**The Gospel of Life in Ordinary Times**

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By Lucia A. Silecchia

Respect Life Month is an annual October opportunity to recommit to respecting the unique dignity of each human being, made in the likeness of God and created with an irreplaceable part in the human family that no other will ever fill. This year’s theme, *“Living the Gospel of Life,”* invites a thank you note to all those who live this “Gospel of Life” in their ordinary times by welcoming the most vulnerable. So …

*Thank you* to the elderly couple with full hearts and an overflowing basement bursting with the cribs, strollers, clothes, diapers, formula and toys they collect for expectant mothers in need. They know what may seem small never is.

*Thank you* to the man who sits in a quiet bar while his friend confides that his wife is pregnant with their fifth child and he just lost his job. Hearing this despair and knowing the desperate thoughts that fill the fearful father’s mind, this loyal friend pledges his support. He means it. This friendship means the world and can save a life – or two.

*Thank you* to the high school teacher with the picture-perfect family life who consoles a student facing an unexpected pregnancy and fearing her bright future is lost. After the standard words of encouragement fail, this teacher takes a deep breath and confides in her student what she has always kept private*: “I was once there too.”*

*Thank you* to the woman who carries her child for months, knowing she will place her greatest treasure into the heart and home of another family. She also knows this great act of love will exhaust her body and break her heart in ways few will understand. *Thank you* to the parents with full hearts and empty arms who adopt children and raise them with a love that, in turn, inspires others to see the beautiful gift of adoption and continue this circle of selfless, aching love.

*Thank you* to friends who console a mother who miscarries her child. They understand this grief is deep and raw because a life has ended. So, they do not blithely say *“it’s better this way”* or *“you’ll have another”* because they know far more than a dream or a hope died within.

*Thank you* to those who speak kindly and with respect for women who give birth to and raise children in less than perfect circumstances. The children in their lives will overhear them – and remember their words more than anyone will ever know.

*Thank you* to all who dedicate their lives to caring for, teaching, employing and advocating for those who live with disabilities. In the opportunities you provide, families facing an unexpected pre-natal diagnosis might just see a glimpse of a promising future for their child. They may desperately need your witness to resist the pressures they are so likely to face as they wait to welcome their child.

*Thank you* to the parents of boys who teach their sons to respect the dignity of women, the sacredness of sex, and the obligation to support the children they father in every way they can. Thank you to those same parents who care for the mother of their son’s children – regardless of whether she is a beloved daughter-in-law whose pregnancy answers years of family prayer or a frightened teenage girlfriend whose name they do not even know.

*Thank you* to the religious sisters who, in so many ways, live the radical hospitality that welcomes women in need and their children by offering the love and material support that our busy world pays lip service to *say* but too often neglects to *do.* *Thank you* to the priests who hear the pain-filled confessions of those who carry heavy burdens and lifetimes of regrets. Through the ministry of the Church they grant the pardon and peace that frees so many who are so broken to become some of the best protectors of life I have ever met.

*Thank you* to the friends of a frightened young woman, abandoned by her boyfriend, who accompany her home when she fears telling her family she is pregnant. *Thank you* to the friends of an overwhelmed father-to-be when they have the courage to tell him that fathers support both their children and the women carrying those children – and then help him to do this. Extra thanks if those friends also have the courage to tell him that, popular opinion notwithstanding, saying *“I will support you in whatever you decide”* is not support at all.

*Thank you* to the friendly Mass-goer who gives a wink and a smile to a crying infant rather than a cold stare and a judgmental glare. The harried parents trying to keep their children corralled in their pew will appreciate this and be grateful that those who celebrate the sanctity of life are not curmudgeons when they see the beauty of that life in the house of God.

*Thank you* to the knitters and quilters in retirement homes who make baby blankets for infants they will never know and donate them to pregnancy centers. They hold the loving hope that an exhausted mother may derive the strength to carry on just knowing a handmade gift was specially prepared for her unborn child.

*Thank you*, most of all, to parents who welcome children into the world in so many situations that are unexpected, unsupported, and unappreciated. What you do is sacred – not only on day one, but each and every day.

To all of you, and so many others, my *“thank you”* seems so small. May God bless you all for all the ways you live the Gospel of Life in all the days of your ordinary times.

*Lucia A. Silecchia is a Professor of Law at the Catholic University of America. "On Ordinary Times” is a biweekly column reflecting on the ways to find the sacred in the simple. Email her at* [*silecchia@cua.edu*](mailto:silecchia@cua.edu)*.*