

Statement of Michigan Diocesan Bishops on Legal Birth Definition Act

To the Catholic faithful of Michigan:

This summer we witnessed both the fragile nature of life and the wonder of our universe. As the electrical power “grid” disconnected, we experienced the deep and abiding connection we share as human beings. A few days later we marveled at the nearness of Mars in the summer sky. How humbling to know we are part of an immense mystery of creation!

As we observe and celebrate Respect Life Month this October, we, the diocesan bishops of Michigan, reaffirm our unwavering conviction and teaching about the sacred gift and mystery of human life. We respectfully call your attention to legislation now before our elected state officials that will protect human life.

The Legal Birth Definition Act defines when a child is legally born. Until now, there has been no such definition by the Supreme Court or the Constitution. We believe such a definition is timely and a means of assuring the legal protection of all human beings, especially those most vulnerable. This bill declares that “birth” begins when any part of a child is visible outside the mother’s body. Simply put, the child is considered “born” and, therefore, entitled to certain legal rights.

As spiritual leaders, we recognize that this legislation in defense of life is imperfect; nonetheless, it represents a positive step in affirming life from the first moment of conception. Certainly, the theological reasons for supporting such legislation flow from Scripture and our Catholic faith. Even those who do not share our faith will find the common good a compelling reason to support this legislation.

This message on the dignity of life is in full accord with our nation’s Declaration of Independence that proclaims that every person is “endowed by their Creator with certain

unalienable Rights ...Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” Note that the first of these rights is the right to life itself. Without that fundamental right to life, all other rights are impossible.

Life is a gift. Despite recent scientific efforts to clone and generate life, human life is ultimately never solely our creation. Every human life is a unique and unrepeatable gift. We are “co-creators” with God in the process, yet, once life is conceived, it takes on a destiny and purpose of its own, with its own inherent rights and dignity.

Our lives are linked, one to the other. No one of us lives independently. Abortion, the destruction of a human life, is never simply a personal decision; it always impacts the rest of the human family. It should come as no surprise that tolerance of abortion and partial-birth abortion further encourages a culture of violence and death.

The Hebrew and Christian Scriptures assert that we are made in the image and likeness of God. The fifth commandment powerfully and unambiguously declares, “Thou shall not kill.” As Christians, we stand in reverent wonder and awe before the mystery of the Incarnation – that the Son of God took on human flesh. All life is sacred because it has been divinely created and redeemed by Christ. For over two millennia, our Church has consistently taught that all life is sacred from the first moment of conception until the last natural breath.

As we celebrate the 25th anniversary of the pontificate of our Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, we give thanks for his courageous proclamation of, and witness to, the Gospel of Life. Sixteen years ago in Detroit, he listed the many blessings our country has received and the responsibilities which go along with those blessings: “*America*,” the Pope said, “*your deepest identity and truest character as a nation are revealed in the position you take toward the human person... This is the dignity of America, the reason she exists, the condition for her survival –*

yes, the ultimate test of her greatness: to respect every human person, especially the weakest and the most defenseless ones, those as yet unborn.”

Pope John Paul II’s words are no less true today. We invite all people of good will to consider the reasons and urgency of defining legal birth and the positive effects it will bring to the citizens of Michigan.

His Eminence Adam Cardinal Maida
Archbishop of Detroit

Most Reverend James A. Murray
Bishop of Kalamazoo

Most Reverend Patrick R. Cooney
Bishop of Gaylord

Most Reverend Carl F. Mengeling
Bishop of Lansing

Most Reverend Robert J. Rose
Bishop of Grand Rapids

Most Reverend James H. Garland
Bishop of Marquette

Most Reverend Kevin M. Britt
Coadjutor Bishop of Grand Rapids

Most Reverend Kenneth E. Untener
Bishop of Saginaw

Respect Life Sunday
October 5th, 2003