Called to More
Ministering to those on Death Row

It all started with an article asking for volunteers. In the summer of 1996, a year after his ordination, Fr. Neil Kookoothe read an article about a fledgling ministry run by Br. Patrick Byrd in Texas. There was a request for people to write to inmates on death row; Fr. Neil felt called to respond. He started corresponding with Keith, which led to sending Christmas and birthday cards to other inmates. That led to personal visits and a passion for walking with those prisoners began. If you Google his name, you will find that a background in nursing and law helped him gain the release of a death row inmate named Joe (pictured below). Joe now works at St. Clarence, where Fr. Neil is pastor.

When asked how his ministry to those on death row has changed his priesthood, Fr. Neil was quick to point out that it has changed, “not just his priesthood, but me.” When he started out, he had to fight his own fears – he had never been inside a jail, let alone a prison. However, in the 20+ years that he has been ministering to those on death row, he said these men have been his best spiritual directors. He has learned more about the concept of freedom that he ever dreamed possible, as well as realizing how blessed he is to have had the quality of education and a tight knit family in his life. The experience of walking with these guys has made him into a social justice Gospel preacher – it affects how he reads and shares the Gospel and even how he hears confessions. It has changed everything.

When asked how he’s seen movement in the Catholic church in regards to this issue, he says it’s a both/and answer. The attitude in the wider Catholic community, sadly, tends to mirror that of the culture, which supports the death penalty. Nationally, however, advocates such as Sr. Helen Prejean, the author of Dead Man Walking, have been able to humanize the issue and have moved more people to take a stand against this punishment. Six or seven states have abolished the death penalty. Where Fr. Neil has had the chance to educate and preach from his experience, he has seen attitudes change. He has been able to put faces to this issue that is very political and emotionally charged. He says, “when people are educated, I’ve seen movement.” It’s his wish that more bishops would make strong statements upholding Catholic Social Teaching pointing to the dignity of the inmates’ humanity.

When it comes to being educated, Fr. Neil has a few ideas. He has a chapter in a new book, Living on Death Row: The Psychology of Waiting to Die, which comes out April 24. You can find it for pre-order on Amazon through the American Psychological Association. (continued on Page Three)
However, a recent Supreme Court case aimed at reducing or even banning executions was shut down for being too broad.

After over 13 years, I have moved into an office with windows. I am so appreciative of God’s gift of natural light. I hope I remember to be this grateful in the days, weeks, and years ahead.

I hold all these things and all people whose lives are not treasured in my prayer and I ask you to do the same. Love is the key to respect for life. Since God is love, we must be regularly connected to the source of love in all our endeavors to honor the consistent life ethic.

Peggy Gerovac

FROM THE DIRECTOR

I would like to take a different approach to this letter. Stream of consciousness is the style I am presenting for this edition.

First, the Conscience Protection Act was not included in the FY 2018 omnibus appropriations bill (omni) released by the House and Senate. We cannot be sure why it was not included since lately the negotiations on this spending bill were done behind closed doors. What we do know is that we will continue to advocate for people who are required to perform medical procedures that are against their religious beliefs.

In our favor, the Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act passed by an overwhelming bipartisan vote 97-2. This was a hard-fought win against this horrific crime. The hard fight was not among legislators until some big internet service providers caught wind and tried to stop it in its tracks. Ohio Senator Rob Portman was a writer of this legislation that was tightening a loophole in previous legislation. The bipartisan bill, H.R. 1865 (115), would puncture that arrangement, allowing prosecutors or victims to take websites to court if they knowingly enable sex trafficking through advertisements, posts or other means. Craigslist has shut down its personal ads because it says it cannot be sure they will not have a problem with this service in the future.

I have had little direct communication with Bishop Perez. As of the day I write this, he had given no new direction for the office. He is still learning so much about the Cleveland diocese. He is working with focus groups that may suggest some changes down the road.

We continue to experience wins and losses on eliminating the Death Penalty. In a case-by-case basis, the persons scheduled for execution have been defended by dedicated attorneys and law students. They have successfully had the sentencing changed.

40th Anniversary of the U.S. Catholic Bishops Pastoral Statement on People with Disabilities 1978 - 2018

(Updated 1989)

from the National Catholic Partnership on Disability (NCPD)

This year, we are celebrating the 40th anniversary of the Pastoral Statement of U.S. Catholic Bishops on People with Disabilities (Statement). This major statement regarding persons with disabilities and their relationship within the Church calls us to embrace our responsibility with our brothers and sisters with disabilities to ensure their meaningful participation in the community of faith.

The Statement affirms the dignity of persons with disabilities, recognizing their inherent baptismal rights to receive spiritual formation, to have full participation, and recognizing their call to share their gifts with the Church.

The Statement also clarifies the roles of communities, parishes, dioceses, and national organizations in the integration of persons with disabilities in all the facets of the church’s life.

The Statement can be found on the USCCB website.
He gives four ways to work towards changing hearts toward this issue:

- Educate yourselves – see the underlying issues that lead to these crimes
- Get involved – write to death row inmates; put a face to their names
- Attend a talk on the Death Penalty
- Contact Ohioans to Stop Executions – they make advocacy easy – you fill out the forms and they contact the law makers on your behalf!

Reactions to the death penalty seem to come from the heart & the gut. We hear about the crime and immediately render a verdict on the person. However, if we could move past that and see the great disparity – across racial, gender, educational, and economic lines – that lies within the heart of this issue, we could see the humanity of the people who are facing this penalty.

The death penalty is a very important life issue; these people on death row are our brothers and sisters - their lives matter. By looking at life across the spectrum - from beginning to end - Fr. Neil says, we see that if we look beyond the accidentals, we are more alike than we are different; “what we share is life.”

By responding to that request to become a penpal, Fr. Neil’s life was changed forever. He now has the great gift of sharing the Gospel with those who are on the margins, forgotten and condemned to die. Those very same men have taught him how to read the Gospel in a fuller and more rich way. Because of this, he has been putting faces to an issue and changing the hearts of those he encounters for the last 23 years.
Catholics and embryo adoption

Birth of embryo frozen since 1992 is latest twist in challenging issue

Father Tadeusz Pacholczyk - OSV Newsweekly
February 7, 2018

The longest-known case of a frozen human embryo successfully coming to birth happened in November 2017, in Tennessee, when Emma Wren Gibson was born to Tina Gibson, who nine months earlier had been implanted with an embryo that had been frozen since 1992. Tina, who was born in 1991, and her husband received the embryo through the National Embryo Donation Center, a Knoxville-based group offering implantation of donated frozen embryos for infertile parents seeking children.

Moral reservations

How should Catholics respond when they learn that a friend or family member has done in vitro fertilization and now has frozen embryos? What should be done with all the frozen embryos who now exist?

The short answer to this vexing question is that, ethically, there is very little we can do except to keep them frozen for the foreseeable future. As the Church condemns separating human reproduction from the procreative act of husband and wife, no other morally acceptable options seem to exist.

In “embryo adoption,” couples relinquish their own embryos so others, like Tina Gibson, can implant, gestate and raise them as if they were their own children; this approach, however, raises various moral concerns. Technically speaking, the moral question of whether it is allowable to do this remains unresolved, and there is ongoing debate among reputable Catholic scholars about the matter. The most recent Vatican bioethics document called Dignitas Personae (2008), however, expresses serious moral reservations, even though it does not outright condemn it as immoral.

We easily can see reasons why the promotion of embryo adoption would be imprudent. If embryo adoption were to become standard practice in the current, largely unregulated setting of the infertility industry, this actually could stimulate the production of yet more frozen young human beings; IVF clinic operators would be able to placate themselves by saying, “We really don’t need to worry about producing extra embryos, because there will always be a market, and somebody willing to ‘adopt’ any that are left over.” It could offer the clinics an excuse to continue and even expand their current immoral practices of doing in vitro fertilization, cryopreserving embryos and trapping young humans in these “frozen orphanages.”

Live and let die?

Some have suggested that a morally acceptable solution to the frozen embryo problem might come through applying the principle that “extraordinary” means do not have to be undertaken to prolong human life. They argue that to sustain an embryo’s life in a cryogenic state is to use extraordinary means and this is not required.

This is not a convincing argument, however, since the decision to continue cryopreserving an embryo in liquid nitrogen does not actually appear to be an example of using “extraordinary” means — the burdens and costs involved in taking care of embryonic children in this way are actually quite minimal. When we have children, we take on a duty to clothe, feed, educate and care for them, all of which costs plenty of money. When our children are frozen, we don’t need to clothe, feed or educate them; our care for them can only be expressed by regularly paying the bill to replenish the liquid nitrogen in the tanks that preserve their lives. This way of caring for them is obviously unusual, but it does not appear to be morally “extraordinary” and clearly achieves the important goal of safeguarding their very young lives.

Obligation to care

In my opinion, parents have an obligation to care for their children in this way at least during the parents’ own lifetimes, in case some other option happens to become available in the future — maybe a sophisticated “embryo incubator” of some kind — or until there is a reasonable certainty that they have died on their own from decay or “freezer burn,” which may occur whenever frozen embryos are stored for very extended periods. Perhaps after a few hundred years, stored embryos will have died on their own, and they will finally be able to be thawed and given a decent burial. This approach would not involve us in the direct moral agency of ending their lives by withdrawing their life-sustaining liquid nitrogen.

Frozen embryos, clearly, can never be donated to science. Such a decision would amount to handing over not cadavers, but living human beings for dismemberment at the hands of stem cell researchers. This always would be a radical failure in the parents’ duty to protect and care for their offspring.

Our sinful choices have consequences. The original decision to carry out in vitro fertilization invariably has serious repercussions and causes real complications, including these kinds of dilemmas for which no sound moral resolution is apparent.

Father Tadeusz Pacholczyk, Ph.D., is director of education at The National Catholic Bioethics Center in Philadelphia.
The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is creating a new division, under the organization’s Office of Civil Rights (OCR), that will focus on enforcing conscience rights and religious freedom laws. According to HHS: The Conscience and Religious Freedom Division has been established to restore federal enforcement of our nation’s laws that protect the fundamental and unalienable rights of conscience and religious freedom. OCR is the law enforcement agency within HHS that enforces federal laws protecting civil rights and conscience in health and human services, and the security and privacy of people’s health information. The creation of the new division will provide HHS with the focus it needs to more vigorously and effectively enforce existing laws protecting the rights of conscience and religious freedom, the first freedom protected in the Bill of Rights. OCR Director Roger Severino added, “Laws protecting religious freedom and conscience rights are just empty words on paper if they aren’t enforced. No one should be forced to choose between helping sick people and living by one’s deepest moral or religious convictions, and the new division will help guarantee that victims of unlawful discrimination find justice.”

A World Where Abortion Is Unthinkable
by Shelley Douglass, Plough Magazine

I was in jail for taking part in anti-nuclear actions of civil disobedience ... When you’re in jail, you do anything to get out of your cell – it’s boring in that cell! ... One day we walked in and the presentation was on abortion. The two women who came in clearly believed what they were saying. ...They really did want to share that abortions were normal, an easy thing, a very simple thing to do, that you really ought to consider it, especially if you were financially embarrassed. Everyone in jail is, of course. After the two women explained about abortion there was a silence. Then one of the women from the streets said, “But why would I want to kill my baby?”

Support the Child Welfare Provider Inclusion Act:
Contact your Representative & Senators today!

The Child Welfare Provider Inclusion Act (CWPIA) protects the religious liberties of child welfare service providers, including adoption and foster care agencies. The Act would prohibit the federal government and any state that receives certain federal funding from discriminating against child welfare service providers on the basis that they decline to provide a child welfare service that conflicts with their sincerely held religious beliefs or moral convictions. The Inclusion Act is needed because child welfare service providers are being discriminated against because of their sincerely held religious beliefs and moral convictions. For example, certain religiously-affiliated charities in Massachusetts, Illinois, California, and the District of Columbia have had to stop adoption and foster care services because of requirements imposed upon them to place children in households headed by two persons of the same sex. Also, women and men who want to place their children for adoption should be free to choose from a diversity of adoption agencies, including those that share the parents’ religious beliefs and moral convictions. The Inclusion Act recognizes and respects this parental choice. The Inclusion Act has been introduced in both the House (H.R. 1881) and the Senate (S. 811).

Go to: https://www.votervoice.net/USCCB/Campaigns/43805/Respond
**Civil War Nurses Memorial**

A sculpture commemorates the "Nuns of the Battlefield" who cared for soldiers on both sides of the conflict.

*When the U.S. Civil War erupted in 1861, both sides faced a significant absence of a critical resource: well-trained, experienced nurses. At the time, the only "professional" nurses to speak of were nuns from orders who ran hospitals or otherwise provided ministration to the sick and injured. Despite prevalent anti-Catholic bigotry at the time, some 600 nuns answered the call and proved themselves invaluable in caring for the casualties of the bloody struggle.*

Completed almost 60 years after the end of the Civil War, the Civil War Nurses Memorial was the brainchild of Ellen Ryan Jolly, president of the women’s auxiliary branch of the Ancient Order of Hibernians. The Irish Catholic organization raised $50,000 to construct the monument after Jolly secured approval from Congress on March 29, 1918. Noted Irish artist Jerome Connor was commissioned to create the sculpture. However, construction did not begin until five years later, due to disagreements about the location of the memorial and composition of the artwork. It was finally dedicated on September 20, 1924.

The final product consists of a granite base and slab bearing a bronze bas relief sculpture entitled *Nuns of the Battlefield*. The sculpture depicts twelve nuns in an impressive assortment of habits (including one wearing the cornette of the Daughters of Charity, the headgear said to be the inspiration for the Flying Nun) representing the various orders that provided medical care in the army camps. Angels of peace and patriotism flank the relief, underlining the merciful role the nuns served in the midst of the carnage.
Local Radio informs on Pro Life issues

Premiering in January of 2017, “EWTN Pro-Life Weekly” informs and educates viewers about current issues of importance in advancing a culture of life.

“This year has flown by. It’s been really incredible,” said Catherine Hadro, host of the half hour program. Hadro said the program answers the question “how can we as pro-lifers build a culture of life” and feels the program fills a unique need. “We want to bridge the gap between Capitol Hill and viewers at home.”

Hadro said the program provides the information pro-lifers need to know about what’s happening in the pro-life movement, and each program provides a call to action. “You can do something every week. We need to hear your voices,” Hadro said.

Hadro said it has been really interesting to follow the Trump presidency and how the administration will fulfill the promises to the pro-life community. The program debuted just as the new administration was taking office.

In addition to EWTN Pro-Life Weekly, the network also provides all-day coverage of the Annual March for Life, both on television and through the EWTN Global Catholic Radio Network.

Prior to hosting EWTN Pro-Life Weekly, Hadro was a correspondent with EWTN News Nightly, where she also worked as a producer.

EWTN Pro-Life Weekly is carried on AM 1260 The Rock, Cleveland’s EWTN Global Catholic Radio Network affiliate, every Sunday morning at 10 AM and, beginning in March, will be re-broadcast Sunday evenings at 8:30 PM.

The program is also shown on EWTN Television on Fridays at 11 PM, Sundays at 10 AM, and Mondays at 3 AM.

Public Awareness from the Office for Victims of Crime

This can be found at—https://ovc.ncjrs.gov/humantrafficking/publicawareness.html

Office for Victims of Crime encourages local organizations to use these resources throughout the year at public awareness, education, and training events to promote and advance the cause of justice for victims of crime.

"Faces of Human Trafficking" Video Series

The series is intended to be used for outreach and education efforts of service providers, law enforcement, prosecutors, and others in the community. The series includes information about sex and labor trafficking, multidisciplinary approaches to serving victims of trafficking, effective victim services, victims’ legal needs, and voices of survivors.

Accompanying the video series is a discussion guide, four OVC Fact Sheets, and four posters that can be used to augment trainings and generate discussion. Download the complete Discussion Guide or the sections associated with each video below.

The Fact Sheets provide an introduction to human trafficking, information on the legal needs and rights of victims of human trafficking in the United States, information on the special considerations and needs of youth victims, and promising practices for building effective collaborations to address human trafficking.

The posters are designed to target specific audiences—service providers and allied professionals, law enforcement, the general public, and victims/survivors. Download the posters from the gallery on the right and customize them with information about your organization, training opportunities, or local service providers.
Rosary for Life

On the First Saturday of each month, beginning at St. Andrew’s Abbey (2900 MLK Drive), with confessions at 8:30am, followed by 9:15am Mass in the abbey chapel. After Mass, participants assemble in front of the Preterm abortuary on Shaker Blvd at 10:30am, to pray the rosary (three sets of mysteries) and the Divine Mercy chaplet.

All other Saturdays of the month: Participants meet on the sidewalk in front of the Preterm abortuary at 9:30am to pray the rosary and Divine Mercy chaplet.

West Side Rosary for Life: Participants assemble in front of Planned Parenthood, 20800 Center Ridge Road, across from Westgate Mall every Saturday morning at 10:00am and every Tuesday evening at 6:30pm.

For more information call 216-362-1732

PLEASE CONTACT US TO POST YOUR VOLUNTEER NEEDS AND UPCOMING EVENTS.
ALL OF OUR ADS CAN BE FOUND ON OUR WEBSITE FOR PARISH USE!

Contact Us

For Life is a quarterly publication and educational service of the Office for Human Life of the Diocese of Cleveland.

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