



Catholic Social Teaching *for Everyone*

SESSION TWO:

Life and Dignity of the Human Person

Opening Prayer:

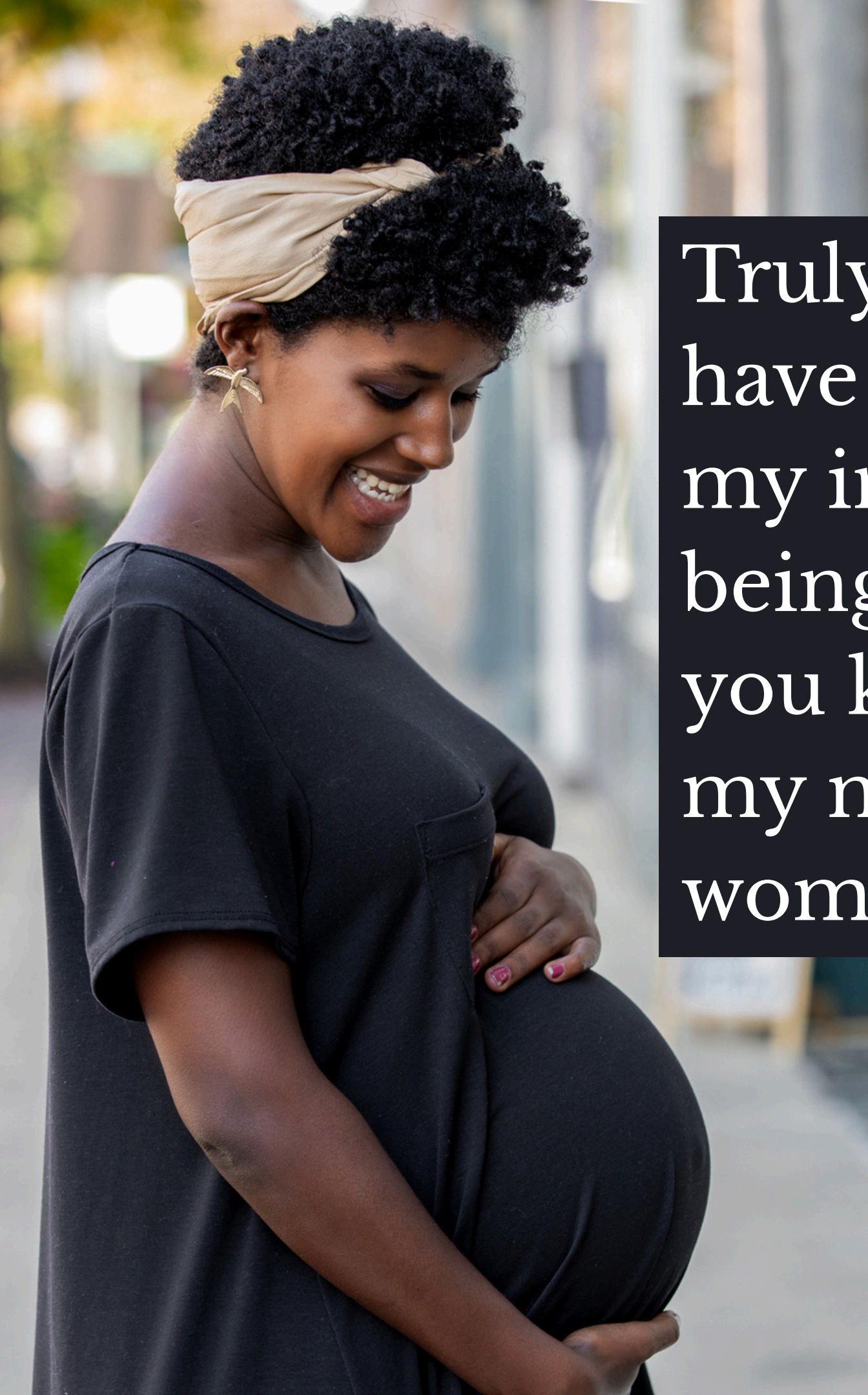
Psalm 1b-6, 13-15

I give you thanks that I am wonderfully made.

O LORD, you have probed
me and you know me;
you know when I sit and
when I stand;
you understand my thoughts
from afar.
My journeys and my rest you
scrutinize,
with all my ways you are
familiar.

Even before a word is on my
tongue,
behold, O LORD, you know
the whole of it.
Behind me and before, you
hem me in and rest your
hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too
wonderful for me;
too lofty for me to attain.

(contd.)



Truly you
have formed
my inmost
being;
you knit me in
my mother's
womb.

I give you thanks that I am
fearfully, wonderfully made;
wonderful are your works.
My soul also you knew full well;
nor was my frame unknown to
you
When I was made in secret,
when I was fashioned in the
depths of the earth.
Your eyes saw me unformed;
in your book all are written
down;
my days were shaped, before one
came to be.

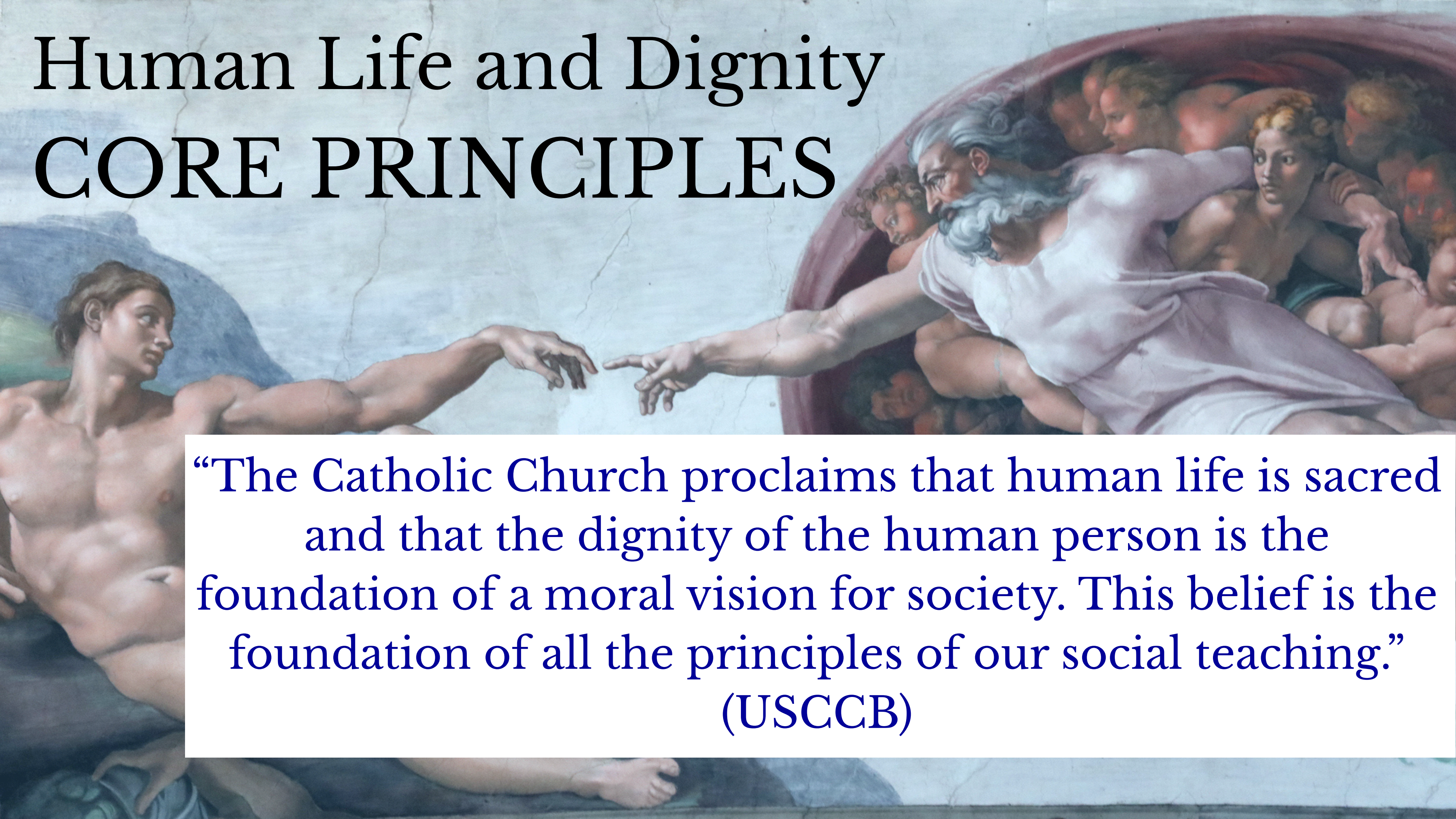
CST 101

Life and Dignity of the Human Person

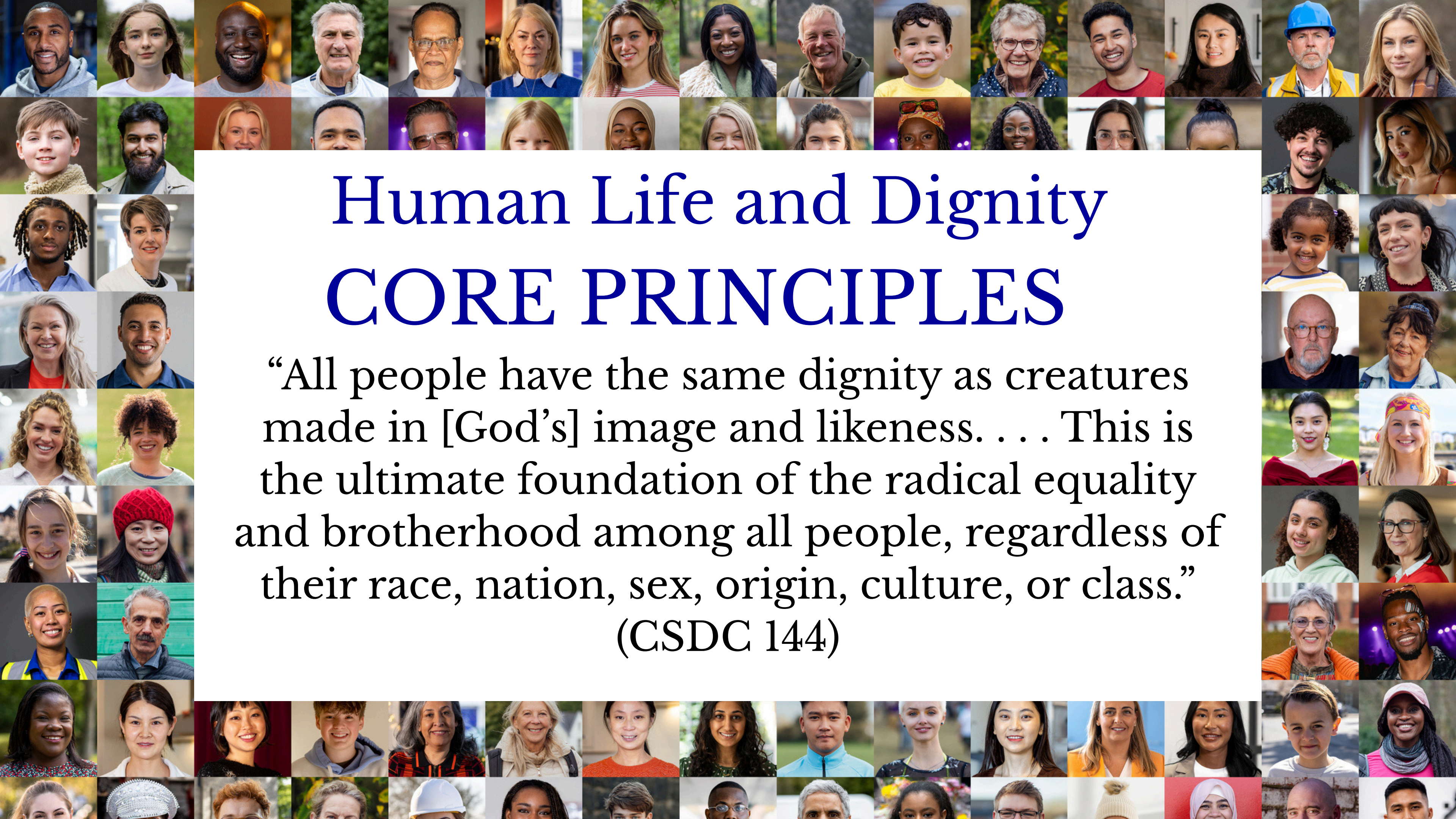


Human Life and Dignity

CORE PRINCIPLES

The background of the slide is a reproduction of Michelangelo's famous fresco, "The Creation of Adam." It depicts God on the right, reclining and reaching out with his right hand towards Adam on the left, who is lying on a rock and reaching out with his right hand. The two hands are just inches apart, creating a sense of tension and divine spark. The scene is set against a light blue sky and a dark, rocky landscape.

“The Catholic Church proclaims that human life is sacred and that the dignity of the human person is the foundation of a moral vision for society. This belief is the foundation of all the principles of our social teaching.”
(USCCB)



Human Life and Dignity

CORE PRINCIPLES

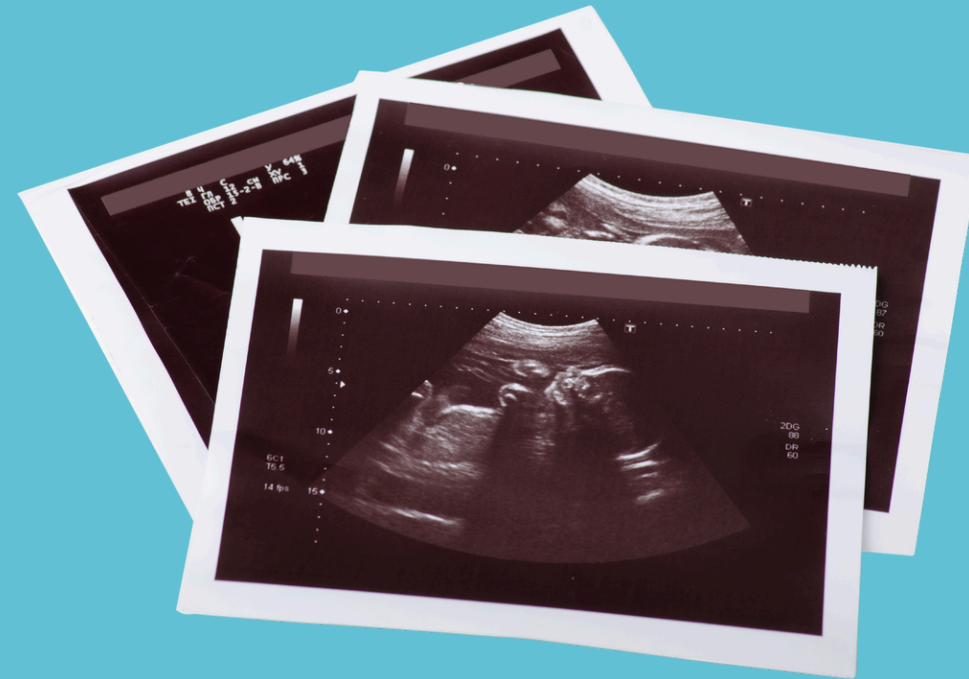
“All people have the same dignity as creatures made in [God’s] image and likeness. . . . This is the ultimate foundation of the radical equality and brotherhood among all people, regardless of their race, nation, sex, origin, culture, or class.”

(CSDC 144)

Human Life and Dignity

SACREDNESS OF LIFE

“Human life is sacred because from its beginning it involves the creative action of God and it remains forever in a special relationship with the Creator, who is its sole end.

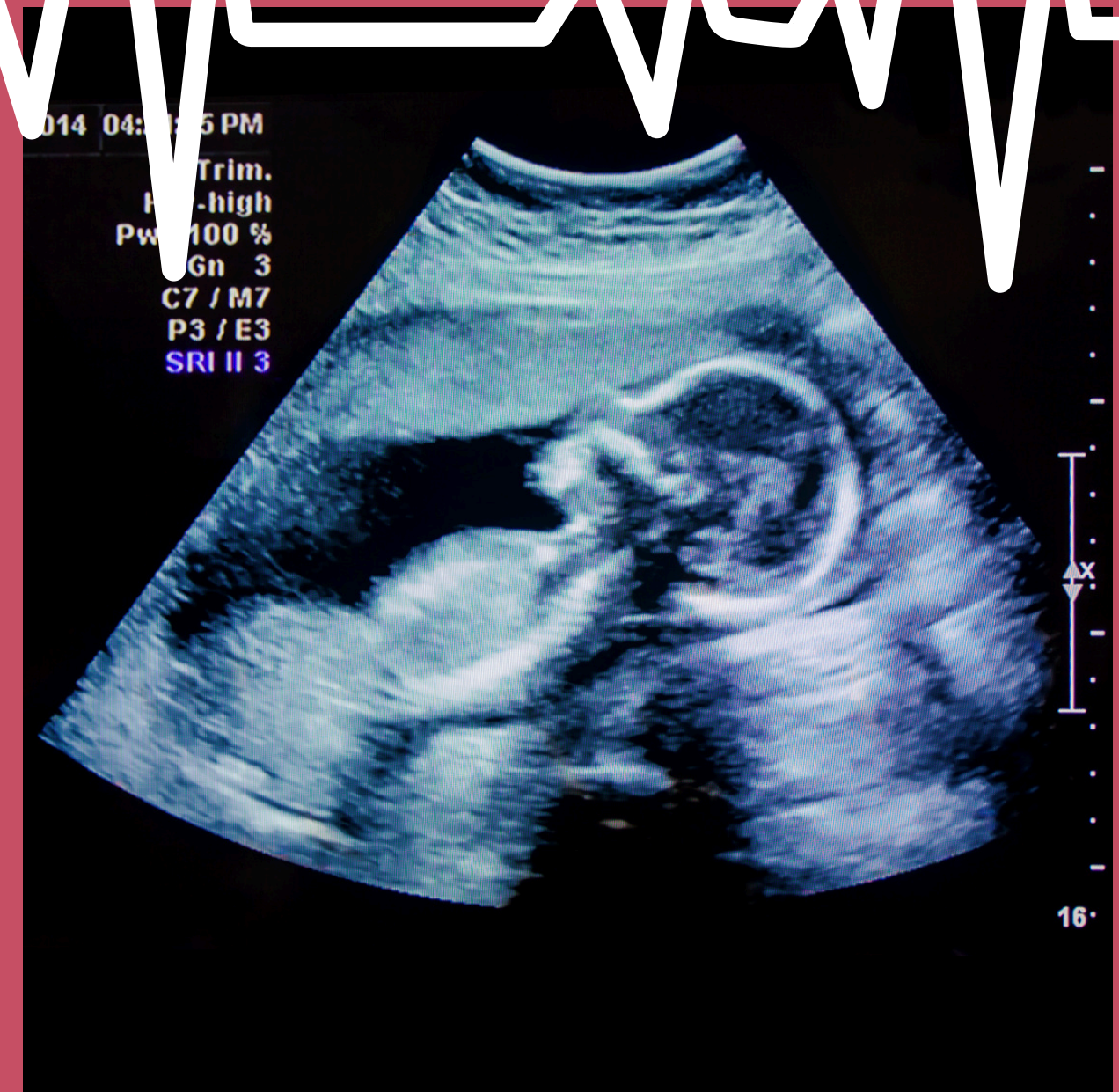


God alone is the Lord of life from its beginning until its end: no one can under any circumstance claim for himself [or herself] the right directly to destroy an innocent human being.”
(CCC 2258)

Threats to the Sacredness of Life

ABORTION

“Human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception. From the first moment of his existence, a human being must be recognized as having the rights of a person – among which is the inviolable right of every innocent being to life.”
(CCC 2270)



Threats to the Sacredness of Life

EUTHANASIA

“Whatever its motives and means, direct euthanasia consists in putting an end to the lives of handicapped, sick, or dying persons. It is morally unacceptable.”
(CCC 2277)



Threats to the Sacredness of Life

DEATH PENALTY

“Today, there is an increasing awareness that the dignity of the person is not lost even after the commission of very serious crimes...more effective systems of detention have been developed, which ensure the due protection of citizens but, at the same time, do not definitively deprive the guilty of the possibility of redemption.” (CCC 2267)



Threats to the Sacredness of Life

WAR

“Catholic teaching calls on us to work to avoid war. Nations must protect the right to life by finding increasingly effective ways to prevent conflicts and resolve them by peaceful means.” (USCCB)

“The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* speaks of the possibility of legitimate defense by means of military force, which involves demonstrating that certain ‘rigorous conditions of moral legitimacy’ have been met.” (*FT 258*)

A photograph of a cemetery with many white headstones in a green field. The headstones are arranged in rows, and there are trees in the background. A dark green banner is overlaid at the top, and a white box is overlaid in the center.

Threats to the Sacredness of Life

WAR

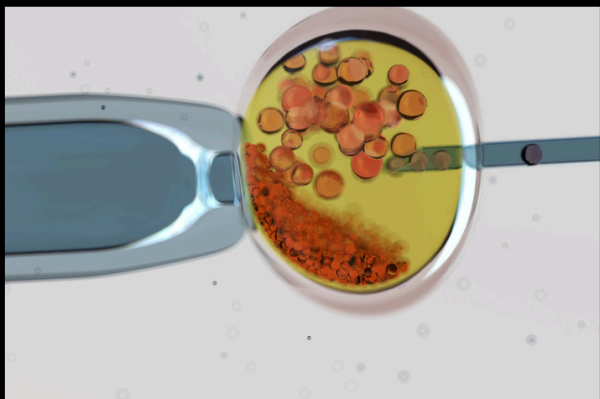
“Yet it is easy to fall into an overly broad interpretation of this potential right. . . . We can no longer think of war as a solution, because its risks will probably always be greater than its supposed benefits. In view of this, it is very difficult nowadays to invoke the rational criteria elaborated in earlier centuries to speak of the possibility of a ‘just war.’”

(FT 258)

Threats to Human Dignity

Church teaching lists multiple other offenses against human dignity, including:

- Kidnapping, hostage taking, terrorism, and torture (CCC 2297)
- “Ever new forms of slavery such as trafficking in human beings, child soldiers, the exploitation of workers, illegal drug trafficking, prostitution.” (CSDC 158)
- Pornography (CCC 2354)
- In-vitro fertilization, human cloning, and embryonic stem cell research (CCC 2377, *Dignitas Personae*)



Threats to Human Dignity *cont'd*

- Experimentation on human subjects without their informed consent or in a way that exposes them to disproportionate risks (CCC 2295)
- Exclusionary immigration policies (*FT 37, 37; CSDC 298*)
- Racism and racial discrimination (CSDC 144, 433)
- Unjust prison conditions (CSDC 403)
- Violations of the rights of workers (CSDC 301)
- Denial of religious freedom and other basic human rights (CSDC 421, 153-55)



Questions for Reflection *and Discussion*

Seamless Garment of Life Issues

“The threat of abortion remains our pre-eminent priority because it directly attacks our most vulnerable and voiceless brothers and sisters and destroys more than a million lives per year in our country alone. Other grave threats to the life and dignity of the human person include euthanasia, gun violence, terrorism, the death penalty, and human trafficking.” USCCB, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* (2023)

Are these statements saying essentially the same thing, or are they different?

If the latter, how would you reconcile them?

“Our defense of the innocent unborn . . . needs to be clear, firm and passionate, for at stake is the dignity of a human life Equally sacred, however, are the lives of the poor, those already born, the destitute, the abandoned and the underprivileged, the vulnerable infirm and elderly exposed to covert euthanasia, the victims of human trafficking, new forms of slavery, and every form of rejection.”
Pope Francis, *Rejoice and Be Glad*, 101 (2018)

Racism as an Affront to Human Dignity

“Racism is bad because it attacks the inherent dignity of the human person, created in the image and likeness of God. The persistence of racism demands our attention now. Racism emerges in the actions and inactions of individuals; and is embedded in our institutions and public policies. Our faith calls us both to personal conversion and to the transformation of our society.”

<https://www.usccb.org/resources/practical-steps-eradicating-racism>

How is racism an offense against the dignity of persons? Give specific examples. Describe how the transformation of our society is needed to address the offense of racism.

Take Action



Examination of Conscience for Life and Dignity of the Human Person (USCCB)

- Do I respect the life and dignity of every human person from conception through natural death?
- Do I recognize the face of Christ reflected in all others around me whatever their race, class, age, or abilities?
- Do I work to protect the dignity of others when it is being threatened?
- Am I committed to both protecting human life and to ensuring that every human being is able to live in dignity?



Taking Action — Pro-Life Ministry

- Promotes the Church's defense of life at every stage, with a particular focus on opposing abortion.

Activities include:



Mother's Day Carnation Sale, 2026

- March for Life in DC and Virginia Pro-Life Day in Richmond each January
- Celebration of World Down Syndrome Day each March
- Mother's Day corsage sale each May to benefit a pro-life organization
- Father's Day Donuts for Dad program each June
- Baby bottle campaign each October, Respect Life Month, to benefit pro-life organizations
- Raising awareness for adoptees and adoptive families each November, National Adoption Month
- Sending St. Valentine's Day, Easter, and Christmas cards to the parish homebound each February, March/April, and December
- Hour of Power ministry meetings on third Thursday of each month

Taking Action — Pax Christi

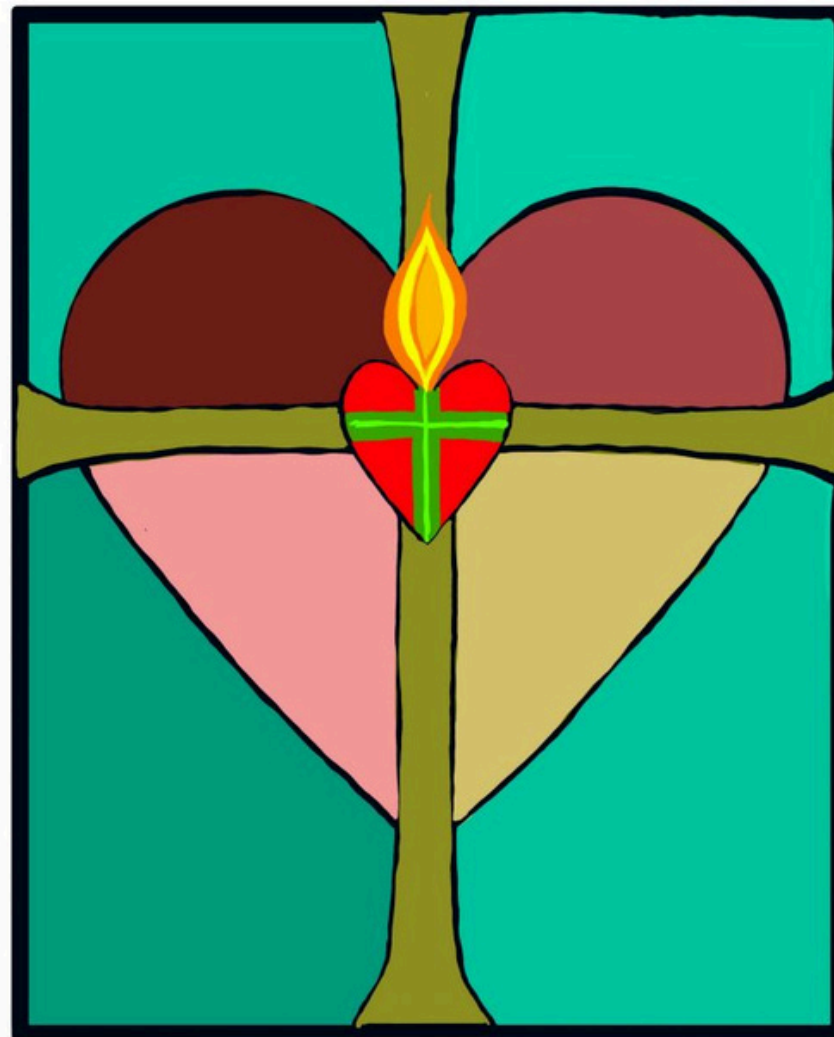
Strives to create a world that reflects the peace of Christ by witnessing to the call of Christian nonviolence. Activities include:

- Parish Prayer Vigil for Peace, Life, and Justice on the first Saturday of each month
- Quarterly demonstrations at the White House calling for nuclear disarmament (with PCMDCB)
- Advocacy on behalf of gun violence prevention, peace in the Middle East, and other issues
- Meeting for prayer and study on the third Tuesday of each month



Taking Action — Racial Justice Ministry

- Racism is that structure or system of discrimination based on prejudice.
 - GI Bill after WWII
 - Schools in communities of color
- Racism does not go away. It adapts.
- “The primary goal for white people working to understand racism is NOT to learn how racism impacts people of color. The primary goal [for many of us white folks] is to recognize how the system of racism shapes OUR lives, how we uphold that system, and how we might interrupt it.” (Robin DiAngelo)



Racial Justice Ministry
St. John Neumann Church

- RJM goals are to educate people about racial inequalities in our society and Church, advocate for public policies that uphold the dignity of all persons, and foster a more inclusive parish community.
 - Films, talks, discussions
 - Prayer vigils
 - Multi-week JustFaith programs
 - Involvement in diocesan Peace and Justice initiatives
 - Juneteenth Celebrations of Freedom since 2023

Taking Action — Knights of Columbus

- Catholic men's organization devoted to Charity, Unity, Fraternity, and Patriotism.
- Founded in 1882 by Blessed Fr. Michael J. McGiveny.
- Men 18 or older, practical Catholic, committed to our core values.
- Many charitable efforts globally, nationally, and locally.
- Blood Drives, Global Wheelchair Initiative, Special Olympics, Seminarian Support, Coats for Kids, Holiday Parking, Gabriel House and a lot more.
- Some of our distinctly Pro-Life activities include Charity Breakfasts, Ultrasound Program, March for Life Marshalls, local pregnancy center support, KOVAR, and ASAP program.
- Dinners, bike rides, praying the Rosary, sports watch parties.
- 220+ men here at SJN. More than 2 million Knights worldwide.
- Meet twice per month but we don't take attendance.



Closing Prayer:

Life & Dignity of the Human Person Prayer (USCCB)

God of all life,

Help us to appreciate the great gift that is human life formed in your image, a reflection of your holiness. Help us to recognize you in all whom you have created: children not yet born, families affected by poverty and war, people of different abilities, people from other lands, and all who are victims of hatred and racism.

Help us to bear witness to the dignity of all whom you have created, regardless of stage of life, or wealth, or ability, or color, or creed, for every person is fully equal in your loving eyes. Share with us your holy knowledge that we are all your children, each bestowed with inherent dignity. May your justice reign forever! Amen.