

*An initiative by the Council for Life
of the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference*



Join the *Pray for Life* Novena

Thursday 23 May
to Friday 31 May
(Feast of the Visitation)

The Pray for Life Novena is an invitation to join thousands of people across Ireland to pray for the protection of human life.



IRISH CATHOLIC
BISHOPS' CONFERENCE
COMHDHÁIL EASPAG CAITLICEACH ÉIREANN

Each day's intention is accompanied by a short reflection and suggested actions to help build a culture of life in Ireland.

See more at www.prayforlife.ie

Day One:

Novena Day 1 - Expectant Mothers - Thursday 23rd May



Intercession

May every expectant mother receive compassionate care and support as she nurtures the life in her womb.

Prayers

Our Father, 3 Hail Marys, Glory Be

Reflection

When the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary, she opened her heart to receive his message that she would conceive the Son of God in her womb. As a young bride who had not yet lived with her husband, Mary knew that her pregnancy presented many challenges. Despite this knowledge, she faithfully responded, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38).

Like the Blessed Mother and like her cousin Elizabeth, women who unexpectedly become pregnant often face significant challenges. They, too, are called to place their trust in God and faithfully respond to His gift of new life. And we are called to walk with them in their time of need. As Jesus taught us, when we love and serve others, we are loving and serving Him.

May all expectant mothers be encouraged by the example of Mary and Elizabeth and receive support and grace in lovingly welcoming their children into the world.

Acts of Reparation (Choose one)

- Pray this short Prayer for Expectant Mothers.
<https://prayforlife.ie/prayer-for-expectant-mothers/>
- Consider giving some time to one of the organisations who serve expectant mothers in need in your community.
- Offer some other sacrifice, prayer, or act of penance that you feel called to do for today's intention.

One Step Further

When a woman is facing an unexpected pregnancy, the reaction of the first person she tells tends to set the tone for her decision-making. Pregnancy can be challenging, but no matter the circumstances, it's important for an expectant mother to feel supported and loved. Read *10 Ways to Support Her When She's Unexpectedly Expecting* for simple tips on how to provide loving, life-affirming support for a friend who is unexpectedly pregnant. Your support may be the only support she receives. Visit www.prayforlife.ie to read the document.

Day Two:

Novena Day 2 - Expectant Fathers - Friday May 24th



Intercession

May expectant fathers lovingly support the mothers of their children in welcoming new life.

Prayers

Our Father, 3 Hail Marys, Glory Be

Reflection

Fatherhood has its origins in God, who chose to reveal Himself to us as Our Father, sending his only Son for the sake of our salvation. Fathers therefore have a special role “in revealing and in reliving on earth the very fatherhood of God” (Familiaris consortio 25). Fathers are called to exhibit “generous responsibility for the life conceived under the heart of the mother” (FC 25). They are uniquely entrusted with the protection and defence of both mother and child and, in this way, in safeguarding the sanctity of human life.

As evidenced in our world today, the role of the father “is of unique and irreplaceable importance” (FC 25). Often women choose abortion because they do not have the support of the child’s father, or — even worse — the father of the child pressures her to make the decision to abort. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge with compassion that men can also be overwhelmed by an unexpected pregnancy and that society increasingly tells them that they should have no say in their children’s lives. In the face of these false messages, we pray that expectant fathers will find courage in the example of Saint Joseph — who embraced the role of father amid difficult circumstances — and offer loving, life-affirming support to the mothers of their children.

Acts of Reparation (Choose one)

- Pray a decade of the Rosary for all expectant fathers, that through her intercession, Our Lady may inspire in them the virtues of Saint Joseph.
- Consider making a pilgrimage to Lough Derg this summer. www.loughderg.org
- Abstain from meat today.

One Step Further

To mark the opening of the Year of St Joseph in 2020, Pope Francis wrote a beautiful apostolic letter *Patris Corde* (With a Father’s Heart). In it the Holy Father tells us that “fathers are not born, but made. A man does not become a father simply by bringing a child into the world, but by taking up the responsibility to care for that child.” Read this article on www.prayforlife.ie: *St Joseph: Dads Make a Difference* by Joe McKeown from the March 2022 Issue of *Intercom Magazine*, on how to be a ‘creatively courageous father’ – and consider sharing it.

Day Three:

Novena Day 3 - The End of Abortion - Saturday May 25th



Intercession

May the practice of abortion in our country end.

Prayers

Our Father, 3 Hail Marys, Glory Be

Reflection

At every stage and in every circumstance, we are held in existence by God's love. The presence of an illness, disability, or other challenging situation never diminishes the value of a human life. God does not call us to perfection of appearance or abilities, but to perfection in love. Christ invites us to embrace our own lives and the lives of others as true gifts.

Abortion tragically rejects the truth that every life is a good and perfect gift, deserving protection. This violent practice ends the life of a human being at its very beginning and horribly wounds all those involved. But Christ came that we "might have life and have it more abundantly" (John 10:10), taking on human flesh for the sake of our redemption. May our culture experience the power of God's transforming love, that all eyes may be opened to the incredible beauty of every human life.

Acts of Reparation (Choose one)

- Take a break from television and the radio today. Consider spending some of that time praying with today's reflection.
- Offer some other sacrifice, prayer, or act of penance that you feel called to do for today's intention.

One Step Further

Commit to praying once a week for an end to abortion in Ireland.

Read the information published by the Catholic Bishops of Ireland ahead of the 5th anniversary of the Abortion Referendum in the Republic of Ireland:

Abortion: Changing the Narrative - a Statement of the Catholic Bishops: Information and resources

See www.prayforlife.ie for more information.

Day Four:

Day 4: Unborn Children - Sunday May 26th (Trinity Sunday)



Intercession

May all unborn children be protected in law and welcomed in love.

Prayers

Our Father, 3 Hail Marys, Glory Be

Reflection

On this blessed Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity, we contemplate the mystery of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – a unity of love and communion. We recognise that the family is called to be a reflection of that community of love within the Trinity.

In *Evangelium Vitae* (The Gospel of Life), Pope John Paul II says that “within the people of life and the people for life, the family has a decisive responsibility. This responsibility flows from its very nature as a community of life and love. The family is truly ‘the sanctuary of life: the place in which life – the gift of God – can be properly welcomed and protected. Consequently the role of the family in building a culture of life is decisive and irreplaceable.” (EV 92) He asked that “a great prayer for life rise up throughout the world, from every Christian community, from every group and association, from every family and from the heart of every believer, an impassioned plea to God, the Creator and lover of life.”

As we mourn the many babies whose lives have been ended by abortion and remember those who suffer the aftermath, may that prayer arise in our hearts and in our families today and every day, until every human person is again protected in law and welcomed in love.

May the unity and love of the Holy Trinity inspire us to create families and communities where all life is welcomed, cherished, and protected.

Acts of Reparation (Choose one)

- Take time alone or with your family to read one or two paragraphs from Pope St John Paul’s Gospel of Life e.g. paragraph 92 and 93. <https://prayforlife.ie/evangelium-vitae/>
- Offer this brief Prayer for Life for all unborn children whose lives are at risk or some other sacrifice, prayer, or act of penance that you feel called to do for today’s intention. <https://prayforlife.ie/prayer-for-life/>

One Step Further

Familiarise yourself with the legal status of the right to life of the unborn child in your jurisdiction. Both in the Rep. of Ireland & Northern Ireland, decisions in recent years have removed significant protections which safeguarded the right to life of the unborn child.

Consider writing to your political representatives today to express a desire for change in this area, asking that they work to bring about laws that protect and respect the unborn child so that they can be welcomed in love into our world.

Evangelium Vitae (“The Gospel of Life”) is a papal encyclical promulgated on 25 March 1995 by Pope John Paul II. It deals with issues pertaining to the sanctity of human life.

Day Five:

Novena Day 5 - Healing After Abortion - Monday May 27th



Intercession

May each person suffering from the loss of a child through abortion find hope and healing in Christ.

Prayers

Our Father, 3 Hail Marys, Glory Be

Reflection

Countless children's lives have been ended by abortion, and countless parents and family members suffer guilt, grief, and regret—often in silence. Yet God's greatest desire is to forgive. No matter how far we have each strayed from His side, He says to us, "Don't be afraid. Draw close to my heart." Be assured that it is never too late to seek God's forgiveness in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Consider the parable of the Prodigal Son. After repenting of sinning against his father, he returns from far away to seek forgiveness and work as a servant. But his father sees him approaching, runs to warmly embrace him, and hosts a banquet to celebrate his return. So, too, does God welcome all His children who come to Him in the Sacrament of Reconciliation with contrite hearts, no matter how serious the sin. Let us turn confidently to Our Lord, Who is love and mercy.

Acts of Reparation (Choose one)

- Pray the Chaplet of Divine Mercy for today's intention
- Offer some other sacrifice, prayer, or act of penance that you feel called to do for today's intention.

One Step Further

Read the personal stories of healing from Rachel's vineyard's website <http://www.rachels-vineyard.ie/> to gain an understanding of the pain and also the healing that is possible after an abortion.

If a friend confided in you that she had an abortion, remember to listen and respond in a way that brings her closer to healing and forgiveness and perhaps gently suggest to her to reach out to Rachel's Vineyard for help.

Day Six:

Novena Day 6 - Mothers Choosing Adoption Tuesday May 28th



Intercession

May expectant mothers choosing foster care or adoption and those in the process of either receive grace and support in embracing this loving option for life.

Prayers

Our Father, 3 Hail Marys, Glory Be

Reflection

Mothers placing their children into foster care or adoption often face challenges such as having to let their child go. But mothers who make an adoption plan or consider foster care for their children are not letting their children go without difficulty, rather, they are exemplifying the sacrificial love of Christ on the Cross in choosing to do what is best for their children, even at a great cost to themselves. Like Christ, they pour out their bodies and souls for the sake of another. We also consider those parents who through their generosity of spirit are ready to embrace a new life through adoption or foster care.

Today let us reflect on Saint Joseph's role as the foster-father of Jesus. The evangelists Matthew and Luke present him as the foster father of Jesus, and not as his biological father. Joseph shows us that this type of bond is not an afterthought. This kind of choice is among the highest forms of love, and of fatherhood and motherhood. How many children in the world are waiting for someone to take care of them! And how many married couples want to be fathers and mothers but are unable to do so for biological reasons; or, although they already have children, they want to share their family's affection with those who do not have it. We should not be afraid to choose the path of adoption or foster care.

The Letter to the Hebrews reminds us that, in the face of fears and trials, we can "hold fast to the hope that lies before us. This we have as an anchor of the soul, sure and firm" (Heb 6:18-19). We pray that each expectant mother choosing foster care or adoption will be filled with "the peace of God that surpasses all understanding" (Phil 4:7) as she makes a loving choice for her child. Let us all cling fast to the anchor of hope, for we have received "a spirit of adoption, through which we cry, 'Abba, Father!'" (Rom 8:15).

Acts of Reparation (Choose one)

- Do you have a sweet tooth? Or do you prefer salty snacks? Pick your favourite kind of treat, and give it up for the day.
- Look up one of the Scripture passages from today's reflection, and spend some time with it in prayer. What is the Lord saying to you?
- Offer some other sacrifice, prayer, or act of penance that you feel called to do for today's intention.

One Step Further

Consider offering a prayer intention to console the hearts and minds of the mothers who have had to make this difficult decision.

Pray that they will have the strength and courage to pursue a life affirming option for their child.

Pray that children in your community would know they are loved by God and understand that He desires to be in relationship with them.

Pray that children in foster care or adoption would experience a feeling of belonging in a foster family, a church community, or a group of friends within your community.

Pray that God would lead them and their birth mothers to full healing as they work through any hurts of the past way that brings her closer to healing and forgiveness and perhaps gently suggest to her to reach out to Rachel's Vineyard for help.

Day Seven:

Novena Day 7 - Civic Leaders - Wednesday May 29th



Intercession

May civic leaders work for the protection of all human life, in every stage and circumstance.

Prayers

Our Father, 3 Hail Marys, Glory Be

Reflection

Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirms that “everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person”. Every one of us has a right to our life. It is not given to us by any law or government. We have it ‘as of right’, whether we are wealthy or poor, healthy or sick. That our society has decided that one category of human being should have that right taken from them was a shocking step. It effectively says that unborn children do not exist or, if they do, they do not count. This is a manifest injustice: any law that removes the right to life is an unjust law and must be resisted by every person, every voter, every political representative.

Those who work as public officials and civic leaders have a duty to serve the common good, and therefore have a profound obligation to safeguard this most fundamental right to life. For Catholic politicians this is not only a matter of protecting the human right to life but also a fundamental matter of our faith. Voters have a duty to inform themselves on the position of election candidates in respect of their willingness to support and cherish equally the lives of mothers and their unborn children. Through our own prayer, witness, and civic participation, we can encourage our leaders to truly answer their call to protect the rights of all people. For “there can be no true democracy without a recognition of every person’s dignity and without respect for his or her rights” (Evangelium Vitae 101).

Acts of Reparation (Choose one)

- Sacrifice some of your free time to do a small act of service, such as making breakfast for a family member, helping out a coworker, or praying for the intentions of a friend.
- Offer this Prayer for Religious Freedom, that Christians may always be free to respect, protect, and defend human life and would have the courage to do so
<https://prayforlife.ie/prayer-for-religious-freedom/>
- Offer some other sacrifice, prayer, or penance that you feel called to do for today’s intention.

One Step Further

In December 2018, following the removal from the Constitution of Ireland of the right to life for unborn children, the Irish Catholic Bishops affirmed “women’s lives, and the lives of their unborn children, are precious, valued and always deserving of protection. Any law which suggests otherwise would have no moral force. In good conscience it cannot be supported and would have to be resisted. Read more at “Abortion cannot be supported” (See catholicbishops.ie)

Another crucial challenge in our times is the need for the state to uphold the value of human life in the case of those who live with degenerative or terminal illness. We read in the The Catechism of the Catholic Church: “euthanasia is an act of homicide that no end can justify and that does not tolerate any form of complicity or active or passive collaboration. Those who approve laws of euthanasia and assisted suicide, therefore, become accomplices of a grave sin that others will execute. They are also guilty of scandal because by such laws they contribute to the distortion of conscience, even among the faithful”. Read more in “Samaritanus Bonus” a letter by Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on the care of persons in the critical and terminal phases of life.

Day Eight:

For all who support or participate in abortion - Thursday May 30th



Intercession

May all who support or participate in abortion experience a conversion of heart to seek and receive the Lord's boundless mercy.

Prayers

Our Father, 3 Hail Marys, Glory Be

Reflection

When God fashioned the human person in His own image and likeness, He destined us for eternal life with Him. Yet because of the sin of our first parents, death entered the world. The book of Genesis recounts the first occasion in which a person takes the life of another, as Cain violently kills his brother Abel. This instance of brother rising up against brother "at the very dawn of history is thus a sad witness of how evil spreads with amazing speed" (Evangelium Vitae 8).

From the time of creation, disregard for human life has continued to spread. When we, like Cain, allow sin to find a place in our hearts, we become blinded to the truth. Sometimes this blindness might be so deep that we fail to recognise the undeniable humanity of unborn children. We may even tragically believe the lie that abortion is an act of compassion. But we know that "life, especially human life, belongs only to God: for this reason whoever attacks human life, in some way attacks God himself" (EV 9). Let us pray that all who support abortion will encounter the transforming love of the Father and, with repentant hearts, seek His mercy.

Acts of Reparation (Choose one)

- Smile. Ask God today for the grace to be extra joyful and to share the light of Christ with those most in need of His love and mercy.
- Make an act of faith, hope, or love
- Offer some other sacrifice, prayer, or act of penance that you feel called to do for today's intention.

One Step Further

In *Our Common Humanity*, written shortly before the 2018 abortion referendum in the Republic of Ireland, the Irish Catholic Bishops outline the great value our Church puts on all human life, and especially on children before they are born and on their mothers. Download the document to study on your own, or with a parish or other group or to share with family or friends. We must continue to pray earnestly that Ireland will once again 'choose life' and that the lives of all women and their unborn children will again be loved, valued, welcomed and respected in this country.

<https://prayforlife.ie/our-common-humanity/>

Day Nine:

Novena Day 9 - For All Who Defend Life - Friday May 31st,
The Feast of the Visitation



Intercession

May all who defend life find strength and renewal in the Holy Spirit.

Prayers

Our Father, 3 Hail Marys, Glory Be

Reflection

On this feast day, the Feast of the Visitation, we remember the joyous occasion of Elizabeth and Mary meeting each other, both of them pregnant. This Feast is all about mutual support, encouragement and accompaniment. At their meeting, John the Baptist leaped in the womb of Elizabeth, and she blessed Mary and the Christ Child. Mary, in turn, responds with the famous Magnificat praising the Lord.

God has carefully, tenderly created every person in His own image and likeness, to be in a loving relationship with Himself. From each tiny child knit within a mother's womb, to every person approaching death, all are loved perfectly and completely by God: "It is therefore a service of love which we are all committed to ensure to our neighbour, that his or her life may be always defended and promoted, especially when it is weak or threatened" (Evangelium vitae 77).

In a world in which those who are most vulnerable are so often overlooked and disregarded, Christ calls us to embrace and uphold the unconditional dignity of every human life. In answering this call, we help to build "a new culture of life, the fruit of the culture of truth and of love" (EV 77). May the Holy Spirit continually renew us as we strive to faithfully defend God's gift of life.

Acts of Reparation (Choose one)

- Pray the Magnificat using the words of Mary's prayer in response to the greeting of Elizabeth. (<https://prayforlife.ie/the-magnificat/>)
- Light a candle in front of a statue of Our Lady at home or your local church.
- Offer some other sacrifice, prayer, or act of penance that you feel called to do for today's intention.

One Step Further

Do you know someone that is pregnant or who has recently given birth? Perhaps make some food for them or offer to call around to do some housework for them. Or any gesture which ensures this new mum or pregnant woman rests at this time.