ARCHDIOCESE OF WINNIPEG
Catholic Centre
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February 5, 2012

Dear Friends in Christ,

The beauty and dignity of human life has always been at the heart of the Christian life and the teaching of the Catholic Church. As the Christian family, we are called to proclaim and celebrate the good news of life itself. We are called to celebrate and support the family, the cradle of life and the first sign of God's love for human life. We must be God's prophets in a world where the precious gift of life and family are often neglected, compromised or forgotten.

As bishops, we thank you for your efforts to protect and promote life in all of its stages and conditions. We are living in a world that is changing at a rapid pace and change always brings uncertainty. The values of our faith and our Catholic institutions are constantly questioned, challenged and increasingly abandoned by our neighbours, colleagues, and even family members. Our culture emphasizes material prosperity over integrity, individual convenience over the common good, and immediate gratification over the growth and suffering that refines our very humanity. While our society constantly changes, we must exercise great care and attention to ensure that the gift of human life is always received and protected. And, we must ensure that families remain central to the reception, nurturing and protection of God's people.

The world needs our joyful and committed witness and action in so many places. At the beginning of life, we have the privilege of protecting and caring for mothers and the babies they carry by working to end abortion, to provide access to prenatal care, and to stop pregnancy from being treated as a medical illness. We are called to discern the use of reproductive technology with great reverence to the human body and to God. As children are born, our faith calls us to protect the dignity and quality of their lives at every stage, first in their families, and then in their communities in every nation around the world. We are called to protect people of all ages from the indignities of poverty, social exclusion, violence, abuse, and discrimination. We are called to ensure that aging and elderly persons are cherished, valued and appropriately cared for. We need to be engaged in the dialogue surrounding euthanasia, protecting the dying from being killed and protecting our medical health professionals from being engaged in ending, rather than protecting, human life.

As we share in God's ongoing work of creating and sustaining life, we acknowledge that we do this work first in our families. We receive children gratefully, losing sleep and some of our independence to care for their needs and communicate that they are worthy of God's love and ours. We teach children to know, love and serve their siblings, their parents, and God. We let go of our children as they grow into adulthood, even as we continue to love them. We teach values to our children, pick them up when they fall down, forgive each other often, and choose to be in relationships even when they are difficult. And we do

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this because others have taught, loved and served us in our own families and beyond them. It is not only biological parents, children and grandparents who engage in this important work of the family. In our world, we must also celebrate the generous and faithful adoptive, step and foster parents who gratefully receive and nurture children whose biological parents are unable to do so for a variety of reasons. We must acknowledge the single people, neighbours, extended family, and parish and community members who love and support the family in all its forms.

Our faith also teaches us that our love of and reverence for life extends to all God's children. Our witness and action must go beyond the confines of our own homes. Working to end abortion will happen when we support our children and neighbours facing unplanned pregnancies at the same time that we engage the political structures that make abortion *seem* like an easier choice than giving birth. We will reverence the dignity of human life when we mourn equally the death of an aborted baby, a child killed in war, a mother taken by starvation, a person with a disability killed in the name of compassion, and a grandfather who is prescribed the medication that stops his breathing.

On February 5th, we begin our provincial Respect for Life week. This year's focus is on palliative care in the midst of the ongoing threat of euthanasia. We are invited this week to take the time to suffer with those who are suffering and dying and to get informed about and active in ways that we can provide quality care for the dying.

Given the complexities of the world we face today, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops has agreed that it is time to lead a renewed effort to proclaim the dignity of each person and the vital importance of the family. Our voice is strengthened when we witness together as the Church in Canada. Next year, our provincial week will be moved from February to May, to coincide with a national Week for Life, which will be held from May 12-19, 2013. This year is to be a year of preparation, reconnecting with the issues pertaining to life and family. You are invited to watch for and attend the events in the coming year, which will be held in our Dioceses with the support and collaboration of the Canadian Organization for Life and Family (COLF).

This Respect for Life week, and all year, as we journey toward a national Week for Life, we want to thank those who have been long active in publicly promoting and protecting life with faithfulness and joy. And may our efforts to share God's gift of life be received by a world longing for love.

With grace and peace,

✠V. James Weisgerber, Archbishop of Winnipeg

✠Lawrence Huculak, OSBM, Archbishop of Winnipeg and
Metropolitan of Catholic Ukrainians in Canada

✠Albert LeGatt
Archbishop of Saint Boniface