



## ARCHDIOCESE OF INDIANAPOLIS

*The Church in Central and Southern Indiana*

## Leadership Briefing

By Archbishop Charles C. Thompson

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### Human life should be respected, protected in all circumstances

*“Everyone is responsible for his life before God who has given it to him. It is God who remains the sovereign Master of life. We are obliged to accept life gratefully and preserve it for [God’s] honor and the salvation of our souls. We are stewards, not owners, of the life God has entrusted to us. It is not ours to dispose of” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, #2280).*

Our Church is committed to defending and supporting the dignity of human life from conception to natural death. Our defense of the unborn is clear and our 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 (see the 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). It is important to note, however, that there may have been mitigating circumstances and that someone who takes their own life — due to severe depression or mental illness — may not have been capable of making that decision with full freedom and moral culpability.

We have reason for concern 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 absolute 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*

+ Charles C. Thompson | Archbishop of Indianapolis

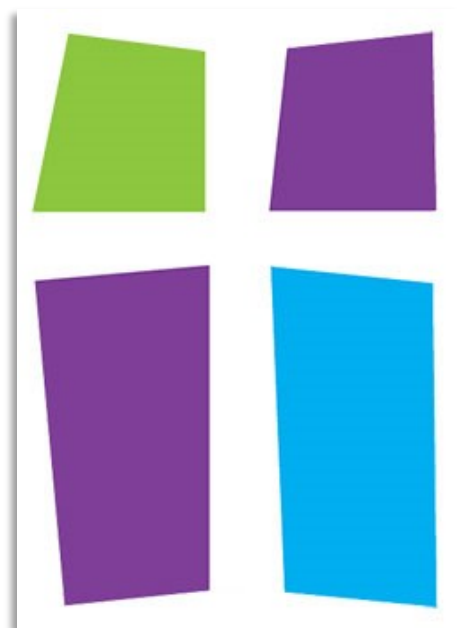
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## Drug abuse threatens human life, dignity and families

**An excerpt from *We are One in Christ: A Pastoral Letter on Fundamentals of Christian Anthropology* by the Reverend Charles C. Thompson, Archbishop of Indianapolis**

*“The use of drugs inflicts very grave danger on human health and life. Their use, except on strictly therapeutic grounds, is a grave offense. Clandestine production of and trafficking in drugs are scandalous practices. They constitute direct cooperation in evil, since they encourage people to practices gravely contrary to the moral law (Catechism of the Catholic Church, #2291).”*

In our country, drug abuse is a serious problem. Wars stimulate drug use as many wounded soldiers return home wracked with pain, but even in peacetime people turn to many different kinds of drugs, including opioids (prescription painkillers such as oxycodone, hydrocodone or fentanyl, and illegal substances such as heroin) to help them deal with painful illnesses, loneliness and the anxiety of daily life.



The abuse of any drug—legal or illegal—is deadly serious. Six out of 10 drug-overdose deaths involve opioids, and drug overdose is the leading cause of accidental death. In 2015, more than 33,000 Americans died from prescription drug overdoses or heroin, and an estimated 2 million Americans are addicted to prescription pain relievers while another half million are addicted to heroin.

In addition to the grave harm done to addicts, drug abuse also affects many other family members, co-workers, friends and society as a whole. It is estimated that every addict affects at least four other people, especially spouses and children. Families suffer enormous emotional, physical and financial trauma when one or more of their members is addicted to prescription painkillers and/or illegal drugs. More than 40 percent of children placed in foster care come from families burdened with drug addiction.

This life issue threatens human life and dignity. Think of how many unborn children are exposed to opioids through their mother's bloodstream. These children tend to be smaller and to weigh less than other newborns. They often exhibit symptoms of withdrawal after birth, and they are at a higher risk for behavioral problems as they grow older. It's a vicious cycle—*anxiety leads to drug use which, in turn, creates further anxiety and even more drug abuse.*

What's the solution? If it were simple or painless, we would have eliminated the drug problem long ago. In fact, this is a very complex and difficult problem that is broadly and deeply embedded in our society. No single solution—whether legal, moral, spiritual or sociological—presents itself as “the answer” to our current opioid crisis, or to the longstanding problem of drug addiction here in Indiana or throughout the world.

Still, we cannot afford to stand idly by while millions of our sisters and brothers suffer. We must act in ways that are consistent with our baptismal responsibility to bring the healing power of Jesus Christ to all who suffer whether they are close to home or, as Pope Francis says, on the margins of society, “the peripheries.”

As we look for ways to respond to this crisis, it's helpful to refer to the Indiana bishops' 2015 pastoral letter, “Poverty at the Crossroads: The Church's Response to Poverty in Indiana.” Poverty results from many different causes and takes many different forms, but drug addiction is certainly one of the main causes—and effects—of poverty. Here is a slight adaptation of what we write in the introduction to “Poverty at the Crossroads”:

We bishops have a particular obligation to care for the most vulnerable members of God's family. That is why we pay special attention to the unborn, to the sick and the elderly, to prisoners, to those who suffer from various forms of addiction or mental illness, and to the education of people from many different backgrounds and circumstances. That is also why we care, in a very special way, for those brothers and sisters of ours who are poor and who suffer from all forms of drug addiction.

Using the simple formula of SEE, JUDGE, ACT, we invite and challenge everyone, beginning with ourselves, to be more attentive to the poor, including those suffering from all forms of addiction, in our communities, to identify the systemic issues that keep individuals and families poor, and to take concrete steps to reduce the long-term impact of poverty and drug addiction in our state, even as we reach out and help those who, here and now, suffer from its devastating effects.

Let's open our eyes and recognize (SEE) drug addiction for what it is. Let's make serious decisions (JUDGE) about steps we can take as individuals, families and communities to address all of the contributing factors to the current opioid epidemic.

And, finally, with the help of God's grace, let's do whatever we can (ACT) to help those who suffer now and in the future.

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## **A Message from Pope Francis: Words of Challenge and Hope**

*Selections from:*

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON "DRUGS AND ADDICTIONS: AN OBSTACLE TO INTEGRAL HUMAN DEVELOPMENT"**

**Saturday, 1 December 2018**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am pleased to receive you at the conclusion of this International Congress on Drugs and Addictions.

In these days, you have discussed issues and problems linked to the troubling phenomenon of narcotics and other forms of addiction, old and new, which pose an obstacle to integral

human development. Communities everywhere are challenged by current social and cultural changes and by pathologies derived from a secularized climate marked by consumerist capitalism, self-sufficiency, a loss of values, an existential void, and a weakening of bonds and relationships.



Drug addiction, as has often been pointed out, is an open wound in our society; its victims, once ensnared, exchange their freedom for enslavement to a dependency that we can define as chemical.

Drug use is gravely harmful to health, human life and society, as you well know. All of us are called to combat the production, processing and distribution of drugs worldwide. It is the duty and responsibility of governments courageously to undertake this fight against those who deal in death. Dealers of death: we must not be afraid to use this title. An area of increasing risk is virtual space; on some Internet sites, young people, and not only the young, are lured into a bondage hard to escape, leading to a loss of life's meaning and, at times, even of life itself. Faced with this disturbing scenario, the Church senses the urgent need to create in today's world a form of humanism capable of restoring the human person to the centre of social, economic and cultural life: a humanism grounded in the "Gospel of Mercy". There the disciples of Jesus find the inspiration for a pastoral action that can prove truly effective in alleviating, caring for and healing the immense suffering associated with different kinds of addiction present in our world.

The Church, together with local, national and international institutions, and various educational agencies, is concretely engaged in every part of the world in combating the spread of addictions, devoting her resources to prevention, care, rehabilitation and reinsertion, in order to restore dignity to those who have lost it. Fighting addictions calls for a combined effort on the part of various local groups and agencies in enacting social programs promoting health care, family support and especially education. In this regard, I readily support the desire expressed by this Conference for a better coordination of policies aimed at halting the growth of drug abuse and addictions — isolated policies are of no use: it is a human problem, it is a social problem, everything must be interconnected — through the creation of networks of solidarity and closeness to those suffering from these pathologies.

Dear brothers and sisters, I express my deep gratitude for your contribution to these days of study and reflection. I encourage all of you, in your various sectors, to pursue your commitment to increasing awareness and offering support to those who have emerged from the tunnel of drug addiction and various addictions. They need our help and accompaniment, so that they in turn will be able to ease the pain of so many of our brothers and sisters in difficulty.

I entrust your efforts and your worthy initiatives to the intercession of Our Lady, Health of the Infirm. I ask you, please, to remember me in your prayers. To all of you, and to your families and communities, I cordially impart my blessing. Thank you.

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### **My Prayer for You**

Lord of Life, we come to you with hearts filled with sorrow because of the many ways that our society abuses the precious gift of human life. Help us to be better stewards of this gift—as individuals, families and communities. Guide us in our efforts to safeguard human life and dignity, and inspire us to defend life wherever and however it is threatened. Amen.

*+ Charles C. Thompson*