



## ARCHDIOCESE OF INDIANAPOLIS

*The Church in Central and Southern Indiana*

# Leadership Briefing

By Archbishop Charles C. Thompson

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### **God alone is the Lord of life, from beginning to end**

Saturday, January 22, is a Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children. It is a serious day of remembrance for the millions of victims of our nation's laws and practices that fail to protect the dignity of human life.

Every human being is made in the image and likeness of God and, so, must be treated with the utmost dignity and respect. This is true from the moment of conception until the time of natural death. No one has the right to violate the sanctity of human life. No one is free to decide that an individual person's life is unnecessary or that a group of people are inferior or subhuman and, therefore, expendable.

Our Church vigorously opposes abortion because we believe that from the first moment of conception each human being must be recognized as having the inviolable right to life. No human law or social policy can override this most fundamental, God-given civil right. This absolute commitment to the dignity of human life extends to other social issues as well.

All forms of homicide, including infanticide (the killing of children) and genocide (the elimination of entire communities based on their religious or ethnic identities) must be strenuously opposed. The same is true of capital punishment, which Pope Francis has declared to be "inadmissible no matter how serious the crime committed because it attacks the inviolability and dignity of the person."



This same principle applies to all forms of euthanasia (cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, #2276). Catholic social teaching emphasizes that “those whose lives are diminished or weakened” due to illness, disability or extreme old age “deserve special respect.” They should be helped to lead lives that are as full and dignified as possible in their diminished circumstances. Whatever its motives and means, direct euthanasia (“mercy killing”) consists in putting an end to a human life. Our Church teaches that this is “always unacceptable.”

The same is true of suicide, which, tragically, is increasing in our society. According to the catechism, “Suicide contradicts the natural inclination of the human person to preserve and perpetuate his life. It is gravely contrary to the just love of self. It likewise offends love of neighbor because it unjustly breaks the ties of solidarity with family, nation, and other human societies to which we continue to have obligations” (#2281).

Especially in the United States today, when many states have adopted laws that permit—even encourage—suicide assisted by physicians and loved ones, the Church is required to speak out and to declare that “suicide is contrary to love for the living God.” In all these cases, the Church and all of us individual Christians have a moral responsibility to show compassion, understanding and loving support for our sisters and brothers who are under so much emotional pain and stress that they seriously consider taking a human life—their own, that of an unborn child or a loved one who is in terrible pain.

We cannot imagine how much intense pressure is placed on those who contemplate abortion, euthanasia or suicide. What’s needed above all is the unconditional love and mercy that our Lord Jesus Christ offers to all who are burdened in any way. His love is needed, often desperately, to break through the barriers of guilt and shame that surround our brothers and sisters who have given up hope, and are seeking a way out of overwhelming crises in their lives.

Our Church’s unwavering commitment to the dignity of life is not meant to “lord it over” women and men who are suffering. Instead, it serves as a call to the rest of us—spouses, family members and friends, neighbors and fellow parishioners, and all people of good will—to reach out to those who are suffering, and offer both words of encouragement and a helping hand wherever possible.

In order to be signs of the unconditional love and mercy of God, we uphold the conviction that 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. Because we know how much God loves each and every one of us, we affirm that “God alone is the Lord of life from its beginning until its end: no one can under any circumstances claim for himself the right directly to destroy an innocent human being” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, #2258).

We are stewards, not owners, of God’s gift of life. Let’s do everything in our power to nurture, protect and defend this gift—from the moment of conception to the moment of natural death!

+Charles C. Thompson  
Archbishop of Indianapolis

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## ICC is ready to add voice to issues and legislation during General Assembly

**By Victoria Arthur**

As lawmakers returned to the Statehouse in Indianapolis this week to begin a new legislative session, the Indiana Catholic Conference (ICC) stood ready to speak on the key issues of the day, always standing in solidarity with the most vulnerable.

The 123rd Indiana General Assembly opened for business on Jan. 4 for a short, non-budget year session that is expected to wrap up by mid-March. State lawmakers will introduce and debate a flurry of bills on a

wide range of topics. And as it has for the past 55 years, the ICC will weigh in on important legislation while engaging as many Catholics as possible in the process.



“The ICC is the public policy voice for the Catholic Church in the state of Indiana,” said Angela Espada, the sixth and current executive director of the ICC. “Simply put, we advocate either for or against proposed legislation in line with the long and rich history of Catholic social teaching.”

Espada explained that promoting the common good and protecting the most vulnerable members of society form the basis for the Church’s engagement in the public arena.

“If you look at the issues that politics hits on, much of it has to do with immigration, education, whether or not to have a social safety net and how far that net expands, and respect for life,” Espada said. “All of these are issues that the Church has experience in and has either advocated for or against in some form since its beginning—certainly long before there were lobbyists and massive political agendas.”

Protecting human life from conception to natural death remains the most pressing of the Church’s priorities—and, therefore, the ICC’s. Abortion is at the forefront of the national

debate again, as the Supreme Court has recently considered pro-life legislation in Texas and Mississippi that has been challenged by abortion advocates.

Indiana Speaker of the House Todd Huston (R-Fishers) stated during his recent Organization Day speech for the state legislature that Indiana is following developments at the Supreme Court.

“In Indiana, we have a strong history of standing up for the rights of the unborn, and we’ll continue to build on our pro-life efforts this session,” Huston said.

Throughout its history, the ICC has supported pro-life initiatives brought before the General Assembly, Espada said. That includes standing up for the unborn while opposing the death penalty and assisted suicide. Pro-life efforts can take a variety of forms, she emphasized, pointing to recent efforts by the legislature to increase accommodations for pregnant women in the workplace—from longer and more frequent breaks to temporary transfers to less strenuous or hazardous environments.

“The legislation that passed last year did not go far enough, and we’d like to see something better this year for expectant moms,” Espada said.

With COVID cases once again on the rise, efforts to stem the pandemic are likely to dominate conversations at the Statehouse during the 2022 session, according to Alexander Mingus, associate director of the ICC.

“We anticipate lots of discussion around COVID response, especially concerning vaccines and exemptions,” Mingus said. Espada added that the ICC will be particularly interested in the debate as it concerns religious freedom and liberty.

With inflation rising sharply nationwide, Espada and Mingus expressed hope that a long-overdue update of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program would finally pass the state legislature. TANF is a federal government program that provides grants to the states for distribution to families in dire economic circumstances. Because of outdated state guidelines, the \$288 maximum monthly cash payment for a family of three in deep poverty has not been adjusted for inflation since 1988.

Much to the dismay of the ICC and other advocates for the poor, proposed legislation to update TANF has been passed over during recent legislative sessions.

“Even though TANF money flows to the states from the federal government and is readily available, Indiana has not offered an increase in monthly payments for the neediest of the needy in more than three decades,” Espada said. “With COVID continuing to devastate our economy and inflation on the rise, we need these changes more urgently than ever.”

She and Mingus call on the Catholic faithful for their prayers during the 2022 legislative session—as well as their active engagement. They encourage everyone to visit the ICC website, [www.indianacc.org](http://www.indianacc.org), which offers access to I-CAN, the Indiana Catholic Action Network. Those who sign up for I-CAN receive action alerts on important legislation and ways to contact their elected representatives.

“This is the best way for everyone to stay engaged with us throughout the legislative session and all year long,” said Mingus, who was instrumental in recently revamping the ICC website and introducing the weekly podcast that he and Espada host during the General Assembly. “If anyone has family members, friends and fellow parishioners who aren’t aware of the ICC, we ask that they encourage them to sign up for I-CAN and stay up to date through our podcast and other resources.

“We need everyone’s help to spread the word that we exist, and ultimately to support our work on behalf of the Church.”

*(Victoria Arthur, a member of St. Malachy Parish in Brownsburg, is a correspondent for The Criterion.)*

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## **Dialogue Between Generations, Education and Work: Tools for Building Lasting Peace**

“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace” (Is 52:7).

The words of the prophet Isaiah speak of consolation; they voice the sigh of relief of a people in exile, weary of violence and oppression, exposed to indignity and death. The prophet Baruch had wondered: “Why is it, O Israel, why is it that you are in the land of your enemies, that you are growing old in a foreign country, that you are defiled with the dead, that you are counted among those in Hades?” (3:10-11). For the people of Israel, the coming of the messenger of peace meant the promise of a rebirth from the rubble of history, the beginning of a bright future.



Today the path of peace, which Saint Paul VI called by the new name of integral development, remains sadly distant from the real lives of many men and women and thus

from our human family, which is now entirely interconnected. Despite numerous efforts aimed at constructive dialogue between nations, the deafening noise of war and conflict is intensifying. While diseases of pandemic proportions are spreading, the effects of climate change and environmental degradation are worsening, the tragedy of hunger and thirst is increasing, and an economic model based on individualism rather than on communal sharing continues to prevail. As in the days of the prophets of old, so in our own day the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth constantly make themselves heard, pleading for justice and peace.

In every age, peace is both a gift from on high and the fruit of a shared commitment. Indeed, we can speak of an “architecture” of peace, to which different institutions of society contribute, and an “art” of peace that directly involves each one of us. All can work together to build a more peaceful world, starting from the hearts of individuals and relationships in the family, then within society and with the environment, and all the way up to relationships between peoples and nations.

Here I wish to propose three paths for building a lasting peace. First, dialogue between generations as the basis for the realization of shared projects. Second, education as a factor of freedom, responsibility and development. Finally, labour as a means for the full realization of human dignity. These are three indispensable elements for “making possible the creation of a social covenant,” without which every project of peace turns out to be insubstantial.

Dear brothers and sisters, as we seek to combine our efforts in order to emerge from the pandemic, I renew my thanks to all those who continue to work with generosity and responsibility in the areas of education, safety and protection of rights, in supplying medical care, in facilitating meetings between family members and the sick, and in providing economic support to the needy and those who have lost their jobs. I continue to remember the victims and their families in my prayers. *(A Selection from the Holy Father’s 2022 World Day of Peace Message)*

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## **My Prayer for You**

Lord, you are the source of all life. Help us to cherish and defend the sanctity of human life and the beauty of all creation. Teach us to be true messengers of peace, missionary disciples who, as Pope Francis teaches, “can work together to build a more peaceful world, starting from the hearts of individuals and relationships in the family, then within society and with the environment, and all the way up to relationships between peoples and nations.”

+ *Charles C. Thompson*