



Secretariat of Pro-Life Activities

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“Moved by Mercy” Respect Life Month, October 2016

My dear friends in Christ:

This summer, I traveled to Poland for World Youth Day, where millions of young Catholics gathered. A theme chosen by Pope Francis that I addressed in a talk I gave to young people was, “Now is the time for mercy.” It’s timely, isn’t it? Yet, as in a story I shared about Pope Saint John Paul II, it’s also timeless. For years, Poland had been oppressed, with no freedom of religion. Human rights had been trampled, and the sacredness of human life violated. Then Pope John Paul II visited in 1979 with a message that changed the world.

He spoke about God, about faith, about human dignity, truth, and the sacredness of human life. He spoke about Jesus and the Church. And what do you think happened? Over a *million* people responded, chanting over and over, “We want God! We want God!” Mikhail Gorbachev said it was Pope John Paul II’s nine-day visit that led to the fall of communism.

After my talk concluded, history repeated itself. Youth from all over the world chanted, “We want God! We want God!” The Lord was moving hearts with his mercy.

God offers his gift of mercy to each and every one of us, *no matter what*. But we have to decide to receive that gift—whether or not to turn away from sin and turn, instead, toward him. We have to decide whether we want God.

The theme of the 2016-17 Respect Life Program is “Moved by Mercy” (usccb.org/respectlife). When we let our hearts be moved by God’s mercy, it shapes everything. As Pope Francis said, “We are called to show mercy because mercy has first been shown to us” (*Misericordiae Vultus*).

God made each of us in his own image and likeness. He desires to be united with us forever in a loving relationship. God loves us, treats us with respect, and asks us to do the same with others. Every person is sacred and must be treated with the dignity they deserve. No one should ever be treated callously or carelessly - - everyone should be cherished and protected!

From each tiny child waiting to be born, to individuals nearing death, all are precious and deserve our care and protection. Women and men suffering after abortion, individuals tempted to end their lives, couples longing to conceive a child, people pushed to the margins of society by a “throwaway culture,” expectant mothers facing challenging pregnancies, and every other person—each “has a place in God’s heart from all eternity” (*Amoris Laetitia*, 168).

Let’s ask God to make us channels of his loving mercy: Lord, help us to receive your mercy and turn to you each moment. And please guide us in extending your mercy to others today. Now is the time for mercy.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Timothy Cardinal Dolan

Chairman

USCCB Committee on Pro-Life Activities

October 2016