

## RESPECT LIFE MONTH STATEMENT

# Living Radical Solidarity

OCTOBER 2023

Most Reverend Michael F. Burbidge  
Chairman, USCCB Committee on Pro-Life Activities



Since 1973, the year the Supreme Court legalized abortion nationwide in *Roe v. Wade*, the month of October has been set aside by the U.S. bishops as a time to focus on protecting God's precious gift of human life. While we thank God that the terrible reign of *Roe* has ended, we also recognize that abortion still continues in most states and is aggressively promoted at the federal level. A great many prayers, sacrifices, and good works are still desperately needed to transform a culture of death into a culture of life. Our public witness, our marching, and our advocacy must continue, yet laws alone will not end the tragedy of abortion.

While ending legalized abortion remains our preeminent priority, the most immediate way to save babies and mothers from abortion is to thoroughly surround mothers in need with life-giving support and personal accompaniment. This is radical solidarity.

St. John Paul II first defined "radical solidarity" in this way: "*In firmly rejecting 'pro-choice' it is necessary to become courageously 'pro woman,' promoting a choice that is truly in favor of women. ... The only honest stance, in these cases, is that of radical solidarity with the woman. It is not right to leave her alone.*"<sup>1</sup>

Being in radical solidarity with women who are pregnant or raising children in difficult circumstances means putting our love for them into action and putting their needs before our own. Pope Francis reminds us that solidarity "refers to something more than a few sporadic acts

of generosity. It presumes the creation of a *new mindset*," a transformation within our own hearts.<sup>2</sup>

This new mindset requires that we come alongside vulnerable mothers in profound friendship, compassion, and support for both them and their preborn children. It means addressing the fundamental challenges that lead an expectant mother to believe she is unable to welcome the child God has entrusted to her.

This includes collective efforts within our dioceses, parishes, schools and local communities, engagement in the public square, and pursuit of policies that help support both women and their preborn babies. It all the more so requires our individual, personal commitment to helping mothers in our own communities secure material, emotional, and spiritual support for embracing the gift of life. Radical solidarity means moving beyond the status quo and out of our comfort zones.

Our parish-based and nationwide initiative, [\*Walking with Moms in Need\*](#), for example, provides easy-to-follow, step-by-step instructions to help transform our parishes into places of welcome, support, and assistance for pregnant and parenting mothers facing difficulties. Melissa, a [\*North Carolina mom\*](#)<sup>3</sup> with young children and a busy

job, attended a parish informational session for *Walking with Moms in Need*, thinking she might help out here and there. But she felt the Lord's call and "by the end of the session she had volunteered to be the ministry's coordinator." Her parish now holds "Hand Up Days" once a month during which families can "shop" free of charge for baby and toddler items they need that have been donated by parishioners.

Melissa shared some powerful words of encouragement: "I think for too long we have been comfortable leaving the work of accompanying women in crisis situations – pregnant or parenting – to others in the nonprofit and government sectors. It is very clear in the Gospel that this is our job — all of us! A woman in a pregnancy center once told me that most women considering abortion are wrestling with a financial matter less than \$250 and that has really stuck with me. If we can lighten the burden just a little, what a difference we can make — it is literally life or death."

God has given each of us particular gifts, and with those gifts He entrusts us with a role and duty within the Body of Christ. Embracing an attitude of radical solidarity calls us to honestly reflect on some challenging questions and to consider specific actions we can take to foster an authentic culture of life. Some questions we might ask ourselves could include: *Do I know what efforts are happening in my area to help women who are pregnant or parenting in difficult circumstances? What are the needs? What are my gifts and talents? How can I adjust my schedule or budget to assist efforts to help moms in need and their children?* Radical solidarity can be lived out in countless ways, including volunteering at your local pregnancy center;



helping an expectant mother find stable housing; babysitting so a mom can work or take classes; providing encouragement and a listening ear to a mom without a support system; or speaking to your pastor about beginning *Walking with Moms in Need* at your parish.

In addition to enshrining pro-life laws and policies, the transformation of our culture also requires continual conversion of our *own* hearts, so that we can recognize in every person the face of Christ and place their needs before our own.

And so, this October, I invite all Catholics to think about building a culture of life in terms of radical solidarity. We are the Church. Our prayers, witness, sacrifices, advocacy, and good works are needed now, more than ever. We are the hands and feet of Christ in the world today and we each have a personal responsibility to care for one another.

For more information on how to celebrate Respect Life Month and stand in radical solidarity with moms in need, please visit [respectlife.org/celebrate](https://respectlife.org/celebrate).

---

1 Pope John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, p. 207.

2 Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium (The Joy of the Gospel)*, no. 188.

3 Elizabeth Ascik, "One of the Best Ways to Walk with Moms in Need," *Aleteia*, March 23, 2023, <https://aleteia.org/2023/03/22/one-of-the-best-ways-to-walk-with-moms-in-need/>.