thing.

There is a degree of agency that every human being is given and is called to use. We get to choose, and we *have* to choose. No one has ever ‘drifted’ toward holiness; it involves a decision. So I encourage each and every college student to make that decision. No one can make the decision to live Christ *for you*. And this is a good thing. If a person wants to follow Christ in college, they can! It will definitely mean that you are saying ‘no’ to the average college experience, but you are saying ‘yes’ to a great thing, and great things come at great cost.”

He continued, “One of the most powerful ways that our students have come to know Christ is through virtuous friendships. These friendships have opened the doors to asking about Jesus and the Catholic Church. Once those questions begin pressing on the human heart—and once the answers are communicated—so many people come into the fullness of the faith.”

Encouraging college-aged children to attend Mass and to participate in activities at their Newman Center will benefit them immensely and will help them find positive connections and quality friendships that are based on something more solid than the time and location of the next party. These are the meaningful relationships that will last a lifetime.

## Building a respect for all human beings

Not only do we want our children to remain faithful to Catholicism while in college, but we want them to respect and uphold the dignity of all human beings throughout their lives. We pray that they are not swallowed by the culture that advocates for abortion “rights,” that promotes the “goods” of contraception, or that preaches the “benefits” of dying “with dignity.” We understand that these are very serious topics and ones that are often difficult to talk about. Fr. Mike’s MFL speech offers us wisdom and insight.

During this address, Fr. Mike described the first time he ever gave a speech. He was in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, and he spoke about the sanctity of life from creation until death and about the evil of abortion and euthanasia. He chose this topic because it was something that had not only been an integral part of his life but an integral part of the life of his entire family.

Fr. Mike explained that when he was young his mom kept several pictures on the family fridge, but two in particular stood out to him. One was of a baby who had died because of an ectopic pregnancy, and another was of a garbage bag with the remains of aborted children who had been thrown away. These pictures made a lasting impression on him because they clearly showed the humanity of these tiny babies.

He then told the story of his grandmother, who had been a nurse at a hospital that began committing abortions in 1973. She understood that abortion is a grave evil, so she told the administration that they either could stop doing abortions or she would leave. The hospital, of course, would not stop committing abortions, so she walked away from her job and from nursing. This story made an impact on Fr. Mike because, as he said, “it broke her heart.” He expressed how



proud he was of her because she stood up for what she believed was right. He said, "She stood and she walked. And that matters. Because every person matters. Every life matters."

He then asked the crowd what her actions changed. Did it change the hospital policy? No. Did it change the culture? No. But it changed her.

And that is what he tries to impart to the students at the University of Minnesota Duluth. He proudly told *CLM* that many students are well formed about abortion, euthanasia, and chastity before they arrive on campus, so they want to enhance their faith by joining student pro-life groups. The Bulldog Students for Life group hosts speakers and prays at abortion clinics. And he said that after graduation many students have gone on to work at—or even found—pregnancy resource centers.

Fr. Mike stressed that it's important for students to speak out about these evils because, "if they do not speak, a culture of silence in the face of evil distorts everything."

Walking in faith and speaking out in truth and charity are vital actions we must teach our children to partake in. This moral courage is what will make a difference in the culture so that one day our hearts will no longer be broken by the horrors of abortion or by the tragedy of children leaving the faith.

And so we are thankful that our young adult children have faithful priests like Fr. Mike Schmitz—men who help them see the beauty of the faith and who teach that though do-



Photo courtesy of Bulldog Catholic

ing the right thing may be difficult, our heavenly reward will be far greater than anything we could ever imagine. And there, no hearts will break ever again.

Susan Ciancio is the editor of *Celebrate Life Magazine* and director of the Culture of Life Studies Program.

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# Teaching Our Children to Trust God Even through Miscarriage



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By Beth Meverden

Not too long ago, our youngest child (with us on earth) wrestled again with why God took our littlest one earlier than any of us wanted. His tenderness toward his younger sibling amazes me. It's been nearly eight years and he was very young when we lost our fourth to miscarriage. Sometimes he still feels the loss like it happened this week.

I'm so grateful that he expresses his sadness so we can help him process what he's thinking and feeling. These conversations often lead to talking through other things he's struggling with, to sweet cuddle times together, and to relief and peace as we move forward together with the lives we have been given.

But I often wonder, *How do we support our children when we're dealing with our own deep sadness?*

Initially, after losing a child in miscarriage, we must deal with our own grieving, sadness, and confusion, but like everything in family life, we do it together. Letting our children see us grieve teaches them how to grieve in God-honoring ways.

When we lost our baby, we had just told our extended family and announced the baby at church. At first, I was frustrated that we hadn't waited to announce the baby so I didn't have to talk about our loss with so many people. Then I realized the gift it was that we had celebrated the life of our preborn child with our loved ones. We got to continue talking about our little one, about trusting God,

and about being grateful we had even the short amount of time we did with this baby.

Through the loss of our child, I have learned some important lessons about helping children process their sadness and confusion about miscarriage.

## 1 Celebrating the life of our preborn children with their siblings helps them understand that life begins before birth.

We don't know how many days each of us gets on earth. We know that each life is precious to God and that He continued to knit us throughout our mother's pregnancy. Like a mama knitting a blanket in preparation for her preborn child, God continues to hold and shape us throughout the maturation process.

Psalm 139:13-16 says, "You formed my inmost being; you knit me in my mother's womb. I praise you, because I am wonderfully made; wonderful are your works! My very self you know. My bones are not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, fashioned in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw me unformed; in your book all are written down; my days were shaped, before one came to be."

God never leaves us. He knows what our entire lives look like and plans their length and purpose for His glory and our good.

Celebrating life whenever we can teaches our children how precious all of life really is. Whenever our children lose someone they love (pets, family members, friends), it's an opportunity to talk about living lives that point others to Jesus and shining His light even when things feel dark.

## 2 Mourning with our children about the loss of their sibling reminds them to trust God when it's hard.

The questions from our older children about where the baby went and why God took the baby so soon will be painful for us right after we lose a child in miscarriage because we are struggling with the same questions. Though we're hurting, we must not neglect the opportunity to disciple our children in the midst of the pain each of us feels. Rather, we must take advantage of the teachable moments whenever we can. Telling our children we're "too sad" or it's "too much" teaches them to let sadness control them. Instead, we must train them to choose to surrender to hope instead of despair.

Many mamas give in to grief's control. This robs them of peace, hope, and an opportunity to trust God more intimately. But we must remind our children that because of Jesus we always have hope. Hope and trust go hand in hand. We trust God because of who He is and what He has done, while also hoping for what He says He will do.

1 Thessalonians 4:13 tells us we must not grieve like those who don't have hope. When we talk about hope in the midst of dark situations like miscarriages, we train our children to let Jesus' light shine through them even when they don't feel like it.

Talking about the hope we have in Jesus gives our children perspective on the purpose of life. We exist for God and to bring Him glory and attention through praise. As Acts 17:28 says, "In Him we live and move and have our being."

Let's train our children that even death is an opportunity to trust God because He is the resurrecting God. He is the eternal God, and He created us for eternity with Him. Our lives don't end with death. Our babies' lives didn't end with death. We are eternal beings. When we talk about the children we lost, we don't have to say "Our baby was." We can say "Our littlest is."

## 3 Talking with our children about what life could have been like is okay, but then we must move the conversation back to trusting God.

A recurring stinging time for me happens when our family walks through parking lots. Daddy walks with one of the kids talking about important things, and the other two walk together continuing whatever riveting conversation they were having in the car. I often walk behind them, feeling my hand stretch out for the little hand I "should" be holding to keep our littlest safe until we're inside the store. More often than not, I'm arm in arm with one or two of them as we walk, but many times I feel the void of our littlest one not being with us.

Part of my conversation with my son that morning was about what could have been: the friendship, the games they would have played together, the stories they would have told together, and having a buddy closer to his age. It's tough to be the youngest child with the heart of an older brother. Sometimes he feels the void more vividly than other times. It's in those moments that we take time

to cherish the sixth member of our family.

He asked if he was never born if our littlest could have been born. I explained that he was born two years before we lost the baby and that God had his life planned. I told him we can be grateful that we got to know about the life of our littlest and celebrate our baby as long as we did. We talked about God's timing and how we can trust Him to know what's best for our lives even when we don't understand.

## 4 Job's life helps us teach our children that God can be trusted, whether we ever understand why hard things happen or not.

Though we have the benefit of reading what happened in the background of Job's story, we don't know if Job ever got that insight. He lost almost everything and still trusted God without knowing why. In Job 1:21, he said, "Naked I came forth from my mother's womb, and naked shall I go back there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord!"

No matter how great our pain and loss are, we can choose to be like Job and trust and praise God.

Initially, after losing a child in miscarriage we must deal with our own grieving, sadness, and confusion, but like everything in family life, we do it together.

## 5 Showing our children God's mercy and protection gives them the gift of knowing Him more.

After some time of talking about what we were missing out on, my son and I talked about what our littlest one is missing out on.

Our baby's heartbeat was extremely slow. I have no idea what that meant. I don't know what sickness and struggle our littlest had on earth, but I trust that God chose to protect our little one from this as part of His mercy and love for our child.

Our littlest won't deal with the pain of scraped knees or broken bones, betrayal from a friend, or a broken heart from rejection. We may never know all God spared our littlest one from, but we are grateful for His immense

love for each of us and for all He has already taught us from that short earthly life and the eternal life we will be blessed to be part of together.

The best part of this true story is that our baby's earthly life is not the end. That truth gives us the hope that we need to keep trusting God. As parents, we have the honor of sharing that truth and hope with our littlest one's siblings. And as we share that hope, we are given the hope and comfort we need as well.

**Beth Meverden loves sharing the comfort she's received from God with others (2 Corinthians 1:4). You can read all her devotionals for mamas who have lost a child at 3YouCanSee (3youcansee.wordpress.com) or get the two-week devotional at 3youcansee.wordpress.com/2-week-devotional. Find more resources for parenting on her website at BethMeverden.com.**

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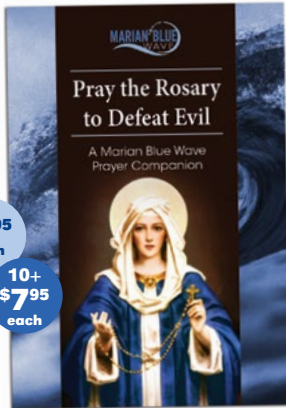
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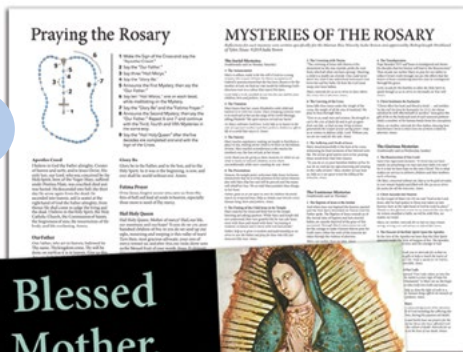


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## Tearing Us Apart: How Abortion Harms Everything and Solves Nothing

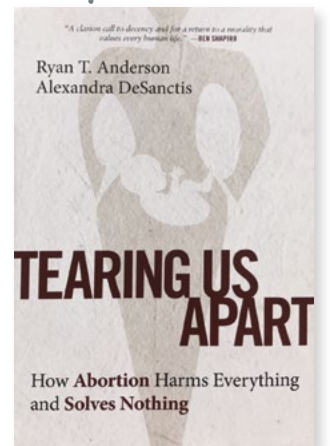
Anybody who thinks abortion is just about abortion needs to read *Tearing Us Apart*. Anderson and DeSanctis provide a *tour de force* of *Roe v. Wade*'s far-reaching ramifications: Legalized abortion is hardly just "a woman's choice" but entails an entire vision of life, interpersonal relations, medicine, law, and culture that its votaries will viciously defend. If anybody doubts that we are in a culture war or believes that fighting it is beneath us, ignore him: He's grossly out of touch with reality.

In the first of seven clearly written chapters, the authors treat the case for pre-born human life and the arguments used to deny it. They go on to explore abortion's deleterious consequences for women, including their physical and mental health, and how abortionists try to sweep it all away as "pseudo-science." They move to abortion's implications for human equality, including the racist eugenics that motivated Margaret Sanger et al., the ongoing disparate impact of abortion on black and minority communities, the use of abortion to eliminate disability by eliminating the (possibly) disabled preborn, and the paradox of this indisputable "woman's choice," whose use in sex-selection abortions primarily targets females. They then address the deforming influence of abortion on medicine, including redefinitions of "medicine" (what does abortion "cure"?) and "health" (open-ended), fetal experimentation, and the contradiction that sanitary and practical standards otherwise universally applied across medicine suddenly become "burdensome" when applied to abortion clinics. They discuss the corrupting influence of abortion on law, where abortion remained for 50 years a "right" in search of a permanent constitutional perch, then address its spread into politics, creating the Democratic party's narrow tent and distorting the judicial confirmation process. And finally they address how abortion has affected mass and social media, culture, and woke businesses to abandon neutral and objective standards in favor of unvarnished advocacy.

*Tearing Us Apart* ends on the threshold of *Dobbs*, so it does not take account of the last year's developments; that's grist for a second edition. But that doesn't detract from the book, which gives us a thorough presentation of how we got to where we are. The conclusion offers prescient suggestions for pro-life labors were *Roe* reversed. It states, "A post-*Roe* America . . . will require both the ability to speak the truth and to reach people who don't know it." The authors show that the forces arrayed to stop that are quite formidable.

This book belongs in every pro-lifer's library. Distribute it to others (including public and private libraries). Steven Christie's *Speaking for the Unborn* is a better choice for a quick and simple presentation of pro-life arguments calibrated to the modern, abbreviated attention span, but for those who relish reading and thinking, *Tearing Us Apart* is the more developed, synthetic, and comprehensive argument. I'd grab it while I can: Considering the fate of Anderson's takedown of transgenderism—*When Harry Became Sally*—expect no small effort to censor this book's message.

John M. Grondelski, PhD (Fordham), was former associate dean of the School of Theology at Seton Hall University in South Orange, New Jersey. All views expressed herein are exclusively his.



by Ryan T. Anderson and Alexandra DeSanctis, Washington: Regnery Publishing, 2022, 256 pp.



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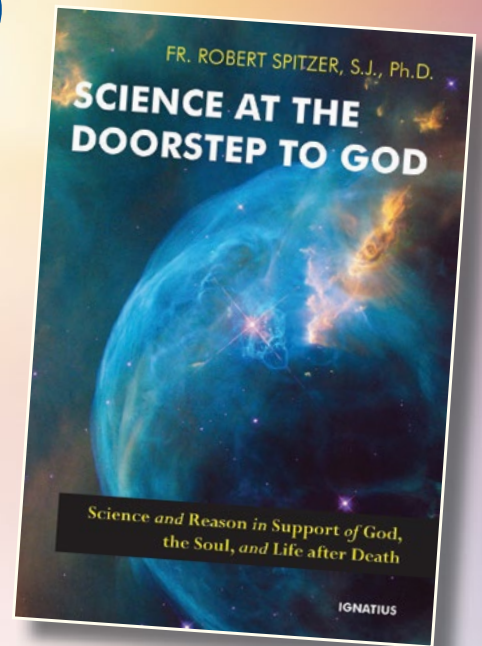


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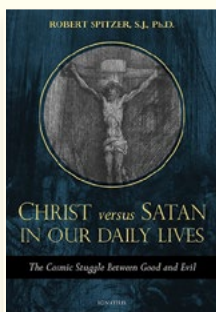
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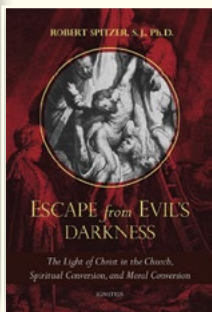
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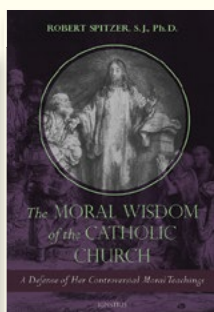
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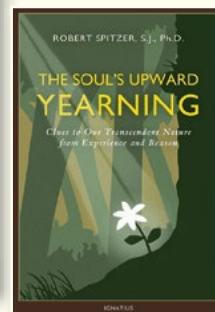
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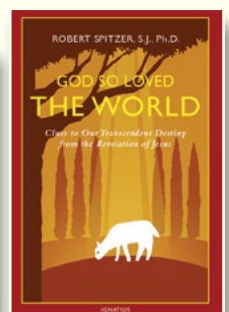
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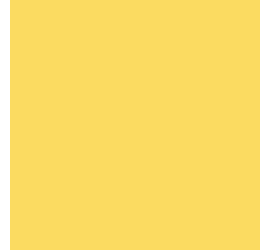
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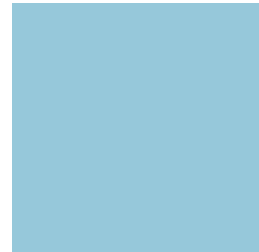
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# Adoption

## A GIFT FROM GOD

By Diane Stark

Today, Kathleen Folan is a wife, mother, and the director of family and youth ministries at St. Dominic's Catholic Church in San Francisco. But in 1990, Kathleen was a 20-year-old college junior, pregnant as the result of a rape. Right away, she recognized the personhood of her preborn child. "I knew it was a child, a human being," she said. "It's a lie if we say it's not."

Although terrified of the changes the pregnancy would bring to her life, Kathleen never considered abortion. "I knew abortion would make it so much worse," she said. "It wouldn't heal my pain. It would just cause guilt that I'd live with forever."

It took Kathleen 11 days to tell her parents, but when she did, they were loving and supportive. They offered to adopt her baby themselves and assured her that they would support any life-giving decision she made.

Throughout her pregnancy, Kathleen was 90% sure that she would choose adoption for her baby. "Despite the circumstances, God had created a human being, and it was up to me to give him the best life I could," she said. "I wanted him to have a mom and a dad, and I couldn't give him that. God sent me numerous signs that adoption was the right choice."

### The perfect family for her baby

Kathleen looked at hundreds of couples who wanted to adopt. At first, she did not know what type of family she wanted for her baby, but after some reflection, she realized that she wanted her baby to be raised in a family

that shared her Catholic faith and her pro-life values. The first couple she chose fell through when they conceived after years of infertility. Kathleen asked them to help her choose a new family, and she also reached out to her priest. Within a week, they both came back with the same names: Barry and Liz Sullivan. They lived across the country in Maryland, but when Kathleen met them, she knew she had made the right decision.

They settled on an open adoption. "I wanted him to know who I was," Kathleen said. God walked through the pregnancy with her, showing her His grace in many ways. While in a bookstore in Spokane, the name "Nathan," which means "gift from God," jumped out at Kathleen, but she didn't share it with the Sullivans because she wanted them to have the honor of naming the baby. Then



Kathleen at the airport with the Sullivan family

Liz said that they were torn between two names and one of them was Nathan. Kathleen shared about her bookstore experience, and they settled on the name Nathan.

Kathleen gave birth in Spokane, Washington, surrounded by her loved ones, and kept Baby Nathan with her for six days after his birth. “Everyone in my family came to meet him,” she said. “Even neighbors stopped by to see him.”

The Sullivans arrived in Washington on day three. Together, they baptized the baby and held a handing-over ceremony. “The open-adoption counselor suggested the ceremony because she thought our family was strong enough to handle it,” she said. Kathleen said the ceremony was beautiful, but the day Nathan left with the Sullivans, she began to grieve. “I returned to college just two months after his birth, but I was miserable,” she said. Then the Sullivans invited her to fly to Maryland for spring break. Kathleen worried that it would cause her more pain, but the Sullivans begged her to visit.

As soon as she saw their home and watched Nathan interact with them, she felt a peace come over her. “Their loving home was everything I couldn’t provide for him and everything I hoped to have someday,” she said. “That trip helped me heal.”

## Beauty in darkness

When Kathleen had first found out about her pregnancy, she decided not to tell anyone at school. Her roommates even staged an intervention because they had mistaken her morning sickness for an eating disorder. Then one of her professors noticed that something was wrong, and he approached her.

“I confided in him, and he convinced me to tell people,” she said. “I was so afraid of what people would think, but their reactions were the exact opposite of what I expected. They were so kind. My fears didn’t come true at all, and I’m convinced many women will have the same experience.”

Kathleen also feared that no man would want to marry her if he knew about her past. Her fear ended up

being the opposite of reality in that case too. Shortly after her spring break trip, Kathleen was showing a friend photos of 10-month-old Nathan, and Luis, another student, asked if the baby was her little brother. Her friend blurted out that Nathan was hers. “I had to explain that I’d placed him for adoption,” Kathleen said. “Luis told me later that he knew in that moment that he would marry me someday because he wanted a strong woman to raise his children.”

God had given Kathleen a man who loved her *because* of her decision, not *in spite* of it.

Kathleen and Luis married in 1995 and had three children together. Their children always knew about Nathan, and they prayed for him each night at bedtime. They sent cards and gifts and spoke to him on the phone, but because of the distance, they didn’t see him again until he was 17. “Our family flew to Maryland and stayed with the Sullivans for six days,” she said. “My kids were 6, 8, and 10 at the time, and they adored Nathan.”

When Nathan was 21, he moved to California, and Kathleen and her family were able to see him more often.

They even attended his wedding. “Nathan is the beauty that came out of something dark,” Kathleen said. “I never dreamed our story could turn out this way.”

In 2020, Kathleen and Nathan shared their story at the West Coast Walk for Life in San Francisco, focusing their comments in particular on the argument regarding exceptions for rape. Kathleen said, “Giving birth to Nathan did not destroy my life, as the abortion side would like you to think, but instead, it gave reason to a painful experience.”

Nathan stated, “How I was conceived doesn’t define who I am. Life is life, no exceptions. Life is a gift, no exceptions. Life is precious, no exceptions.”

As their story proves, life is always a gift from God.

**Diane Stark is a wife, mother of five, and freelance writer. Her work has been published in a variety of secular and Christian magazines, and she currently works as a contributing editor for *Guideposts Magazine*. Diane writes about the important things in life: her family and her faith.**



Kathleen and Nathan



## Make the Saints Part of Your Family's Advent Journey

By Susan Ciancio

What do Saints Francis Xavier, Nicholas, and Catherine of Genoa have in common? They gave their lives to the tiny baby whose birth we will celebrate in just a handful of weeks.

Yet they are certainly not the only ones. Because they lived lives glorifying Jesus, teaching others about Him, and building His Church on earth, they and the other saints in heaven reside with our Father, giving Him perpetual adoration and love.

Their lives serve as examples when we face adversity, when we feel lonely, when we are confused or scared, and when we need guidance. The saints are our friends in heaven who not only advocate for us but who give us something to strive for.

Sometimes their life stories sound like adventures that could have been written by J.R.R. Tolkien, Alexandre Dumas, or Mark Twain. We find narratives of kidnapping and escape, of wicked stepmothers, of betrayal, of poverty, of disability, and more. In short, we find hardship. But it was not the kind of hardship where they wallowed or walked away from God. It was the kind of hardship that brought them closer to Him, that built their reliance upon Him, and that ultimately gave them a greater feeling of joy than any they could have imagined.

Every saint who has ever lived has faced some kind of adversity. Every saint knows what it is like to struggle. They were human beings, after all.

These saints are true gifts to the Church because we can always find something in their lives that resonates with ours. Through their actions and teach-

ings, we learn about faithfulness and about forgiveness. We learn how to overcome adversity and how to stand up for truth and reason with courage. And we learn that our lives become empty if we don't have a relationship with God.

Some would say that life is much easier for us today than for the saints who lived hundreds of years ago. Modern technology and even the basics of life, including electricity and running water, are things they just did not have. But neither did they have the distractions of TV, phones, and social media. They weren't immersed in some of the vitriol we find ourselves absorbed in today. For those reasons, they were fortunate. Yet what they did have was quiet time for contemplation.

Catholic writer and philosopher Josef Pieper wrote extensively on leisure and contemplation, acknowledging that we must take time for both. He does not speak of leisure in a "let's go to the water park or the ball game and goof off" kind of setting but rather in time spent to think and reflect on life and its beauty and meaning. In so doing, he says, we will be led to God.

With this in mind, we created a booklet for you—and your family—that will guide you on your Advent journey as you await the birth of Baby Jesus.

*Awaiting the Gift of Christ: Walking with the Saints This Advent* is a daily reflection booklet whose purpose is to draw your attention away from the craziness of the holidays and to help you reflect on—or contemplate—what we celebrate at Christmas.

Each day's entry begins with words of wisdom from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Then we offer a brief biography of a saint and a reflection of how that saint lived a culture of life. We end with suggestions for how you or your family can truly live the lessons he or she taught.

The purpose of this booklet is to give you that time of quiet contemplation, to help you shut out the outside world, and to encourage you to focus on the reason we spend four weeks in preparation for our Lord's birth. We hope that the booklet not only strengthens your relationship with God but that it gives you the peace and the joy that we all deserve this holiday season.

Out of a love we can only begin to fathom, Jesus came to us as a vulnerable baby. He lived and walked here on earth, built His Church, taught a new way of life, and gave us the roadmap we need to navigate our earthly lives and to prepare for eternal life.

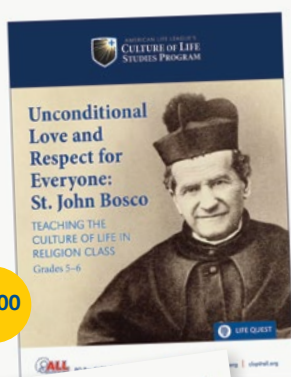
What an immense gift! Let us give back to Him by giving of ourselves and our time this Advent and by allowing His love to permeate our thoughts and our homes.



To purchase this downloadable booklet, visit [shop.all.org/clsp](http://shop.all.org/clsp).

Susan Ciancio is the editor of *Celebrate Life Magazine* and director of the Culture of Life Studies Program.

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# My Search for God

By Stevan Covic

I am not Catholic, but on my wedding day, a Catholic priest dubbed me a “Searcher for God.” This is the story of my search.

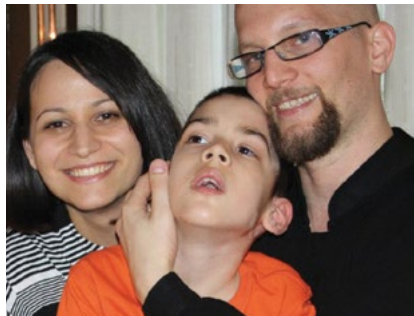
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I was raised by atheists in a (then) communist country in Eastern Europe. Even though we were atheists, we honored Catholic customs and traditions. My wife, on the other hand, was born and raised Catholic. We met on September 1, 1996—the first day of high school. Jelena was the prettiest girl in my class, and I soon realized she was also the smartest. Being a somewhat shy and insecure young man, it took me almost a year to ask her out; by that time, we were already best friends.

Not long into our dating, tragedy struck as Jelena’s father died in a car accident. Perhaps unconsciously trying to fill a void that had been created in their lives, Jelena, her sister, and their mother would go to the local orphanage and take in children for a weekend. They would take them to the zoo and playgrounds and return them after the weekend was over. On one particular occasion, they invited me, and I obliged.

The experience will be etched in my memory as long as I live. As Jelena and I entered a room, about 15 to 20 children stormed us with smiling faces. They started pulling our trousers, asking: “Will you be my daddy? Will you take me home?” They smiled the whole time but with a kind of deep sadness, as if they knew this was their only way out of there, their only way to be truly loved. It was soul-crushingly, gut-wrenchingly sad. When we stepped outside, I told Jelena: “If we ever end up married, for every child of our own, we have to adopt one from here.” The feeling was mutual and we kind of made an unofficial pact.

The way we would eventually honor it was something completely different indeed.



Photos courtesy of the Covic family

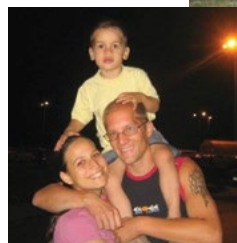
As fate would have it, Jelena and I finished high school and went to college together. In our senior year, out of the blue, we decided to tie the knot. It was clear we were meant to be together. Before even graduating, we decided to head back home, as I discovered a very lucrative new opportunity—snail farming. We got a piece of land and found a small cottage nearby where we were allowed to live free of charge, and everything was looking bright.

Then one day, as I was helping my brother on his farm, my phone rang. It was my wife. From the first few words she uttered, I could tell that she was nervously excited, maybe even a little bit frightened about something. And then, entirely unexpectedly, she uttered the words I will remember forever: “How would you like for us to become foster parents to a little boy?”

What? I tried to remain calm and collected and started asking all the—as you will surely agree—appropriate questions: “What do you mean foster parents to a small boy? What small boy? Where is he now? How old is he? What’s happening?” But as I was asking these questions, something in the back of my mind was starting to get happy and excited. This is the beginning of the story of my son Aleksa and also the part where you should really strap in.

## Blessed with a little boy

By the time we learned about the existence of our son, he was two and a half years old. Born out of rape, he was placed in a foster home. His mom returned to her husband and two sons, hoping one day her husband would



The Covic family before Aleksa's illness

accept the baby. When she was not able to pay his foster family anymore, in despair, she went to a Catholic priest for advice. It just so happened that this priest was leading a prayer group for married couples where we lived. Luckily, one of the married couples was my wife's mother and her new husband. So, one day, the priest asked them all to pray for a young boy, his birthmother, and their family. When my wife heard this story, she asked her mother: "So? Will you take the boy?" Her mother replied: "No, we are too old. Why don't you take him?"

Why not indeed? After all, we did make an oath.

It was November 8, 2006, when our son was "born" into our family. We refer to this day as Aleksa's second birthday, and we celebrate it still. As much as we feared how this adoption thing was going to work out, from the very first day, going to sleep together and waking up as a family felt perfect. He was perfect. Being a family felt so natural, so right. After all, Aleksa was just an innocent child who needed someone to call his own. The fact that we didn't share the same genes made no difference whatsoever.

Take a step back, Biology, your powers are weak here. Love is in this house.

Our bliss, however, was to be slowly but surely interrupted. It started soon after his third birthday, first as a simple gaze, then a simple cry. Then it became more frequent. Doctors said it could be epilepsy, so we took him to a child neurologist in Novi Sad, where we used to study.

*"Don't worry. Many children have epilepsy. With a few meds, they usually grow out of it in adolescence."*

Oh, how I wish that doctor had been right!

The snail farm turned out to be a dud. And because of Aleksa's condition, we felt it would be better if we lived near his doctors. So we sold everything and returned to

Novi Sad. We settled in, Aleksa started kindergarten, and after a few months, we started our very own pet shop. Things were looking bright once more.

Oh, how I wish that had been true!

Aleksa wasn't getting better. He was getting worse. The doctor tried changing the meds a few times, but it was starting to be apparent that something else was going on. It wasn't until 2010 that we finally got the answer. By that time, Aleksa was unable to walk by himself, he was forgetting words, and we were sure he was having eyesight issues. After a whole team of doctors ran all kinds of tests, their answer was as follows:

*"It's not just epilepsy. It is something else, but we don't know what it is. Go home and when he progresses more, only then, from his symptoms, will we be able to determine what the problem is. And, by the way, there's nothing wrong with his eyes."*

WRONG! All of it was WRONG on so many levels. *"Go home and wait for your son to deteriorate more?"* That's your answer?

We were devastated! We were furious! Immediately, Jelena sat down and googled, and by about 3 a.m. the next morning she found it. Just a laywoman, just Google, and she found out what all those doctors couldn't. The key was eyesight. Jelena was sure Aleksa was losing his eyesight, and she managed to find a paper citing three neurodegenerative conditions that cause eyesight issues. We finally found our foe, and its name was late infantile Batten disease. We searched more and the blows kept coming: Symptoms develop after the age of three, progressive epilepsy, loss of motor skills, loss of vision, early death. Life expectancy: 12 years.

*No cure. No cure. No . . . cure.*

*No. That can't be true. There must be someone looking for a cure!*

We got up, wiped our tears, dusted ourselves off, and prepared for battle. And a fierce battle it was. It lasted for over a decade. We teamed up with other families, traveled to Chicago, visited conferences, met other children like Aleksa, and talked to experts. One doctor was on the brink of finding a cure. There was no time to waste! We found a potential new treatment in China that could slow down the progression but not cure our children. So, until the clinical trial was supposed to start, we would go to China and nurture our children as best we could.

To this day, that trial still hasn't started.

Aleksa fought bravely until 2017. He surpassed all doctors' predictions and died peacefully in our arms.

I remember, while we were still looking for answers, a local doctor told us: *"Why don't you give him back? You are still young. Don't throw your life away."*



What did we do? We sold our pet shop and returned home to take care of our son. A job, a career, it all meant nothing! All that we cared about was being with our son and giving him all of our love and attention. The experience we had with our baby boy, the love we shared . . . nothing compares to that, not even remotely!

“How would you like for us to become foster parents to a little boy?” Even today, when I think back to that question, my answer is: There’s nothing I would love more, and I would do it a thousand times over!

Our little boy changed us forever. He enriched our lives and made us better people. He taught us what real values in life are, and he showed us that we were stronger than we ever thought possible.

Still not a day goes by without suffering our loss. Not a day goes by without wishing he was still here. And for those of you struggling with loss, here’s a quote that has helped me deal with the pain: *“Embrace your pain. It is all you have left. And remember: If the scars are deep, then so was the love.”*

So even when I am having bad days and experiencing unbearable pain, in a strange way I am happy in my suffering because I know the love we shared was immense, and it still is to this day.

### Paying love forward

You might be wondering where we are today. At present, we are planning on building a summer camp

for children with disabilities, the first of its kind in our country. And we are foster parents to two little orphan girls with Down syndrome. We watch how they grow and learn things that experts told us would not be possible. Each second of each minute of each hour of each day, we know our life now would never be as rich if it wasn’t for our son and the love we experienced.

And to this day, I am still searching, and I still haven’t found my God. Or have I?

I leave it up to you to decide.

**Born in Subotica, Serbia, in 1982, Stevan Covic studied history at the University of Novi Sad. From early on, he and his wife settled on a life of helping others, especially children. He currently works as a freelance writer as well as a coordinator on different charity projects for kids with disabilities. His dream is to establish a social enterprise that will use all of its profits to fund projects for those in need.**



Aleksa with each of his parents in China, awaiting the start of a clinical trial



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*A generous portion of the proceeds will go toward supporting American Life League!*



# Year-End Charitable Giving Helps Us and You!

As this year comes to a close, it is time to examine whether you have accomplished your charitable giving goals for the year and lowered your tax burden.

Please consider making a special year-end gift to American Life League to support our lifesaving work **AND** to receive a generous tax benefit for yourself!

**There are many ways to make a donation to American Life League—and all of them help support our lifesaving work!**

**IRA/Required Minimum Distribution** — An IRA/401(k) is a great way to support ALL's lifesaving work. A Required Minimum Distribution is mandatory if you are 72 or older this year. The RMD requires you to take a distribution of IRA/401(k) funds, whether or not you need it. For many people this results in higher taxes or a higher tax bracket. However, if you make all or part of the RMD directly payable to ALL, you may avoid extra taxes and receive a charitable deduction. Your IRA/401(k) administrator can arrange this for you. It is called a Qualified Charitable Distribution and can be up to \$100,000 for individuals and \$200,000 for couples.

**Matching Gifts** — Many employers, even ones you've retired from, will match a donation to ALL, so it is doubled! Please ask your current or former employer about a matching gift, or ask us to check for you.

**Donor Advised Fund** — If you or your family has a DAF, please use it to make a contribution to ALL, and tell others you know to also support ALL just as you do!

**Foundations/Trusts** — If you or your family is associated with a public or private foundation or trust, you can provide a generous gift or grant to ALL. Additionally, if you are a board or advisory member of a foundation or trust, please consider recommending a gift to ALL from the foundation or trust. This will help us save lives!

**Life Insurance** — Many people who have adult children or no children have made ALL a beneficiary of their life insurance policies. This is the pro-life legacy that they will always be remembered for.

**Stocks/Bonds/Real Estate** — If you have investments in stocks, bonds, or real estate that have appreciated in value since they were first acquired, you may owe substantial taxes when you sell them. However, if they are directly donated to ALL, taxes can be avoided and a charitable deduction for the market value can be taken. This gives you significant tax benefits, and it will help ALL save lives!

As you review the following summary of IRS charitable giving guidelines, remember that your generous year-end donation to American Life League helps our lifesaving work **AND** it may greatly reduce your taxes.

Taxpayers who itemize deductions can deduct their donations to ALL as long as their total itemized deductions do not exceed the Standard Deduction amount set by the IRS.

**1** Cash contributions and contributions of non-cash, short-term capital gain assets can be deducted up to 60% of your Adjusted Gross Income.

**2** Contributions of non-cash, long-term capital gain assets can be deducted up to 30% of your AGI.

**3** If deductions exceed the AGI limits, the excess can be carried forward as deductions in future years, for up to five years.



For help making any year-end gift, please call 540-659-4171.  
Visit [www.ALL.org](http://www.ALL.org) to make a secure credit card donation online.

American Life League, PO Box 6170, Falmouth, VA 22403

Tax ID number (EIN): 52-1238301

*The above points are provided as general information and are not meant to be any form of instruction or advice. American Life League does not provide legal or financial advice, so you should always consult a tax or legal professional when making decisions involving your taxes or finances.*



# Join the pro-life phone company!

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# Leave a lasting PRO-LIFE LEGACY by including a gift to **ALL** in your will!

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You will also receive our Loving Will kit, designed to protect you from euthanasia and provide you and your loved ones with peace of mind.

For more information on putting **ALL** in your will, visit our website at [all.org/wills-bequests](http://all.org/wills-bequests), email [legacy@all.org](mailto:legacy@all.org), or call **540-659-4171**.



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