

“No one, under any circumstance . . .”

This article is an attempt to present both parties in an unfading social dialogue regarding the issues of life. Its content does not demonstrate any differentiation between us, who support life – and them, who come out against life, because we all belong to one society and we cannot evade responsibility for the social awareness state regarding the issue of life as we remain faithful to the revelation of the Decalogue. Our task is to make efforts to develop the new culture of life which is able to oppose the culture of death – in the spirit of care for the human being who is the first concern for the Church.



“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 the right directly to destroy an innocent human being.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church #2258)

“No one can under any circumstance claim for himself the right directly to destroy an innocent human being.” How important it is for contemporary society to specify the law which seems to have been wholly engraved in human hearts. By issuing the abovementioned statement, the Church stands up for the life of the weakest, unable to defend themselves: the unborn, the sick and the aging. Each human being is but a treasure for the Church; he/she is the creation of God who carries within himself/herself the image of God. He/she is a precious gem, redeemed by the Most Precious Blood of Jesus Christ. Who would dare to steal away the life of another, a life created by God?

“No one, under any circumstance . . .” This is what the Catholic Church teaching says. But what about social reality? Our daily life shows that we become more and more able to invent arguments and circumstances to justify intervening in the natural course of life:

- ◆ **Is abortion wrong?** Some call the little conceived baby “the embryo” or “the cluster of cells” and argue that it is not wrong because, “. . . yet, it is not about a human being . . .” It might be. Others prefer the expression “to save the life and health of the mother” or raise the subject of children born into pathological families living in difficult conditions, as if those foreseen “difficult conditions” could decide one’s right to life.
- ◆ **Is euthanasia immoral?** The idea may become strongly fixed in one’s mind as one reflects on the profitability of treatment and the ensuring medical care to the aging or sick person. When one considers the idea of asking the person, “why should you suffer?” and adding to this humanitarian thought the word “assistance,” one may view a proponent of euthanasia as a downright good-doer who “rescues” the sick from the necessity of enduring their sufferings.
- ◆ **Is genetic engineering against ethics?** Some people find it enough to attribute a glorious purpose to those experiments, e.g., “for the benefit of science” to allow themselves to make decisions about life, its form and purpose. “The cells needed for medical treatment would be produced in this way, and even the organs of the body,” the scientists explain.
- ◆ **Is the phenomenon of poverty or hunger of any concern to us?** If they subscribe to marketing rules, individuals feel excused from the responsibility for the masses of the poor, hungry and those who lack water – anywhere, not just in the Third World countries! Let us take a look around! It happens very often that instead of meeting the evil, we choose to think: “Surely it is their fault that they lack food. If they worked honestly . . .” Meanwhile, another group of people die of hunger or cold.

The issues of abortion, euthanasia and genetic engineering are raised continually in social discussions¹. Dilemmas relating to these issues are found in surprising strength in magazines and on TV. When the abortion issue is raised, the question asked is often, "what to choose, the life of the mother or her child?" What future is there for a baby conceived in rape? And in regard to euthanasia, does the sick person have to suffer or should he/she be helped to choose death? We lose power and time in these discussions; they are time and again made use of for the same purposes.



We cannot, however, remain indifferent in the presence of endangered life in the present-day world. "No circumstance, no purpose, no law whatsoever can ever make licit an act which is intrinsically illicit, since it is contrary to the Law of God which is written in every human heart, knowable by reason itself, and proclaimed by the Church" (*Evangelium Vitae*, 62). The voice of life defenders cannot be missing on the public agenda². We cannot, however, convince anyone just by taking a stand. Our support for the culture of life should reach further, touching the reasons for dramatic decisions about the life of vulnerable children and the aging. Each action taken to help the pathological situation,

Debate over each of these issues is, from the start, doomed to failure. Counterarguments will always meet the arguments. Believers appeal to the teachings of the Church, while non-believers refer to liberal rules of making use of freedom without any limit. Conservatives refer to healthy tradition, and supporters of progress justify all with the good of the individual (understood in the individual way). Pro-choice supporters emphasize women's rights, while defenders of the pro-life option bring to mind the rights of children. The discussion very quickly switches to the religious area touching upon the issue of faith, which is often too weak to face up to the burden of one's personal human experiences. Then it appears there is some drama hidden behind every situation which forces a person to make decisions about the life of another; fear, pain, loneliness, helplessness. What adds to this many times is disillusion with the people of the Church who are more often prone to be scandalized than to stretch out a helping hand. The line between good and evil gets blurred in the deformed consciousness of modern people. In the quickened pace of life, there is no time for reflection about life. The world leans more and more towards the civilization of death which threatens the human being. To start the discussion about life – is killing permitted or not? – is to violate the law given by God. As far as moral issues are concerned, we do not have the right to decide what is right or not. Participating in such discussions only tempts us to judge God's law or our neighbor.

violence or poverty smashes the next argument of abortion supporters; a child is not a "growing problem," housing conditions or neighbors' opinions cannot decide one's rights. Assistance rendered to a lonely woman in a difficult situation as most of her friends turn their backs to her can bring her hope and give her strength for accepting a new life³. Likewise, with reference to the aging population, each gesture of goodness or respectful care for the aging lonely person dismisses the temptation of euthanasia.

We believe in the power of prayer and spiritual adoption of the conceived child. What also is of great importance is education in the issue of life. A great number of people do not know or do not think that in its mother's womb there is a real person with all its potentiality of abilities. Education is very important in the fast-developing area of genetic engineering. It is important to determine clearly the protection which mothers and their babies can expect from the family and the law.

We would like, by our attitude, to awaken in the human conscience a sensitivity to the deep meaning and value of human life. We must encourage everyone, irrespective of nationality, economic condition and denomination to undertake appropriate action so that our world manages to oppose the culture of death and stand strongly for the right to live from conception to natural death.

– SM Honorata Grzeszczuk, CSSF (WA)

¹ An example of such discussion in Poland (2008). Both paragraphs quoted from KAI (Catholic Informative Agency):

In the conversation with the readership of the online *Wprost* magazine, Maria Kaczyńska, Mr. President's wife, said: "I support in vitro fertilization because I can understand the tragedy of the people who wish to have children and are unable to let it happen".

Dr. Wanda Półtawska, during the conference arranged at the occasion of awarding her with the honoris causa title at Catholic University of Lublin, pronounced definitely against any form of legalization of *in vitro* method, as it is always connected with the elimination of human life.

² It is important to emphasize here the initiative of March for Life and Family, which this year has been organized for the third time in Warsaw and exists as a 30-year tradition in Washington. Representatives for Polish Pro-Life Movements admit that it was the march organized in the US capital city that inspired them, and decided to plant this idea into the Polish soil.

³ There are situations when conceived life is the result of choices which we unfortunately have to consider immoral. However, support granted to the person is never identical with acceptance of his/her lifestyle. When judging action, we can never condemn a person, who should always be given assistance.

Jericho House: CENTER OF WELCOME

Do not be afraid of the unborn children. Do not panic – as it often eventuates in abortion. The little person is a great blessing for the family and world. It does not threaten anybody.

Do not be afraid of the aging. Do not fear old age. It is fear that makes a lot of contemporaries see euthanasia as a help in their situation. The love – we receive from above – is always ready to make allowances, endures whatever comes, never comes to an end. This love will manage with the suffering of those who are close to leaving this world. Old age and sickness have a meaning in view of the resurrection; that of Christ and that of ours. They really have a meaning.

Do not be afraid of the law of God. It defends the truth about the inconceivable greatness of a person who cannot become a product of any technology. The happiness of parents cannot be based on the death of even a single human existence. If we follow the resurrected Christ, then we shall believe how great is the love which is able to open the family for orphaned children who desperately await parents.

*Archbishop Kazimierz Nycz,
Metropolita Warszawski,
A Letter to the Faithful, Easter 2008*

For the past seven years I have been ministering at Jericho House in Welland, Ontario, Canada, located 20 minutes from Niagara Falls. Jericho House is a youth leadership and justice spirituality center that offers programs designed to foster Christian welcome and hospitality for youth and adults seeking to deepen their relationship with God, themselves, others and the environment. Programs offered at the center include: TORCH Leadership Conferences, social justice immersion & integration days, peer-ministry workshops, adult retreats, Confirmation retreats and reflection days. All programs are peer-led, experientially grounded and scripturally based experiences.

The Jericho Community is a mixed, intergenerational, directional community. It is a collaborative effort of laity, the St. Clare Refugee Center (SCRC), Felician Sisters and Christian Brothers. In the spring of 2001, because of the need for temporary placements for refugees in the Niagara area and because of our close proximity to the United States border, our community at Jericho House offered the St. Clare Refugee Committee space for transitional, short-term housing for refugees. The result of this collaborative effort has been a safe, warm, and hospitable home for refugees who have fled their homeland because of war, strife and death threats.

The first refugees were welcomed at the refugee center on October 22, 2001. In the past seven years, over 150 refugees from Angola, Somalia, Congo, Sudan, Rwanda, Niger, Haiti, Honduras, Columbia, Turkey and Peru have found a home at Jericho House. The volunteer committee gives refugees the initial assistance to help them adjust to life in Canada. Volunteers facilitate transportation for medical appointments, government services, food, clothing, legal aid, translators, interpreters and school connections. Communication is sometimes a struggle, as many of our guests do not speak English. However, it is amazing how much can be accomplished through smiles and hand signals!

Once refugees have settled and found an apartment, they leave our community and continue their journey towards becoming Canadian citizens. Because of an active network among the refugees who settle in the area, Jericho House and St. Clare Refugee Center host yearly social events which include Thanksgiving dinner, Christmas celebrations and the "Spring Fling." Each event provides an opportunity to deepen community, break bread, share stories and provide support.

Sharing our home with refugees has been a "Gospel" experience for both the refugees and our Jericho community. "I found peace here . . ." is how Khadidi Diop, a recent refugee from Niger, Africa, described his stay at the center. Moreover, I think I share the sentiments of the entire Jericho Community when I say that opening our home has broadened my understanding of the Gospel call for justice.

– SM Jacqueline Keefe, CSSF (CA)

Our Jubilee Call TO RESTORE THE LAND

In our Judeo-Christian tradition there are two versions of the creation story, both of which speak of the relationship man has with the rest of creation. In the first creation story that appears in *Genesis 1:26* it is stated, "God said 'Let us make man in our image after our likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air and the cattle and over all wild animals and all creatures that crawl on the ground.'" The second creation story found in *Genesis 2:15* reads, "The Lord God took the man and settled him in the Garden of Eden to cultivate and care for it."

In the previous two millennia, Judeo-Christian cultures have taken the word "dominion" to mean domination and exploitation. Today in our global market economy, our sacred Earth is treated like a commodity that can be controlled by the most powerful. This attitude of domination has brought our planet and its people to a precarious state.

Indigenous or native people are often pushed off the land that they have lived on for centuries. Their innate wisdom of how to care for Mother Earth is ignored. Some of the destructive results of "civilized settlement" are as follows:

- ◆ Disregard of indigenous wisdom has led to the creation of dust bowls, where prairie grasses once fed buffalo as well as people.
- ◆ Clear cutting, strip mining, and tailing ponds (areas containing the waste from mining rock

minerals, which is often toxic and/or corrosive to human and other forms of life), have all allowed soil to wash away or become too contaminated for food production.

- ◆ Removal of native grasses to sow wheat, removal of mixed rainforest to create monoculture plantations, and replacement of scrub vegetation in the semi-desert to plant peanuts have often destabilized the existing landscape and made the land unproductive for growing food.
- ◆ Prime farmland is often destroyed by politically motivated decisions to bring lucrative industry into the area. This practice then leads to secondary industry, housing and transportation links to fill in prime land. The best agricultural land near large urban centers has been covered in concrete! This then pushes food production to less fruitful soils and/or forces dependence on long distance trucking to attain goods previously grown locally.

Politically, economically, and spiritually our world yearns for a whole new way of being. We need to listen to the groans and aspirations that come from deep within our people and within the earth itself. In the year 2000 we spoke of Jubilee. What is Jubilee all about? It is to affirm a life of dignity for all people in a context where justice, liberty, happiness, mutual solidarity, and graciousness prevail. Not only is it a call to restore justice

to the people, but also to the land. Although this call to conversion was never fully realized in Old Testament times, the vision was there. The anti-jubilee ethic of conquest, domination and exploitation gained respectability in the industrial revolution and subsequent colonization. Those who gained power by force exploited people, land, and resources. Unbridled capitalism put its trust in a free market and ever expanding production on a planet with limited resources. Today, the destructiveness of this misplaced trust is evident in the gap between the very rich and the very poor, the loss of arable land to provide adequate food, the rate of extinction of species, the contamination of air, water and soil . . .

In the documentary entitled *Sacred Land Scared Land*, four indigenous groups, and the troubles they are facing, are examined:

- ◆ The plantain producing lands of the Embera Katio of Columbia were flooded without consultation of the people to create a hydroelectric dam. Along with loss of farmland, the stagnant water attracted mosquitoes, which carried malaria and other diseases.
- ◆ In the Philippines, a copper production company dumped 4 million tons of toxic waste into a river, killing the fish and causing skin diseases and lead poisoning for those who used the river.
- ◆ In the Sudan, the government forcibly removed people from the



land where oil was discovered and used the oil revenues to fight in the ensuing civil war. The genocide continues.

- ◆ In Alberta, Canada, the culture of the Lubicon Lake Indian Nation (Lubicon Cree) has been uprooted by unrestricted extraction of oil on lands that were never ceded to the government. Ninety percent of the population is now on welfare and social problems abound. Their leaders have been asking for at least 1% of the 7 billion dollars worth of oil taken from their lands.

These examples of injustice are repeated many times around the globe. As we continue to experience food shortages and the effects of climate change, it is the poorer nations that will suffer the brunt of the situation. While there is talk of a \$700 billion bailout for financial institutions, there is little political will to bail out the people who are starving in Third World countries.

It is time for a Jubilee – a time to renew relations among people and between people and the earth.

According to scriptural tradition, the Jubilee promised was that all land would be restored to the original owners, reflecting a belief that the land belonged to the Creator. Aboriginal people have traditionally seen land as a gift of the Creator, as Mother Earth, the source of all life—not a commodity to be exploited.

What can we do? As we approach the second decade of this new millennium, our Franciscan heritage has much to offer our devastated earth. Francis modelled a relationship of love for all God's creatures. Today we are called to model this relationship to raise the consciousness of a sleeping world. In whatever environment we find ourselves, we should strive to find ways to deepen our own appreciation and love of the earth. We can grow some of our own food or we can help the children we teach discover the joy of co-creating and support initiatives that teach sustainable agriculture. We can examine our lifestyles as religious women to determine if our lifestyle may contribute to profits ahead of people. Can we be part of a sustainable community which supports and nurtures equitable relationships both within the human family and also between humans and the rest of the ecological community? How are our communities and institutions accountable for the social and environmental consequences of their activities? How and where are we investing our money? Let us remind ourselves that what we do as individuals and as a community of Franciscan women should help preserve rather than exploit our Earth.

– SM MaryAnne Olekszyk, CSSF (CA)

When Bankers Rule

Modern society has made the bank account the standard of values.

When the bank account becomes the standard of values the banker has the power.

When the banker has the power the technician has to supervise the making of profits.

When the banker has the power the politician has to assure law and order in the profit-making system

When the banker has the power the educator trains students in the technique of profit making.

When the banker has the power the clergyman is expected to bless the profit-making system or to join the unemployed.

When the banker has the power the Sermon on the Mount is declared impractical.

When the banker has the power we have an acquisitive, not a functional society.

– Peter Maurin,
Co-founder with Dorothy Day
of the Catholic Worker
(from the Houston Catholic Worker)



Photo by Martin Rowe, The Greenbelt Movement

Kenyan Ecologist WINS NOBEL PEACE PRIZE

Wangari Maathai was born in Nyeri, Kenya in 1940. She was the first woman in East and Central Africa to earn a doctorate degree. Wangari Maathai obtained a degree in Biological Sciences from

Mount St. Scholastica College in Atchison, Kansas (1964). She subsequently earned a Master of Science degree and continued her studies at various universities, eventually obtaining a PhD. She taught veterinary anatomy at Nairobi University, and in 1976 got involved with the National Council of Women in Kenya.

Wangari introduced the idea of planting trees with the people, especially women, and continued to develop it into a broad-based, grassroots organization. The main focus of this project was to conserve the environment and improve lives by organizing work for poor people. Throughout Africa women are the primary caregivers, holding significant responsibility for tilling the land and feeding their families. As a result, they are often the first to become aware of environmental damage as resources become scarce and incapable of sustaining their families. Environmental degradation as well as the introduction of commercial farming which replaced the growing of household food crops made it difficult to meet their basic needs. The international trade controlled the price of exports from the small-scale farmers--as a result, reasonable and just income could not be guaranteed. Tree planting became a natural choice to address some of the initial basic needs identified by the women. Also, tree planting is simple and attainable within a reasonable amount of time. Wangari came to understand that when the environment is destroyed, plundered or mismanaged, we undermine our quality of life and that of future generations. Women were made aware of the fact that a degraded environment leads to a scramble for scarce resources and may culminate in poverty and even conflicts.

Wangari Maathai took a holistic approach to sustainable development and embraced democracy, human rights and women's rights in particular. She believed that peace on earth depends upon our ability to secure a living environment. She also said that, in managing our resources and in sustainable development, we plant the seeds of

peace. It was in this context that her tireless efforts were rewarded – in 2004 she became the first African woman to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. In 1986, the movement established a Pan African Green Belt Network that has exposed many African countries to the idea of planting tens of million trees across Africa to slow deforestation. The movement grew to include projects to preserve biodiversity, educate people about their environment and promote the rights of women and girls. Although initially the Green Belt Movement's tree planting activities did not address issues of democracy and peace, it soon became clear that responsible governance of the environment was impossible without democratic space. Therefore, the tree became a symbol for the democratic struggle in Kenya.

Citizens were mobilized to challenge widespread abuses of power, corruption and environmental mismanagement. In Nairobi and many parts of the country, trees of peace were planted to demand the release of prisoners of conscience and a peaceful transition to democracy. People learned to overcome fear and a sense of helplessness and moved to defend democratic rights. In time, the tree also became a symbol for peace and conflict resolution, especially during ethnic conflicts in Kenya when Green Belt Movement used peace trees to reconcile disputing communities. Using trees as a symbol of peace is in keeping with a widespread African tradition. For example, the elders of the Kikuyu carried a staff from the thigi tree that, when placed between two disputing sides, caused them to stop fighting and seek reconciliation. Such practices are part of an extensive cultural heritage, which contributes both to the conservation of habitats and to cultures of peace. Wangari Maathai expressed clearly that without good governance there can be no peace. She also said that many countries which have poor governance systems are also likely to have conflicts and poor laws protecting the environment.

In her famous expression "to think globally and act locally," she encourages us to assist the Earth in healing her wounds and in the process, heal our own. We are called to embrace the whole of creation in all its diversity, beauty and wonder. This will help us to revive our sense of belonging to a larger family of life, with which we have shared our revolutionary process.

– S Margaret Mary Njoki Mbogo, CSSF (KE)

Felician Franciscan Sisters INSTRUMENTS OF PEACE & JUSTICE

During the fall 2008 Biennial Assembly, SM Inga Borko presented the Congregational Justice and Peace Office's two year report. Her presentation highlighted the efforts made to promote a culture of life with a focus on women and children, to join the fight against human trafficking, and to speak out against war. Afterwards, the assembly affirmed the work done by the Congregational Office, the Provincial Justice and Peace Committees, and each individual sister working for justice and peace.

SM Barbara Ann Bosch, minister general, strongly declared that the work of justice and peace is not something extra or added on to our lives as Felician Sisters, nor is it just another community committee. Rather, in the spirit of our beloved mother Blessed Mary Angela, we must each take to heart the work of justice and peace as an essential aspect, a foundational element of our lives, inherent in our Felician Franciscan charism, vision and mission:

The Charism of the Congregation of the Sisters of Saint Felix of Cantalice is to imitate Blessed Mary Angela's boundless love of God and surrender to God's Will in

- ◆ compassionate service,
- ◆ total availability,
- ◆ concern for the salvation of all people.

From the very beginning, Blessed Angela spoke of the boundless love of God and concern for the salvation of all people. Missioned to cooperate with Christ in the spiritual renewal of the world, we acknowledge that in order to be spiritually renewed, the dignity and well-being of each person must be realized. An environment of respect allows human dignity to thrive, giving impetus to our efforts, along with other Franciscans, to be instruments of peace. However, as Pope Paul VI declared, "*Without justice, there is no peace.*"

Found in the description of our Felician Franciscan spirit, it is in the Eucharist that we are empowered to be instruments of peace AND justice:

"As women of the Eucharist, knowing intimacy with Christ in the sacramental encounter, we experience his love and, in response, we strive to love. Thus our love for God and for others finds its source in the Eucharist. We become Eucharist; we become Jesus to others. With

respect for their dignity as persons, we accept them; we are concerned for their good; and we serve them in selfless dedication." (The Spirit's Creative Presence, 16)

Thus, in declaring our vision to be Eucharist, Sister and Servant to all, we recommit ourselves to be contemporary instruments of justice and peace, to work on behalf of our brothers and sisters who are victims of injustice and violence today.

— S Nancy Marie Jamroz, CSSF (LI)



OPPORTUNITY for Evangelization of Presence Experience

The Congregational Office of Justice and Peace is sponsoring the following evangelization opportunity for Felician Sisters in 2009:

Petropavlovsk, Kamchatka, Russia
August 15-Sept. 15, 2009

Five Felician Sisters are invited to spend 4 weeks interacting with people in the community, providing opportunities for people to come together, offering English classes, and assessing the needs of the people.

Application Deadline: March 1, 2009

For more information and to submit an application, go to the Congregational Office for Justice and Peace site at www.FelicianSisters.org
Send e-mails to sminga@feliciansisters.org

BAPTISM and CROSS: A Lenten Franciscan Perspective on the Work of Social Transformation

*Indeed, all the striving of the man of God,
whether in public or private,
revolved around the cross of the Lord . . .
Just as, internally, his mind had put on
the crucified Lord,
so, externally, his body also put on
the armor of the cross;
and, in the sign by which God had vanquished
the powers of the air . . .
the mysteries of the cross began to shine forth in him.*

– Bonaventure, *Major Legend of St. Francis*,
The Miracles, Chapter I

The times in which Francis lived were marked by the sign of the cross in many ways. True, it was a time of fervent (perhaps even at times, overzealous) piety focused on the Crucified Christ. Francis, himself, child of his times, as all of us must be, had his own significant devotion to the cross of Christ. He was instrumental in developing the tradition of the Stations of the Cross, which still adorn the walls of many Catholic Churches. However, the passage from Bonaventure suggests a much deeper reality at work. Francis and those early Franciscan communities “put on the cross,” more than just clinging to it sentimentally.

Can we relate the core of this Franciscan “cruciform” spirituality to dimensions of FAN’s ongoing education and advocacy? What better time than the upcoming season of Lent - a time in which we as church are called upon once again to prepare catechumens for baptism and ourselves to observe the truth of how closely related that baptismal call and the cross truly are?

– Marc DelMonico
FAN Web Outreach Coordinator

Reminder

In support of our Congregational efforts
on behalf of Women and Children
Each week please remember to say
the PRAYER FOR THE CULTURE OF LIFE
and once a month choose a day
to fast and pray for this intention.



JUSTICE & PEACE

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Members of the Felician Franciscan Sisters
Congregational Central Office for Justice & Peace:

SM Inga Borko, Congregational Coordinator (RO)
S MaryAnne Olekszyk (CA)
SM Faith Balawejder (CO)
SM Izajasz Rojek (PR)
SM Jacqueline Keefe (CA)
SM Jeanine Heath (CH)
SM Susanne Dziedzic (BU)
IM Marina Lazara do Carmo (BR)
S Maryann Agnes Mueller (LO)
S Nancy Marie Jamroz (LI)
SM Sophia Gaconi Muturi (KE)
SM Wiktima Hebda (KR)
SM Honorata Grzeszczuk (WA)

Editor: S Maryann Agnes Mueller (LO)
Publication Design: SM Francis Lewandowski (LI)

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Abbreviations

Rome, Italy – RO
Kraków, Poland – KR
Livonia, Michigan, USA – LI
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