Dear Friends of Notre Dame Right to Life,

As we draw to a close of this first semester, it is shocking to think that the academic year is half over! Though ND Right to Life certainly has accomplished so much in this semester, time truly has flown by us! Regardless, I am excited to have this opportunity to tell you of the work that Right to Life has done since we last sent our newsletter in October.

Though the outcome of the November elections was a seeming defeat for the pro-life movement, we cannot necessarily call it so. Upon the election of President-Elect Obama, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a statement saying, “We certainly have very challenging times ahead for pro-life efforts at the federal and state levels. But we know that God can accomplish His will, even in the most challenging of circumstances...We must work diligently now in a renewed and different way, but also, more than anything else must pray diligently, fervently, daily and through every discouragement, in charity not in hatred, in faith not out of desperation.” And how true this is! We must be acutely aware of the implications this election holds for the nation and its future. However, in the end, the pro-life work is not about winning a battle in the political or social arena: this work is about winning and saving souls!

With such a mindset, Notre Dame Right to Life has been staying busy to promote the Culture of Life. Though we usually host our “Project Mom” drive for South Bend’s Women’s Care Center (WCC) in the Fall, we have decided to move this to the spring semester. However, with the help of service commissioner Mary Forr (‘11), RTL raised more than $400 to host a baby shower for one of the WCC’s expectant mother-client in mid-November. In addition, RTL’s November also saw the inaugural hosting of the Pro-Life Presentations’ Committee on-campus presentation of their program on life issues. Please see commissioner Kevin Veselik’s (‘09) coverage of this well-attended event for more details.

Currently, Notre Dame Right to Life’s big project is our March for Life registration campaign. To date, we have approximately 200 students registered to travel with Notre Dame Right to Life to Washington, D.C., in January and we expect more to register as the March date comes closer. These students will be joined by a handful of Notre Dame faculty and staff members to take part in the 36th Annual March with the more than quarter-of-a-million March participants who will be in Washington on January 22nd, 2009. As the March for Life is one of Notre Dame Right to Life’s principal events each year, we have included a special commentary by our vice-president Victor Saenz, featured on the following page.

Looking forward to the spring semester, though we anticipate meeting internal and external difficulties and bumps in the road, with hard work, lots of prayers, and the knowledge of support such as yours, our efforts to promote the Culture of Life will continue. Currently, our plans include, among other things, our general club meetings, the March for Life, our annual Collegiate Conference and the “Project Mom” drive to raise money and collect mother-and-child items for local unwed mothers.

Thank you so much for your continued prayers for and dedication to Notre Dame Right to Life. We are gratefully blessed to have your support to strengthen the work that we do, even the smallest support from you is so great in our eyes! May God bless you and keep you always and particularly in this Christmas season!

In Notre Dame,
Mary K. Daly, ‘10
President, 2008-2009

We seek to promote and uphold the sanctity of all human life from conception until natural death through prayer, service, and education, and to help women in crisis pregnancies find alternatives to abortion through service and support, in the spirit of the Catholic Church.
There might be multiple good reasons for attending the March for Life. It can be a good cultural experience, as D.C. has many sights and sounds to offer visitors. It might be a good opportunity to enrich friendships—or to establish new ones. At face value, the March is a very visible way to make a statement to our country’s government about the evil of abortion. There are many natural, human reasons for attending the March. Here, however, I will discuss the supernatural reasons for attending the March. In brief, if you are a Catholic or Christian of any persuasion, and if you or anyone you know is planning on attending the March, I think viewing the March for Life as a pilgrimage is not only a useful thought experiment, but an obligation.

With this in mind, I will distinguish three distinguishing features of a pilgrimage: (1) prayer for a particular intention, together with (2) travel to a particular place, (3) at a particular time.

Prayer for a particular intention: True, St. Paul urges us to, “pray at all times,” (Eph 6:18) but from a strictly human perspective certain things require more of our attention. Big life events, such as the terminal illness of a loved one, the conversion of a loved one, or the pursuit of a supernatural vocation all merit special attention. To illustrate this, we can look at the example of St. Therese of Lisieux, the Little Flower, late 19th century contemplative Carmelite nun, Doctor of the Church, and by many considered to be the most popular Catholic Saint of our time. She wanted to enter the convent at age 14, two years before the Carmelite superiors could allow her entry. Known for her devout and diligent prayer life, Therese knew the situation she faced—that of her supernatural vocation—required special attention, special action, and special prayer. For this reason, above and beyond her usual practice of prayer, Therese and her father undertook a pilgrimage to Rome, to pray at the tombs of the martyrs and to ask the Holy Father for his permission.

Today, we find ourselves in a time of special need, with a very particular intention that is important and out of the ordinary: almost 4,000 children are being killed every day due to the evil of abortion. If the life of one terminally ill loved one merits special prayer, the thousands of lives of children is worth our loving attention as well. If we cannot admit of this, it would seem that we have become desensitized to this truth; which too would require special supernatural attention.

Travel to a particular place: We do not just pray in a particular way, but we also pray en route to and in a particular place. One might wonder why location is particularly important—if God is everywhere, why ought we invest time and energy to travel to a particular place? Here we must be reminded of the centrality of the Incarnation. In Mary’s fiat, God, who is outside of space and time, entered space and time by taking on human nature, flesh and blood. In this, space and time can no longer ignore the God who condescended to dwell in them. For this reason the Church designates certain places—chapels, shrines, and the like—as places especially marked out for prayer. In fact, in blessing these places, the Church prays that God might pour his graces in a special way in those particular places. Further, the seven Sacraments themselves are very particular places where and ways in which God chooses to lavish his graces. All of this in mind, we can see that Therese and her father implicitly understood that Christ chooses to grant special graces through the tombs of the Roman martyrs, just as He chooses to dwell in bodily form in the tabernacle to distribute graces through the Sacraments.
This forces us to think about why we are traveling to Washington D.C. Not only the nation’s capital, D.C. is home to the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, our place of pilgrimage. Considered thoughtfully, its significance is truly stunning: the Virgin Mary, under the title “The Immaculate Conception,” is the patroness of the United States. It is here that Our Lady is venerated in a special way as patroness of our nation. This will be the place where thousands of pilgrims will gather to celebrate the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass the night before the March: at the feet of the Mother of God, protector of the American Nation, for the protection of the unborn.

Significance of time: Catholicism claims that has God chosen to act through particular places, and also through particular times. We see this in the Church’s feast days and solemnities, special days picked out to celebrate particular mysteries of the life of Christ. In her Story of a Soul, St. Therese tells of her attempts to bargain with Christ, demanding that he give particular and special graces on the occasion of a feast day. Should we not do the same?

Three particular days that surround the March for Life. January 20th, the first day Notre Dame students will be traveling, is the feast day of recently beatified Basil Moreau, founder of the Congregation of Holy Cross, the religious congregation that founded the University of Notre Dame. With the “St. Therese” mentality, this is a tremendous day to ask for particular graces, such as the end of abortion and for the conversion of hearts. January 21st is the feast of St. Agnes, an early Church martyr venerated for her refusal to consent to the sexual advances of a young man on the one hand, and because of her Christian faith on the other hand. This day is particularly appropriate to pray for all the young women in danger of facing unplanned pregnancies, for their growth in chastity, and for their increase in the faith. [Coincidence or not, Notre Dame students will be kindly hosted by the generous parishioners of St. Agnes Parish in Arlington, VA.] Finally, January 22nd is, as most probably know, the anniversary of Roe v. Wade.

There is a last, tremendously relevant point to be discussed here: the value of suffering. Naturally, attending the March will require sacrifices. It means sacrificed time to make up for missed study time. It means traveling twelve hours on a bus and sleeping on the floor—and not sleeping much, mind you. Yet, if done out of love, these inconveniences take on a supernatural meaning that cannot be underestimated. As St Therese states, “Sanctity lies not in saying beautiful things, or even in thinking them or feeling them; it lies in truly being willing to suffer.”

If the idea of a pilgrimage still seems too distant, we only have to go to our back yard here at Notre Dame to look at the Grotto. Allow me to point out the obvious: those candles were not lit on their own. Students, people from all over the world, have come with a particular intention, to this particular place, at a particular time. These people, and perhaps you, yourself, have made such a pilgrimage. The times demand that we do the same again. ♣
On Wednesday, November 19th, Right to Life’s Pro-Life Presentation Commission held an event titled “The Ethics of the Pro-Life Positions: A Bi-Partisan Discussion” in the first floor lounge of the Coleman-Morse Center. All students, faculty, and staff were invited to the student-led discussion on the issues of abortion, stem cell research, cloning, euthanasia, and assisted suicide. The Pro-Life Presentation Commission first presented the facts behind each of these issues and then explained the philosophical, theological, and practical reasons for the pro-life position on each issue. Following each presentation, the nearly fifty people in attendance discussed each issue.

The abortion portion of the presentation explained how human life begins and develops in the womb. Then first trimester abortions, including the chemical methods of RU-486 and the “Morning-after” pill, the mechanical method of intrauterine device, and the surgical methods of dilation and curettage (D&C) and suction aspiration were described. Next, second trimester abortions, including saline injection, urea injection, intracardiac injection, and dilation and evacuation (D&E), were explained. Finally, the second and third trimester abortion methods of dilation and extraction (D&X or “partial birth abortion”) and live-birth abortions were described. The Commission told the crowd of some United States statistics concerning abortion, including the following: there were 1.21 million abortions in 2005, 22% of all pregnancies (excluding miscarriages) end in abortion, and 47% of women will have had at least one abortion by the time they are 44 years old.

Next the Commission explained the Catholic stance that life begins at fertilization, that every human life has inherent dignity, and that all human is sacred for it is created in the image and likeness of God. The option of adoption was also discussed. During the discussion section of the event, everyone in attendance agreed that abortion rates should be decreased and discussed the most effective way of bringing about this change. Many people talked about the importance of education concerning abortion and concerning the options mothers have when they become pregnant.

During the stem cell portion of the event, the Commission explained what stem cells are (unspecialized, renewable cells that become cells with special functions), what distinguishes them from other cells, and their locations (in the different tissues of the human body, the placenta tissue and umbilical cord after birth, and the human embryo). Next the Commission explained how harvesting the stem cells from the human embryo kills the embryo and thus destroys an innocent human life. Next, adult stem cell research and the exciting achievements and advancements in this area were discussed. During the discussion, those in attendance discussed what should happen to existing embryos already created for stem cell research.
Theology of the Body  

“...You have ravished my heart, my sister, my bride” declares the lover in the ancient Hebrew text called the Song of Songs.

The Song of Songs is the favorite biblical book of the mystics. The saints have written more commentaries on the Song of Songs than on any other book of the Bible. Pope Benedict XVI cites it in his first-ever encyclical Deus Caritas Est. Why this book? Why, out of the entire venerable, ponderous Bible, do saints prefer a poem so sensual, so erotic?

The importance of the Song lies in its twofold meaning. It is a sublime portrayal and praise of the mutual love of the Lord and his people. Even more than that, it is an inspired depiction of ideal human love, a description of the sacredness and depth of the marital union. Through the Song of Songs, God’s people can understand both His love for them and also the way in which they should love one another.

God is madly in love with His people, the Song reminds us. This is also part of the message of Pope John Paul II’s teaching on the Theology of the Body. Christopher West, one of the world’s foremost scholars of the Theology of the Body, describes the Song of Songs: “The erotic poetry of the Song provides a language … for expressing the burning passion of God’s love and the experience of union to which all are called with God. God’s eternal plan, as the mystics often put it, is to “marry” us – to live with us in an eternal union of love that the Bible compares to a marriage.”

Every Christian has heard, “God loves you” since babyhood. But how many know that this love is truly passionate - intimate, personal, romantic? His love is like that of the fervent lover in the Song of Songs. Scholar John Eldredge refers to God’s passion for His people as “the Sacred Romance.” That is what the Song tells us - God is madly in love with us, and will stop at nothing to win our hearts.

The second meaning holds implications for our human relationships. The Song’s lover refers to his beloved as “my sister, my bride” - always in that order. It is no coincidence that he calls her his sister first and foremost. Fulton Sheen, leading American theologian of the twentieth century, wrote in Three to Get Married that a husband and wife are like a “sister-soul” and “brother-soul.” A truly loving relationship, he writes, is based on a “spiritual oneness” and a journey toward the “common destiny” of Heaven. The language of the Song reminds its readers that lovers must be companions first and foremost. It is not until the lover recognizes that his beloved is his friend for the journey and his comrade in the struggle that their relationship can become spousal.

This idea of a spousal relationship as a way to holiness is the foundation of the Theology of the Body. Theology of the Body is considered revolutionary - as West puts it, “Sadly, many Christians have difficulty putting “sex” and “holiness” in the same sentence.” The Song of Songs reminds us that sexuality and holiness are closely united. Through sexuality, West notes, “the body ‘speaks’ a language of divine love, of holiness. Not only does it speak – the body sings. And it not only sings, but it sings the greatest of all songs – The Song of Songs.”

This, then, is the true importance of the Song of Songs. It is God’s love song to His people. And it is a description of the highest, the purest, and the most beautiful love a human couple can aspire to. ♠️

For more information on these topics, see www.usccb.org and www.christopherwest.com
Pictures! ‘08 was great! Let’s pray for an equally successful semester this spring!
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♣ ♣ ♣
May you and your family have a 
blessed Christmas this season!