

‘It is wrong to look the other way and remain silent’

written by Katie Zakrzewski |



More than 225 Catholics gathered at the Cathedral of St. Andrew in Little Rock on the morning of Oct. 6 for adoration and to pray the rosary before participating in a eucharistic procession through the street of the capital city to the Shrine of Divine Mercy at St. Edward Church in Little Rock.

While the Mass and March for Life are held each year in January to focus primarily on the importance of protecting the unborn, Respect Life Month provides an opportunity for Catholics to examine all life issues.

Catherine Phillips, diocesan respect life director, said Respect Life Sunday is full of events, such as Mass and times of prayer and confessions and the procession and sharing of food, to reinforce the importance of issues impacting the entire spectrum of life.

“We’re really trying to promote Respect Life Month, kicking off with Respect Life Sunday on Oct. 6,” Phillips said. “... To call our attention to the gift of life, the sanctity and dignity of each person’s life but also to give thanks to God for what he’s done here specifically in Arkansas, helping us to keep abortion out of our state, which wouldn’t have happened without divine intervention. We’re very grateful that we’re not fighting the battle of abortion on the ballot right now. ... It’s really a great time to give public witness to our firm belief that every life is a gift, that every life is precious, that every human person has equal dignity in the eyes of the Lord.”

Phillips said Respect Life Month calls attention to other issues that impact life, such as suicide, euthanasia, the death penalty, caring for individuals with disabilities and reaffirming that “every life is precious and valuable.”

The one-mile eucharistic procession was a new feature of this year’s Respect Life Sunday.

Seminarians, bell ringers, the Knights of Columbus and other Catholic lay organizations led the half-mile procession down Seventh Street and Sherman Street, followed by a crowd of Catholics. Curious onlookers enjoying the sunny weather spontaneously joined the procession as well as others watched from their porches and balconies.

Since the overturning of Roe v. Wade in 2022, and with abortion not on the ballot in Arkansas, many Catholics have shifted their sights to other social issues that they consider more pressing. Phillips reaffirmed that work is still needed on these issues, whether they’re on the ballot or not.

“Yes, I’m breathing a sigh of relief today, but a lot of us who worked on the Decline to Sign campaign so abortion wouldn’t be on the ballot feel ... like it was so close to having abortion on our ballot,” Phillips said. “Now, I firmly believe that most of the good people in Arkansas do not want abortion in Arkansas, but it’s very clear that some people do.

“It’s also very clear that people don’t understand everything about this issue. That education is very important, and that increasing an understanding of what an abortion is and what an abortion isn’t is very important. That increasing an understanding about what the sanctity of life really means, when life truly begins, that it really is precious. And again, it’s not just abortion. It’s through all of life.

“... If you think abortion’s gone away, it hasn’t. Yes, thanks be to God, it’s illegal in Arkansas. But the factors and difficult circumstances that cause people to think that abortion is needed have not gone away. Women still face difficult decisions when they’re diagnosed or often misdiagnosed with an apparent fetal anomaly.”

In his homily during the Respect Life Mass at St. Edward Church, Bishop Anthony B. Taylor said women still face challenges contemplating abortion.

“Overturning Roe v. Wade may have reduced the number of abortions, but it did not put an end to abortions,” Bishop Taylor said. “The issue has now fallen to the states, and many women now travel to other states to get abortions. Merely changing laws will not put an end to abortion. The only lasting solution is to change hearts. And we will only change hearts when we begin to embrace a consistent ethic of life.”

Bishop Taylor echoed Pope Francis’ call for a consistent ethic of life.

“Pope Francis insisted that everything was connected, thus bridging the American political divide between those who are passionate about abortion but weak when it comes to social justice, and those who are passionate about social justice but weak when it comes to abortion,” he said. “Abortion is clearly the most depraved expression of what Pope Francis calls our throwaway culture ... but abortion is not a standalone issue. ... Pope Francis said the innocent victims of abortion, children who die from hunger or from bombings, immigrants who drown in search of a better tomorrow, the elderly or sick who are considered a burden, the victims of wars, terrorism, violence and drug trafficking, the environment devastated by man’s predatory

relationship with nature ... at stake in all of this is the gift from God, of which we are all noble stewards, but not masters.

“It is wrong to look the other way and remain silent. We are here today because we are not willing to look away or remain silent when it comes to abortion. Pope Francis is challenging us not to remain silent on any of these other areas either.”

Dale Flamand, Culture of Life chairman for the state Knights of Columbus, stood guard throughout the day’s events. He said when doing pro-life work, it’s important to keep Christ at the center. “Today, Jesus led us through the streets of Little Rock,” Flamand told *Arkansas Catholic*. “We walked as a family, we prayed as a family, and we shared in the gift of true life — his body and blood. Today was a good day. Bishop Taylor’s homily reminded us that the act of abortion is just one of the many respect life issues we must remember and work toward ending. We can’t do it alone — we need God’s help.”



Bishop Taylor presents the monstrance at the end of the eucharistic procession at St. Edward Church in Little Rock Oct. 6 (Katie Zakrzewski)



Deacon Matt Glover and several seminarians make a stop during the eucharistic procession Oct. 6. (Katie Zakrzewski)



Seminarians surround Deacon Matt Glover as he holds the monstrance during the Eucharistic procession in downtown Little Rock Oct. 6 (Katie Zakrzewski)



Little Rock Police Department blocked off traffic downtown as onlookers and pedestrians spontaneously joined the eucharistic procession Oct. 6 (Katie Zakrzewski)



The Knights of Columbus remain vigilant throughout adoration at the Cathedral of St. Andrew in Little Rock Oct. 6 (Katie Zakrzewski)



Knights of Columbus stand guard beside the monstrance during adoration Oct. 6. (Katie Zakrzewski)



Hundreds of Catholics, clergy, seminarians and Catholic organizations joined the eucharistic procession downtown October 6. (Katie Zakrzewski)

Gun violence through pro-life, moral lens

written by Aprille Hanson Spivey |



When Jesus was arrested, Peter took action. In a show of force, he drew his sword and cut off the high priest's slave's ear. Instead of instructing his other disciples to do the same, Jesus rebuked Peter: "Put your sword into its scabbard. Shall I not drink the cup that the Father gave me?" (John 18:10-11)

This moment was a lesson in nonviolence before Jesus' brutal death. As early Christian author Tertullian said, "In disarming Peter, Christ disarms all Christians."

This, and all of Jesus' teachings of nonviolence, provide a roadmap for the faithful to behave responsibly in the face of an aggressor and with weapons.

So far this year, the United States has experienced more than 385 mass shootings — defined as four or more people shot during a single incident — and at least 11,598 people have died from gun violence, according to a Sept. 5 *ABC News* article.

Gun violence is the leading cause of death in the country for children and youth, with two-thirds of those deaths resulting from suicide, making it one of the most relevant pro-life issues today.

For Catholics, looking at the issue of guns and gun violence through a moral lens versus a solely political one can provide a clear vision for a consistent ethic of life.

"I think so many things in our world are polarizing today. I think that people falsely think that we need to divide ourselves into the camps of Republican, Democrat, liberal, conservative. I don't think we do. We're Catholic first. That's not to say we can't be politically active, but I think our political climate has a lot to do with why so many things are polarizing," said Catherine Phillips, respect life director of the Diocese of Little Rock. "Something that kills is a pro-life issue, whether it's abortion or euthanasia or often when we talk about gun violence, we're talking about murder. Sometimes it's war on a broader scale. But more than that, it is an issue of human dignity. When it's mental health issues, poverty, issues of community instability, forced migration, we're talking about times when people are often marginalized and then we talk about people being wounded or killed by guns."

Church teaching

According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, references to violence are listed under the fifth commandment, "You shall not kill," including the production and sale of arms and self-defense.

In January 2020, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a document, "Backgrounder on Gun Violence: A Mercy and Peacebuilding Approach to Gun Violence," which stated in part, "The Church has been a consistent voice for the promotion of peace at home and around the world, and a strong advocate for the reasonable regulation of firearms."

The USCCB's advocacy for gun policy includes:

- A total ban on assault weapons
- Universal background checks and increased regulations and limitations for gun purchases
- Limits on civilian access to high-capacity weapons and ammunitions

- Supporting a federal law for criminalizing gun trafficking
- Improving access and more resources for mental health care and early interventions
- Steps to make guns safer, including locks preventing children and anyone other than the owner from using a gun without permission or supervision
- Assessing the toll that violent images and experiences on people, specifically youth.

Father Stephen Gadberry, pastor of St. Theresa Church in Little Rock, said the Church's stance has never been about stripping away guns from responsible owners.

"As with all things that we've been entrusted and given stewardship of, we have a responsibility to be educated in its proper use. Whenever we're not properly educated and prepared to use it for its proper end, people suffer," he said. "That could be weapons, that could be medicine that's manipulated. That could be sex that's used for the wrong reasons. So anything that God has given us and that humans have developed that's not used to its proper end goes against God's plan."

Growing up in Wynne, Father Gadberry first shot a gun around 7 years old.

"From the very beginning, I was told there was a proper time and place to use them, and only with adults around, and only with the proper permissions," he said.

He served in the U.S. Air Force from 2005 to 2007. For almost a decade, he's hunted whitetail deer, elk and bear, most often with archery, but he also owns hunting rifles.

"Weapons and firearms are a part of this whole world we live in. In themselves, they're not morally evil. Their improper use can be evil," he said.

As a priest, veteran and hunter, he explained common sense gun legislation goes back to promoting better education around proper gun use.

"I am in favor of some more laws when it comes to acquiring guns, not to make it so much more difficult for law-abiding citizens, but to have systems in place to better know who's getting weapons," Father Gadberry said.

A pro-life issue

In 2023, there were 46,728 gun-related deaths, the third highest ever recorded in the U.S., according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The statistics include murders, suicides, accidental deaths and law enforcement-related deaths.

The Church promotes a consistent ethic of life, which means protecting life from the womb to the tomb, including speaking out against abortion, euthanasia, the death penalty and gun violence. However, abortion often eclipses other pro-life issues. Phillips explained it is not an "either-or" conversation but a "both-and" for the faithful.

"Murder of a human is gravely contrary to the dignity of the human person (catechism, no. 2320). When we're talking about pro-life, it's important not merely to be anti-abortion. ... If we stop recognizing human dignity in one instance, we're on the slippery slope," she said. "Lives lost to gun violence are just as precious as lives lost in the womb."

Dr. Sherry Simon, founder and past president of the Catholic peace and social justice nonprofit Pax Christi Little Rock, serves as chair of the Pax Christi USA National Council and co-founded the Pax Christi USA gun violence prevention working group about a year and a half ago. They promote local gun violence prevention work and provide education and webinars.

In Arkansas, Pax Christi Little Rock hosted Anna Morshedi, who leads the Little Rock chapter of Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America.

Simon said there's been a plague of false propaganda messaging from gun lobbies.

"Most folks are looking for common sense gun laws, just like we have to have a license to drive a car and have to learn to drive a car. Five percent of the world's population is in this country, but we own half of the world's guns.

"As you know, we have the most deaths from guns by many times (the gun homicide rate is 26 times higher than other high-income countries in the world). That correlates," Simon said, adding, "The more you get to know the nonviolent Jesus, the promotion of no regulations of gun use and the amount of gun violence in our country is not a pro-life consistent ethic of life."

Simon said Catholics can help change the trajectory of gun violence in the U.S.

"There's a lot of silence from the pulpit," she said, adding, "If I were a priest, I wouldn't want to make a lot of my congregation unhappy. But I do think, number one, the education needs to come not only from the pulpit, but there can be committees in different parishes on gun violence."

Resources for Catholics

There are many resources for Catholics to look to when it comes to understanding guns, gun violence and our responsibility as a society. Father Stephen Gadberrry, Catherine Phillips and Sherry Simon shared notable resources for the faithful to learn more.

- Biblical references: Genesis 1 and 2 about the stewardship of creation; the Psalms
 - USCCB's "Backgrounder on Gun Violence: A Mercy and Peacebuilding Approach to Gun Violence."
 - Pax Christi USA gun violence prevention: paxchristiusa.org/gun-violence-prevention
 - Michigan Catholic Conference "Focus" article, "Responding to Gun Safety Reform Objections" micatholic.org/advocacy/news-room/focus/2023/a-catholic-response-to-gun-violence/responding-to-gun-safety-reform-objections/
 - Book, "Beating Guns: Hope for People Who Are Weary of Violence," by Shane Claiborne and Michael Martin
 - Nonprofit, Every Town for Gun Safety, everytown.org
 - Pax Christi Little Rock presentation on Moms Demand Action "How to End Gun Violence in America" youtube.com/watch?v=46dsAMNL4es
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Student, pastor reflect on 1998 Jonesboro shooting

written by Aprille Hanson Spivey |



For about six months before Lacey Vance sent her daughter, Scarlet, to kindergarten last year, her nervousness was more than typical first-time parent jitters.

"I could tell that it was very out of character for me to be kept up at night about this," she said.

But the fear was understandable. In 1998, Lacey (then-Hawkins) was an outgoing 12-year-old who loved showing horses, had just joined cheerleading and was active in her school's gifted and talented program.

She felt safe as a seventh grader at the small Westside Middle School, which had about 100 students and teachers outside of Jonesboro.

March 24 marked the 26th anniversary of the shooting at Westside Middle School in Craighead County, where students Andrew Golden, 11, and Mitchell Johnson, 13, triggered a fire alarm and shot from the woods behind the school at students and teachers as they evacuated. According to the Encyclopedia of Arkansas, the shooters fired 30 rounds at the group, killing four female students and a teacher and injuring 10 others. It was one of the first school shootings and remains the deadliest mass shooting at a middle school in the United States.

Since 1998, there have been more than 400 school shootings in the United States, according to *The Washington Post*.

Vance, now 39, who attends Mass at St. Joseph Church in Conway, was there the day of the shooting, and Msgr. Jack Harris was pastor at Blessed Sacrament Church in Jonesboro, ministering to the school and community five years after the attack. Both reflected on that day and where society is now when it comes to gun violence.

"We've hardened ourselves, that's for sure. We've become such a violent society. We just sort of live with it. We looked at ourselves in Jonesboro as being a one-off, as something horrible and it will never happen again. And instead, it just unfolded a year later, practically to the day Columbine (High School shooting in Colorado) happened. That put us into a shock up there. But then it has just continued," Msgr. Harris said.

'That stays with you'

There are moments from that day Vance cannot forget. She was sitting in math class when the fire alarm went off.

"Everybody was excited because it was pretty nice outside that day. And, you know, a fire drill back then was like, 'This is cool. Let's go outside, miss 15 minutes of class.' So we all get up and file out of the building," she said.

The students heard popping noises and were shuffled into the gym. While rumors of a robbery or a hostage situation swirled around the gym, Vance said it was clear some students were missing. She immediately began worrying about her mother, a computer lab instructor at the school.

"A teacher, who was one of my mom's good friends, walked in and all I remember is seeing blood all over her shoes and thinking, 'What is going on?' And then I really started panicking," Vance said, adding her mother was safe. "... Then you start hearing people scream in the gym.

I think a lot of that was the friends being missing, but I know of at least one kid, maybe more than one, who had been shot and didn't realize it and were in the gym with us."

Vance stayed at the school that day longer than most because her mother worked there, watching ambulances and police, seeing the blood in the hallway, trash bins overturned from students who hid and the bullet holes that dotted the walls behind the bleachers in the gym, which was in the line of fire.

"That stays with you," she said.

'But I can't get over it'

Msgr. Harris got the call about the shooting that afternoon. He was soon in that same gym where community leaders met with shocked citizens, stayed to answer calls that evening and met with staff the following day, along with counselors.

"I was put in with the group that was the cafeteria workers. Those ladies were surrogate mothers to these kids," Msgr. Harris said. "... Because this happened at about 12:35 p.m., in the afternoon, immediately after lunch, these ladies felt like, 'We can't believe what we did to these kids. We fed them lunch and sent them out to be shot.' That's not at all what happened, but that's how they felt."

The students returned two days after the shooting. Though counseling was available, Vance did not remember processing what happened.

"I think they thought normalcy is the best thing, and I understand that, given the resources available at the time. ... I think all of us just sort of put a lid on that and kept on going because we didn't know otherwise," Vance said.

For the next five years, Msgr. Harris was a steady presence, attending sports and school activities. He was a listening ear for students with their parents and assisted with camps organized for student survivors in the years following the shooting. He said he watched as students grieved, gravitating toward him and sometimes acting out when he was around because he was the silent reminder of the trauma.

"What they're saying is, 'I'm not permitted to talk about this. People tell me, get over it, move on. But I can't get over it,'" Msgr. Harris said.

Vance graduated from Westside High School in 2003 but has never returned to the middle school. Msgr. Harris became a crisis counselor, working with the National Organization for Victim Advocacy to minister everywhere from Columbine, Colo., to New York City after 9/11. In addition to his work as a pastor in Center Ridge and Saint Vincent, he ministers to death row inmates.

Peace at a new school

While Vance has spent most of her life blocking out the realities of that day, including becoming news-avoidant, sending her only child to school made the trauma boil over.

"You have real pictures to put with the fear in your head where you can picture your own kid in the same situation you were in, and that's very scary," Vance said.

Close friends and clients recommended St. Joseph Elementary School in Conway, and on their first visit, Vance said they greeted Scarlet by name, which was an immediate comfort. Scarlet, turning 7 in October, is now in her second year at St. Joseph in first grade.

Vance is a second-year room mom and said the family is excited about the connection the school has given them to the parish. She praised the teacher's "hawkeye" nature, the school's proximity to the police station and its overall commitment to security.

"In the event of an emergency, not only do you want to be able to get there quickly, but I want to be able to walk up to anybody here and say, 'Where's my kid' and them know who I am and know who my child is immediately. And here that happens," Vance said. "... This school is the best thing ever."



A memorial garden at Westside Middle School in Jonesboro, seen here Sept. 22, honors those who died and were injured when two students opened fire. (Aprille Hanson Spivey)

Common Gun Objections

The Michigan Catholic Conference publication "Focus" shared different topics on guns and gun violence from a Catholic perspective. In their article, "Responding to Gun Safety Reform Objections," they shared tips on Catholic responses to common gun objections. Here are three:

- "Objection: Guns don't kill people, people kill people."

"Response: People live in a fallen world where conflict is sometimes inevitable. The question is whether that conflict will become deadly. The availability of a gun to people involved in violent or angry conflict reasonably leads to an increased risk of serious injury or death."

- “Objection: These measures violate the Second Amendment and my freedom as an American to own a gun.”

“Response: Catholic social principles hold that with rights come responsibilities, and that applies to the Second Amendment. As the American bishops have taught, ‘the unlimited freedom to possess and use handguns must give way to the rights of all people to safety and protection against those who misuse these weapons.’ Catholics do not advocate for freedom from obligation or restriction, but rather freedom for human flourishing. The common good of society includes respect for life and for peace. A peaceful society is not possible if violent death by gunfire is increasingly prevalent.”

- “Objection: You cannot legislate away evil. Homicides will continue despite these laws.”

“Response: Catholics believe civil law expresses the moral order and promotes the common good in society. Although it is true that civil law alone cannot prevent all bad acts, there is extensive research that certain gun safety policies are very likely to save lives, thereby promoting the value of human life and peace to society.”

Read more at micatholic.org/advocacy/news-room/focus/2023/a-catholic-response-to-gun-violence/responding-to-gun-safety-reform-objections/

Scranton church rallies pro-life community

written by Katie Zakrzewski |



Pro-life marches don't have to be relegated to bigger cities like Little Rock and Rogers.

In the town of Scranton (Logan County), with a population of around 250 people, St. Ignatius Church has organized an annual pro-life march since 2019 — an event that has united Christians across denominations and has gotten over half of the town's population to publicly display their beliefs.

Father John Miranda, pastor of St. Ignatius Church in Scranton, St. Meinrad Church in Prairie View and Sts. Peter and Paul Church in Morrison Bluff, has been in the parish since 2017.

He said he noticed parishioners were having to make the two-hour drive to Little Rock for pro-life events.

"I realized that the CYM kids ... would go to Little Rock to participate in the March (for Life each January)," Father Miranda said. "And when I asked them, they said, 'Father, it's a two-hour drive each way, four hours all together. It's not possible.' And then I said, 'You know what? We can do it here.' And then we started it. We asked the other churches."

Father Miranda reached out to the churches in the town and explained that he was putting together a pro-life march so people didn't have to drive to Little Rock. Other faith leaders began sharing information about the march with their own congregations.

Father Miranda's other parishes also join the march.

"All of the churches come to Scranton ... I also ask people from Subiaco and other churches, if they're interested they can come," he said. "So we do have a mixed group, not just people from my parish. I would say from everywhere."

Over the past five years, Scranton has faced several challenges in getting the march, which is held in February, together, from staying healthy during COVID to navigating winter weather. But at each march, anywhere from 120 to 150 people show up with signs and march around the town.

“We inform the sheriff about it, and he sends two deputies, and they block the road for us,” Father Miranda said. “We go down the street, go around town and come back.”

Katrina Willems, a parishioner at St. Ignatius, has helped parishioners prepare for the march since its inception.

“We have a church in Scranton, Prairie View and Morrison Bluff ... we joined all three of our churches together, and we all met at the hall and we had our religious education programs,” Willems said. “The kids made posters and banners and with all of our church members who wished to participate. We all met right here at the church, and for our elderly that wanted to join but could walk, we had golf carts and side by sides.”

Willems said part of the route consists of walking along the highway in town and displaying their beliefs for passersby.

“It’s just this really moving moment — we’re just walking down the highway and cars are pulling over because they’re in awe and wonder of what’s going on,” she said. “And with our banners and signs, you can visibly see that this is a march for life. Then we all meet back at the church. It’s really simple, but it makes a really bold statement with that big of a group together in a public statement of where we stand on the issue of life.”

Father Miranda said it’s important for all parishes and towns, regardless of size, to publicly display their pro-life beliefs.

“This is a very, very small community here ... they’re very closely knit,” Father Miranda said. “I don’t think we should divide ourselves saying that we are Catholics, and they are Baptists — we are all children of God. I think all of us need to understand that God is giving us life, and that should not be something that we differentiate with each other in. We are all children of God.”

Willems encouraged other parishes to start their own marches especially if they are some distance from Little Rock.

“It was a really simple idea that Father John thought of,” she said. “It’s so easy. We just let our church know when we’re going to meet at the hall. We’ll have golf carts available. We usually have donuts and coffee beforehand for fellowship. And then we just take off and start walking. It’s not a hard thing to do, it’s just that you have to plan it really — to say, ‘Hey, we’re going to come together and do this.’ And I think once that first march is over, you just get that feeling of making such a bold statement. There was something about being on the highway and the cars that we’re stopping and seeing the amazing on their faces. I think that’s the biggest thing — just asking your church to try this out.”



More than 150 participants in the Scranton March for Life walk around the town, holding signs and banners before marching alongside the highway in January 2021. (Katrina Willems)

Jonesboro parish program there for city's pregnant mothers

written by Katie Zakrzewski |



In March 2020, for the 25th anniversary of *Evangelium vitae*, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops called on parishes across the country to join a nationwide effort called “Walking with Moms in Need.”

Originally only intended to last for a year to develop educational, pastoral and action-oriented resources for parishes, the program, designed to help pregnant mothers and families in need, took off.

Two years ago, Blessed Sacrament Church in Jonesboro answered the USCCB’s call.

Martha Bartels leads the parish’s “Moms in Need” program with a small group of women.

“After the Supreme Court decision reversing *Roe v. Wade*, I got a newsletter from the diocese,” Bartels said. “It was Respect Life Month, and there was an article in that newsletter...about building a culture of life and what we can do in a post-Roe world. ... So we discussed as a group, ‘What do we want to do? How can we help?’”

Bartels and other parishioners met with pastor Msgr. Scott Friend and Catherine Phillips, director of the Respect Life Office for the Diocese of Little Rock.

“We decided we wanted to have a dedicated phone line at Blessed Sacrament for someone who found themselves unexpectedly pregnant to call,” Bartels said. “We’re a small group, so we were worried about biting off more than we could chew, and we didn’t feel like we were educated enough — that we needed some kind of training.”

Phillips provided the group with educational resources and trainings to pursue.

“After we did that course, we felt like we were more equipped to handle a call if we got one

from someone who was in a crisis situation or unexpectedly pregnant,” Bartels said.

Bartels and the other members of the Moms in Need program began to search across Jonesboro for available resources. They called Holy Angels Convent and were directed to the pregnancy center in Jonesboro, which was established by St. Bernards Medical Clinic. Moms in Need established connections at the pregnancy center, with the diocese and with the St. Vincent de Paul Society, as well as other organizations with similar goals.

Sister Johanna Marie Melnyk, OSB, vice president for mission and ethics at St. Bernards Healthcare, said a parish group like Moms in Need can play a pivotal role in bridging the services gap.

“I’ve enjoyed connecting with Blessed Sacrament’s Moms in Need group and hope we can continue to build on that,” she said. “St. Bernards Healthcare provides a variety of services for moms, babies and families, but a parish organization can be a vital link in connecting people to the services they need. I feel that Moms in Need really wants to provide that personal connection.”

Shortly after, the group designed a brochure with a list of resources and information. They have since been working to put the word out about their hotline and the work they do, keeping an ad in the weekly parish bulletin.

However, the program is eager to expand beyond the parish walls. With Msgr. Friend’s blessing and encouragement, Bartels said the program is getting ready to reach out to the Jonesboro community.

“We plan on trying to get the word out more,” Bartels said. “We’re such a small group of five people that we thought we just need to do our own parish; we’ll start with that. We rotate taking the phone and taking calls. And since we haven’t had many yet, our plan is to try to get the word beyond our parish and see if there’s a need in the community for something like this. We’re going to put information in the hands of the area high schools and with St. John Newman University Parish at ASU and see if we get any calls from that.”

Bartels said if someone calls the hotline, the most important thing Moms in Need can do is listen.

“The first thing you have to do is listen and truly hear what’s on their heart,” she said. “They might be considering abortion. They might be considering adoption. They might want to keep their baby. So our job is just to listen and to build their trust by hearing what’s on their heart. And at that point, once we’ve established that trust and think that we understand what they are feeling and what they want, then we can go in and possibly share with them some information that we know.”

Donna Fincher is another member of the Moms in Need program. Her uncle, the late Father Ernie Hardesty, a longtime campus minister, played a pivotal role in forming her pro-life values.

“I just feel closer to him when I do things like that,” she said.

Fincher led the Moms in Need program when it was originally formed, working to get women’s groups throughout the parish and surrounding community connected to their work.

Fincher said that another large reason for her involvement in the Moms in Need program was her own daughter's unexpected pregnancy.

"My daughter found herself in this situation suddenly at 17 years old, needing someone to go to because she found herself pregnant and she had a lot of goals for herself," she said. "... She was about to go to Notre Dame. She had scholarships anywhere she wanted to go. And so I know the fear that she had, I know how powerless she felt. And she did have a very supportive group of family and friends behind her. But I feel for those who don't — for those who need someone to talk to, to just walk with, to learn the resources that our community has."

Fincher's daughter is now 33. She and her 16-year-old son are now doing well, thanks to the support that they received from the community.

"A lot of things are changing in your life when you find out that you're suddenly pregnant," Fincher said. "... Just reaching out can mean helping people get through those first initial feelings."

Fincher said more parishes should be involved in efforts like this.

"I think that your parish is sometimes the first call that you're going to make," she said. "If you don't have a family member or close friend, you might call your church. That's the first thing I think of when I feel hopeless about something."

Need help?

Would you or someone you know in the Jonesboro area like to speak to the Moms in Need program at Blessed Sacrament Church? Call (870) 926-8377. All calls are confidential.

Need healing after abortion?

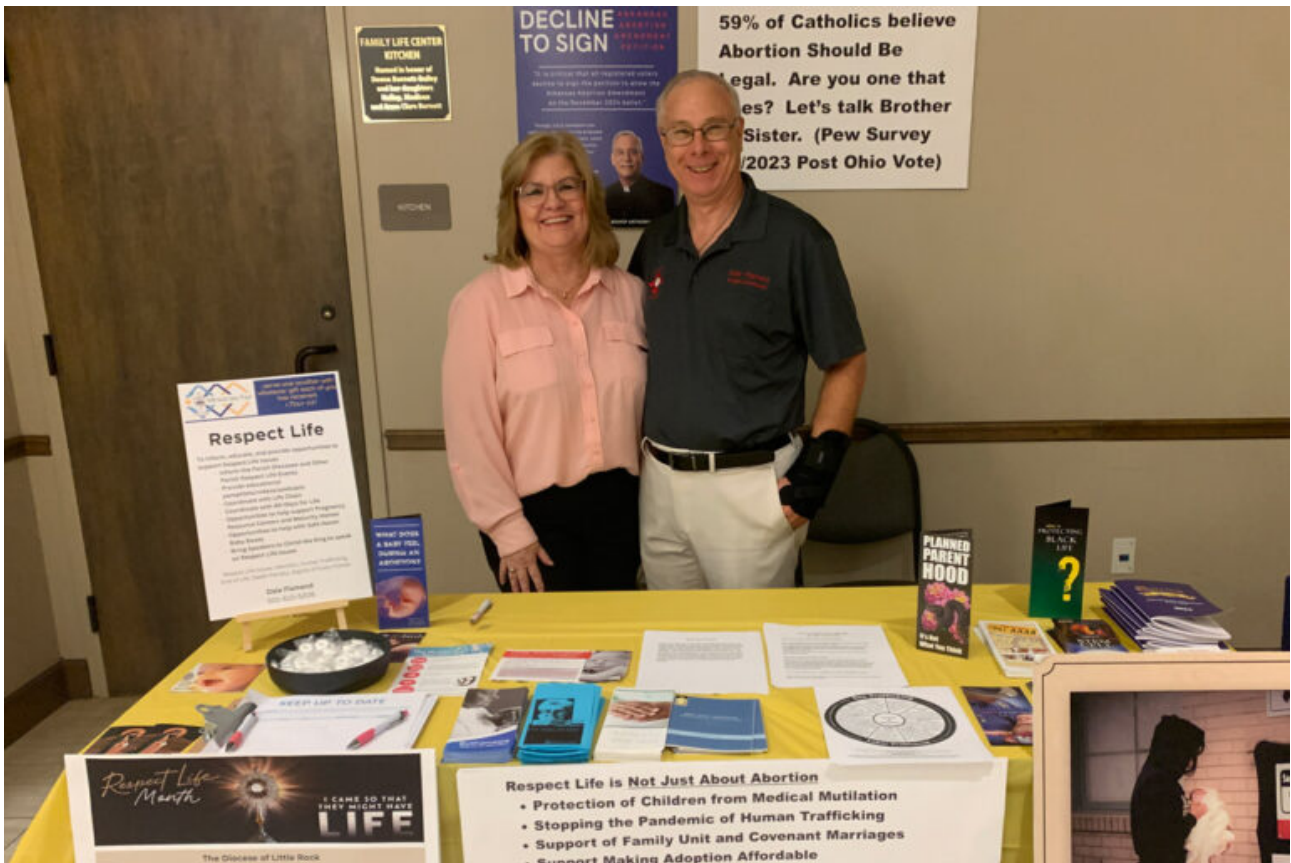
Project Rachel is a post-abortion healing ministry of the Catholic Church, provided in the Diocese of Little Rock through the Respect Life Office. Project Rachel reaches out to women, men and their families with spiritual, psychological and emotional support. Women and men are invited to receive the healing grace of God through sacramental reconciliation, counseling and prayer.

Project Rachel has healing support groups and retreats in English and Spanish, and it respects and maintains the confidentiality of all participants.

For more information, call or text (501) 663-0996 or email projectrachel@dolr.org.

Knight of Columbus, wife set a pro-life example for state

written by Katie Zakrzewski |



Name: Dale and Mary Flamand

Age: Dale, 69; Mary, 68

Parish: Christ the King Church

City: Little Rock

Family: Three sons; five grandchildren

Why you want to know Dale and Mary: Dale Flamand has been the Culture of Life chairman for the Knights of Columbus in Arkansas since 2010, when his family moved to Arkansas. Dale and his wife, Mary, have been instrumental in working in the Knights of Columbus and in pro-life groups and organizations across the state for the past 14 years. Together, the two have attended marches and walks and raised money for a Safe Haven Baby Box and a mobile pregnancy resource center, among other activities.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

What feeds you spiritually?

Mary: Just knowing God's word.

Dale: I think trying to get us to be as good of a disciple as possible. As a Knight and as a Respect Life couple, we're asked to lead, but I think it's more about following Jesus, trying to keep what his vision of our lives should be. I think that's what keeps us going squarely.

How did you get involved with the Knights of Columbus?

Dale: I'm a convert, and you know us converts — we just go crazy after becoming Catholic. ... all of a sudden, you want to get so involved in everything. I had a really good RCIA sponsor (when I converted in 2004), and he said don't do anything for the first two years. Just let it all settle in and see what you want to do. After about two years, a Knight asked me, "Hey, did you ever think about the Knights of Columbus?" So I got involved back in Michigan at our parish there.

How did you get involved in the pro-life side of the Knights of Columbus?

Dale: I wasn't as involved when we lived in Michigan. When we (moved to Little Rock and started attending Christ the King), there were two ladies in the lobby, and they were trying to get men to come out for the 40 Days for Life for the evening hours. They asked if I would like to take the and six o'clock hours, and I said yes. That's when I got started in pro-life work in Little Rock 14 years ago.

Knights work very closely with their wives. Tell me a little more about some of the things you've participated in and helped with.

Mary: It made me step outside the box. How many times have I been down at Planned Parenthood, praying out in front? Which I never thought in the past that I would ever do something like that. A lot of people believe it's the right thing to do, but it's hard for people to do — we know that when we try to have people come out and stand with us. It's not something easy that people want to do. So I've done that a lot. I'm always in the background. I like to do the 40 Days for Life and the Life Chain, which is also not easy. There's a lot of ridicule from people, too, as you're standing out there. You have to be pretty strong. We've worked at the State Fair as a couple, helping Rose Mimms with the Arkansas Right to Life booth on the last day of the fair.

Dale: The Procession for Life, which we think would be great for the community to get out and do something. It's not as intimidating as standing out in front of Planned Parenthood, but that would be something to get more involved. Oct. 6, the Eucharistic Procession for Life, I hope everyone comes. It's an outward statement of our inward beliefs that life is the most precious gift that God could give us. Christ is going to lead the march. What's better than that?

What is something that you wish other Catholics knew about abortion?

Mary: It's important to "be not afraid," but even from what I've heard and talking to different people and different religions, they do not really understand what abortion is. I think we need to educate, even in the Church. We just read a poll from Pew when Ohio passed an abortion amendment there that 59 percent of Catholics believe in abortion. That's a big problem. You don't expect that even in our Church. I think that we need more education in our churches, because people don't really understand that the world has fed them a different version here. And I think we need to help get that out.

— Katie Zakrzewski

12 respect Life grants awarded in 2024

written by Arkansas Catholic Staff |

The Respect Life Office recently awarded grants to parishes, Catholics and organizations offering pro-life ministry.

Several years ago, the office allocated some funding to establish mini-grants from \$100 to \$1,000 to foster pro-life ministry in parishes and local communities. This year a dozen grant awardees from across our diocese are implementing new programs and continuing work that upholds the dignity of human life from the moment of conception, at the natural end of life and across the lifespan.

A funding priority is supporting parish ministry.

- At St. Joseph Church in Fayetteville, the pro-life committee will use their award to build the culture of life within their parish. They will lead weekly pro-life rosaries, provide education about volunteer ministry opportunities and host discussions on a broad range of pro-life topics.
- St. Mary Church in Hattiesville (St. Vincent) will also use their grant funds to increase awareness of pro-life ministry. They plan to begin on Respect Life Sunday by establishing a parish pro-life email database to distribute Respect Life Action Alerts.
- At Mary Mother of God Church in Harrison, the pro-life committee hopes to increase an awareness of the sanctity and dignity of each human life by creating educational displays and conducting prayer services throughout the year. This parish, as well as the pro-life community at the Cathedral of St. Andrew, will purchase fetal models to use as a visual aid to help young and older members of their parishes see the beauty and reality of an unborn baby.

The Respect Life Office recognizes that pregnant women often face challenging circumstances and directs grant funds to support programs that aid moms in need.

- Katie Zakrzewski of Little Rock will use the grant to obtain her lifetime doula certification and provide free support services to pregnant women.
- Compassion House in Springdale will use funds to help provide for the material and housing needs of young mothers.
- Pro-life committee members at St. Joseph Church in Pine Bluff will use funding to partner with Birthright and provide baby formula to new moms.
- Mini-grants given to Northwest Arkansas Respect Life and Arkansas Right to Life will help to spread the word about the availability of Safe Haven Baby Boxes in Arkansas.

Respect Life grants are not only for ministry at the beginning of life. The Respect Life Office promotes a consistent ethic of life.

- Our Lady of the Assumption Parish in Booneville will provide homecooked meals, hygiene

products, cleaning supplies and clothing to anyone in need.

Outreach and care during illness or at the end-of-life is an important part of respect life ministry.

- St. Bernards Development Foundation in Jonesboro will use grant funds to support two people enrolled in the Clinical Pastoral Education program.
- Our Lady of Good Counsel in Little Rock will support their Faith Community Nurse Program. The program's mission includes enhancing healing and lessening isolation and loneliness. Grant funds will offset costs for a caregiver retreat.

The application cycle for mini grants will open again June 1, 2025. Grant requests must be submitted before the end of August annually. The application may be found at dolr.org/respect-life-grant-application. Funds are awarded each year during October, which is Respect Life Month.