

*Resource for Prayer, Education, and Action  
on “The Life & Dignity of the Human Person,”  
the foundational core value of Catholic Social Teaching  
edited by Joyce Ruhaak*

*Prayer Service*

(Please note that all of these suggestions do not have to be used. Some of the readings, water ritual, or pledge of nonviolence *may* be omitted. Other segments may be added).

Opening Hymn Suggestions

*All Creatures of Our God & King  
All People That on Earth Do Dwell  
All Things Bright and Beautiful  
Come to the House  
Emmanuel  
For the Beauty of the Earth  
God Creator, God Most High  
Join in the Dance  
Let All Things Now Living  
Morning Has Broken  
Rise, Shine, You People!  
River of Glory  
Somos El Cuerpo De Cristo*

Opening Comments: We have come together to listen to God’s Word, to praise and thank God for all of creation, including ourselves, and to learn what we might do to protect all life and the dignity of all people.

First Reading Gn 1: 26-31 or Job 33: 4, 26-33, Hos 11: 1-4

(Use an environmental justice-minded translation of the reading from Genesis. Here is the Priests for Equality translation).

Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, to be like us. Let them be stewards of the fish in the sea, the birds of the air, the cattle, the wild animals and everything that crawls on the ground.’ Humankind was created as God’s reflection; in the divine image God created them; female and male, God made them.

God blessed them and said, ‘Bear fruit, increase your numbers, and fill the earth—and be responsible for it! Watch over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and all the living things on the earth!’ God then told them, ‘Look! I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the earth, and every tree whose fruit carries its seed inside itself: they will be your food; and to all the animals of the earth and the birds of the air and things that crawl on the ground—everything that has a living

soul in it –I give all the green plants for food.’ So it was. God looked at all of this creation, and proclaimed that this was good—very good.

Responsorial Psalm Ps 8: 5-7 (example: GIA, *The Grail* by Gelineau)

Water Ritual

*Commentary:* Water is a source of life and nourishment. It conveys the breath and life of God: *the breath of the Almighty keeps me alive.* (Job 33: 4) Water also reminds us of our Baptism, our call by God to be immersed in the Trinity and in the family of God: each one adopted as a beloved son or daughter of the Creator-Parent God, brother or sister of Jesus, and vessel of the Holy Spirit. Human beings are earth and spirit, living in time and for all eternity, thanks to the abundant and over-flowing love of God.

The *action* consists of all present processing, two by two, toward the sanctuary. As they arrive at the font 1 of each 2 blesses the other with water and says: *May this water remind you that you belong to God and you are precious.* Then the 2<sup>nd</sup> repeats the water, blessing the other person of the twosome.

Water Ritual Music     *By Name I Have Called You* (Landry)  
                                  *Baptized In Water* (or other Sprinkling Rite music)  
                                  *Come to the River*  
                                  *Dwelling Place*  
                                  *Flow River Flow*  
                                  *Rain Down*  
                                  *Through It All*

Second Reading 1Cor 15:20-22 or Phil 2: 5-11

Gospel Acclamation verse 1 Cor 15:22 (*Just as in Adam all die, so too in Christ shall all be brought to life*). or Phil 2: 8 (*Jesus humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross*).

Gospel: Jn 1: 1-14, Jn 3: 16-21, or Jn 6: 62-65

Homily Suggestions for “*The Life & Dignity of the Human Person*” (Joyce Ruhaak)

This core value of Catholic Social Teaching is foundational to following Jesus in our daily life. “*This is the way we may know that we are in union with him* (Jesus Christ): *whoever claims to abide in him ought to live as he lived.*” (1John 2:5b)

Every Advent and Christmas we are reminded of God’s greatest gift to humanity, Jesus. To think God would take on human nature in order to save and empower people of every generation. What would elevate the dignity of every human being more than that? Jesus grew in Mary’s womb as every other human being. Who is more helpless than a newborn child?

We naturally make a fuss about the unborn, newborns, and we should. Significant preparation goes into the ritual and cultural observance at the end of a person's earthly existence. It is important to affirm, reflect on, and celebrate the life of each human being. *Every* moment of human life deserves affirmation and respect. Everyone has God-given dignity. It lasts forever.

Our response to and care for the people most challenging to love is the measure of God's love in us. Fr. Ray Lescher, pastor of Sacred Heart Parish in Joliet, IL, often preaches about God's call to all-inclusive love of neighbor. "If anyone says, 'I love God,' but hates his brother, he is a liar; for whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen." (1 John 4:20) Mother Teresa said that Jesus comes to us daily in the most disgusting disguises. That is the challenge: to love those we find repulsive, those we consider our enemies, those we fear, those who do not like or appreciate us. God loves us all, every one. We are expected to do the same.

Hymn Suggestions:     *Abba, Father*  
                              *Before All Creation*  
                              *For the Fruits of This Creation*  
                              *Gift Bread*  
                              *God's Eye Is On the Sparrow*  
                              *Great God, Our Source*  
                              *His Eye Is On the Sparrow*  
                              *How Can I Keep From Singing*  
                              *Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence*  
                              *O God, You Search Me*  
                              *This Day at Thy Creating Word*  
                              *We Are God's Work of Art*  
                              *Whatsoever You Do,*  
                              *Word of God, Come Down on Earth*  
                              *You Are Near*

Pledge of Nonviolence: Institute for Peace and Justice (see resource list)

Sending Forth Hymn: *All the Ends of the Earth*  
                              *All Praise & Glad Thanksgiving*  
                              *Malo! Malo! Thanks Be to God*  
                              *Now Thank We All Our God*  
                              *Thank you, God (Landry)*

### *What Are the Life Issues?*

Everything is a life issue: Anti-Abortion, Stem Cell Research, Anti-War, Anti-Death Penalty, Anti-Poverty, Anti-Racism, Right to Employment and Rights of Workers, Fair Housing, Equal Access to Education and Health Care, Anti-Euthanasia, Environmental Justice. Not only do we support life, but life with dignity, life with basic God-given

rights, and we care for the well-ness of the solar system, planets, creatures, elements, and all matter.

### *Opportunities to Grow in Respect for Life*

1. Check [www.paxjoliet.org](http://www.paxjoliet.org) for *Peace and Social Justice News, Parish Outreach, Relief & Development, Missions, Legislative Advocacy, Social Justice Resources for Educators, Holy Childhood Association, and Special Initiatives*, or to make enquiries.
2. Participate in *JustFAITH* or *Justice Walking*. See “Special Initiatives” on [www.paxjoliet.org](http://www.paxjoliet.org) website to read or download information about the transformative formation process.
3. Consult the Diocesan Life Office website: [www.dioceseofjoliet.org/life](http://www.dioceseofjoliet.org/life)
4. Participate in *JustFAITH* or *Justice Walking*. See “Special Initiatives” on [www.paxjoliet.org](http://www.paxjoliet.org) website to read or download information about the transformative formation process.
5. Refer to the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops: [www.usccb.org](http://www.usccb.org)
6. Website of the Diocese of Minneapolis/St. Paul: [www.osjspm.org](http://www.osjspm.org) It has updates on current events as well as the major documents of Catholic Social Teaching which can be downloaded.
7. Join Pax Christi USA and/or check their websites: [www.paxchristiusa.org](http://www.paxchristiusa.org), IL., [www.paxchristi-il.org](http://www.paxchristi-il.org) for current information, contact people in your area, and resources.
8. Learn to speak more respectfully. [www.allianceforncv.org](http://www.allianceforncv.org) Contact the DuPage Center for Nonviolent Communication, ON479 Morningside Ave., West Chicago, IL 60185. Website: [www.allianceforncv.org](http://www.allianceforncv.org)
9. Read and reflect on the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, adopted & proclaimed by General Assembly, United Nations, Resolution 217 A(111) of 10 December 1948. Copies may be obtained from *Human Rights USA* Resource Center [www.hrusa.org](http://www.hrusa.org) Toll Free Phone: 1-888-HREDUC80000
10. Reflect on the *Universal Declaration on Nonviolence: The Incompatibility of Religion and War*, co-authored by the Dalai Lama and Monastic Interreligious Dialogue. Discuss it with family or friends and consider signing it yourself.
11. Obtain a *Pledge of Nonviolence* for Kids, Youth, Family, Parish, School, Campus, Workplace, Congregation, or Prison from The Institute for peace and Justice, 4144 Lindell Boulevard, #408, St. Louis, MO 63108, Office phone: (314) 533-4445, Fax: (314) 715-6455. Website: [www.ipj-ppj.org](http://www.ipj-ppj.org)
12. Join an anti-death penalty organization: *Catholics Against Capital Punishment*. Website: [www.caacp.org](http://www.caacp.org) or *Illinois Coalition Against the Death Penalty* at [www.icadp.org](http://www.icadp.org), or *Amnesty International* at [www.amnesty.org](http://www.amnesty.org)

*Suggested Activities and Social Justice Actions  
Supporting “Life and Dignity of the Human Person”*

1. Sign up online at [www.paxjoliet.org](http://www.paxjoliet.org) for membership in the *Diocesan Legislative Advocacy Network*. Involve your family in writing letters to legislators. Choose your topic: hunger/poverty, housing, death penalty/criminal justice reform, environment, health, HIV/AIDS, immigrant rights, labor, peace/ non-violence, racism, rural life.
2. Bring your family to a **Steps Toward Eliminating Poverty** event at a parish in the diocese.
3. Read about the “Covenant to End Poverty Now” and sign the *One Declaration*.
4. Attend the *Diocesan Peace Day/Global Solidarity Congress on Saturday, May 5, 2007* at St. Charles Pastoral Center in Romeoville.
5. Have lunch with *Sudanese refugees*. Be with them as they share their painful stories of survival on *Saturday, March 3, 2007*.
6. Find out about *Restorative Justice*: how it affects victims, families, perpetrators, prison administrators and policies, staff members, and the affected communities. Dr. Richard Blackburn, Director of the Lombard Mennonite Peace Center, will speak at an event on *Saturday, April 14, 2007* from 9L00am until 2:30pm.. It will include prayer, breakout sessions, and workshops.
7. Join your parish’s *Peace & Social Justice Committee*. If it does not have one, contact Joyce Ruhaak to find out about bringing *Moving Faith Into Action* formation process.
8. If you are interested in environmental justice, contact Maribeth Meaux by e-mail: [mmeaux@dioceseofjoliet.org](mailto:mmeaux@dioceseofjoliet.org) or by phone: 815-834-7283.
9. Because of 65% to 80% unemployment in the holy land Christian children need sponsorship in order to attend parochial elementary school. If your family or religious education group sponsors a child, they can correspond two or three times a year with that child.

#### Acknowledgements

Scripture passages were suggested in *Leader’s Guide to Sharing Catholic Social Teaching*, USCCB, Washington, D. C.

The translation quoted in the “First Reading” is that of *The Inclusive Hebrew Scriptures vol. 1: the Torah*, Priests for Equality

Some entries in “Opportunities to Grow...” and “Suggested Activities” are explained in detail on the Peace and Social Justice Ministry website: [www.paxjoliet.org](http://www.paxjoliet.org)