



THE DIOCESE OF ROCKVILLE CENTRE
**Office of Human Life,
Family and Bioethics**



A Reflection on the Anniversary of Roe v. Wade
“Father Jim, thank you for my life!”

by Msgr. Jim Lisante,
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From 1985 through 1996, it was my privilege to serve as Pro-Life Director and Family Life Director for our Diocese. It was a time of challenge on life issues which divided and continue to divide our country and much of the world. The 1980s were a time in which we were still absorbing the full scope of both the Roe Vs. Wade and Doe Vs. Bolton Supreme Court decisions. Taken together, these cases effectively wiped away any and every state regulation on access to abortion. In response, the Diocese of Rockville Centre under Bishop McGann's very able leadership determined to stand for life in a multifaceted way. These included:



- Increased encouragement for preaching on the sanctity of all human life at Masses in every parish.
- Challenging our elected officials to stand with our ethical perspectives on life.
- Offering those in crisis pregnancy situations real support (socially and financially) through their pregnancies and beyond.
- Establishing hotlines for those same women so they could feel that the Church was truly there for them.
- Creating a Long Island based healing ministry for those who had chosen pregnancy termination and were looking for peace and reconciliation.
- A dedicated effort to offer public and peaceful witness was also part of our diocesan response. And it was led by Bishop McGann personally. In fact, he became the first diocesan Ordinary in the nation to pray and witness to life outside of an abortion facility. The first time he did that, over four thousand laity, priests and Religious joined him, shutting down Hempstead Turnpike in Hempstead, where the abortion facility was located. Many bishops around the country followed his example and joined this effort by taking to the streets in peaceful and prayerful protest.
- And the pro-life efforts of our diocese ALWAYS reflected the Church's teaching in a CONSISTENT ETHIC OF LIFE.

As director of this apostolate, it was my responsibility to visit a different parish each weekend and offer a homily at all the Masses in each parish on the Respect Life teachings of our church. Not infrequently, those homilies were followed by folks who wanted to talk about the issue after Mass. Those people often included women who were themselves expecting a child and were weighing their choice to carry their child to term or terminate.

Out of those conversations came the choice by a number of women (and their husbands or boyfriends from time to time), to complete the pregnancy and place the child for adoption.. This participation in the placement of children with families who longed to adopt and love a child is probably the most significant and lasting memory of my time in the diocesan pro-life office. It helped me to witness the absolutely heroic decision these Mom's made, knowing they were not able at that point in their lives to effectively care for a baby, but wanting something good for their children. And it showed me the powerful presence of couples who longed to adopt and had so much love to give. The Bishop was always aware of this tender and sensitive part of our ministry. In fact, a member of his own family became one of the adopting couples.

All that was our ministry decades ago. But let me share with you the best part of it all. In the last ten years, a number of the children who we helped place for adoption have been in touch. In one case, as I finished my Sunday Mass, I noticed a young lady obviously holding back in hopes of being the last person on line at the church front door. She approached me tentatively and introduced herself:

"Hello Father Jim, I'm Laura."

"Hi Laura, " I responded, "have we met before?"

Her reply:

"Actually, we have. Years ago, my mother attended a Mass you were preaching at. You talked about the preciousness of life. And encouraged the people to embrace and support life. My biological Mom heard you, talked with you after Mass and chose not to end the pregnancy as she had planned. I was placed for adoption with a great family. I recently had a chance to meet my birth Mom and to hear the story of how I came to be with the wonderful family I call my own. I also had the chance to express my gratitude to this great lady who gave me life. But I also decided to find you. And to encourage you.

Your words and your compassion helped a frightened young woman to take a chance on letting me be born. I have had a beautiful life so far. **So, Father Jim, thank you for my life.** Know I am grateful for what you in the church do for people like me, my birth Mom and my adopted family. Thank you for my life."

We stood there smiling and crying together at the same time!

The abortion debate will likely go on well beyond my earthly life. And, in truth, I am not sure I believe that courts or politicians will ever completely figure out this challenging issue. But I do know that every one of us has choices to make. And that those choices are informed by the love, the help, the compassion and the goodness we as a Church offer. Not judgement, but true and lasting support.

That's what the pro-life ministry does and has always done in our Diocese. We have so much to be thankful for!