

## **Rededication of Mary Care Centre**

By Leela Ramdeen, Chair, CCSJ

Delivered Tues 29 June, 2010

Your Grace, sisters and brothers, as we gather here today for the re-dedication of the Mary Care Centre, let us take this opportunity to pray for and promote a renewed respect for human life.

Our faith requires us to build a culture of life. The Vatican II document, *Gaudium et Spes* (*The Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*), tells us that “God, the Lord of life, has entrusted to men and women the noble mission of safeguarding life, and they must carry it out in a manner worthy of themselves. Life must be protected with the utmost care from the moment of conception.”

In his encyclical, *The Gospel of Life*, Pope John Paul II (1995) calls on us to defend and promote life at all stages and in all circumstances from conception until natural death.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2270) makes it clear that: “Human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception. From the first moment of his existence, a human being must be recognised as having the rights of a person among which is the inviolable right of every innocent being to life.”

And in 2273 of our Catechism we read: “The inalienable right to life of every innocent human individual is a constitutive element of a civil society and its legislation.”

As we engage in our pro-life work, let us not forget the many attacks on human life today – as outlined in Para 27 of *Gaudium et Spes*. “whatever is opposed to life itself, such as any type of murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia or willful self-destruction, whatever violates the integrity of the human person, such as mutilation, torments inflicted on body or mind, attempts to coerce the will itself; whatever insults human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children; as well as disgraceful working conditions, where men are treated as mere tools for profit, rather than as free and responsible persons; all these things and others of their like are infamies indeed. They poison human society, but they do more harm to those who practice them than those who suffer from the injury. Moreover, they are a supreme dishonour to the Creator.”

As Catholics we believe in the sanctity of life and the dignity of the human person. And while we oppose abortion, we recognise our duty to offer practical support and assistance to pregnant mothers. Archbishop Pantin saw the need for such support when he established the Mary Care Centre in 1980. Today, 30 years later, this need exists more than ever.

Overall responsibility for the work of Mary Care Centre falls within the remit of CCSJ and we are thrilled that Deborah de Rosia and her team at Eternal Light Community have

undertaken to partner with the Archdiocese by running the Centre and catering for the needs of pregnant girls and women who may need support. Deborah and her team know the true meaning of the words in today's hymn – taken from Mt 25:40: “Whatsoever you do to the least of my brothers and sisters, that you do unto Me.”

Pope Benedict XVI's words are instructive. He has said: “Every child...brings us God's smile and invites us to recognise that life is his gift, a gift to be welcomed with love and preserved with care always and at every moment.”

He also reminds us that “Each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary.”

These words echo those in Jeremiah 1:5: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you."

There are examples of good practice on which we can draw as we seek to develop the work of the Centre. For example, many dioceses/parishes across the USA are involved in the Gabriel Project – a parish outreach to help pregnant women in need. Gabriel Project began in 1990 when two women noticed a sign placed by a priest outside a Catholic church in Houston. It read, “If you will have your baby, this parish will help you in every way.”

The following is just one of the signs used in some US parishes involved in this Project today:

“PREGNANT? NEED HELP? We, the members of this church community, see in the birth of each baby a fresh expression of God's unfailing love. For the love of God and each and every one of His children, we offer immediate and practical help to any woman.”

While parishes can refer pregnant women in need to Mary Care Centre, Emmanuel Community, Living Water Community, Families in Action and so on, it is important that parish-based ministries offering pastoral services and care for pregnant women are available e.g. to meet their physical, material, emotional and spiritual needs.

If, as our Archdiocesan Mission Statement says, we, the people of God, are building a civilisation of love, then we must show unconditional love to those in need – and do so in a non-judgmental manner. Our vocation must be unconditional LOVE. As His Grace said, this is not a 'job', it is a vocation.

The US Bishops' Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities rightly states: “Respect for human life compels us to reach out to those with special needs. With the support of the faith community, Catholic organisations and agencies provide pastoral services and care for pregnant women, especially those who are vulnerable to abortion and who would otherwise find it difficult or impossible to obtain high-quality medical care.”

We have a responsibility to stand in solidarity with and speak out for the most vulnerable among us, unborn children, and to seek to provide the necessary support for their mothers so that they will be able to bear their children and look after them.

As Pope John Paul II said in his encyclical, *The Hundredth Year* (1991): “The social message of the Gospel must not be considered a theory, but above all else a basis and a motivation for action... Today more than ever, the Church is aware that her social message will gain credibility more immediately from the witness of actions than as a result of its internal logic and consistency.”

Let us not cease in our efforts to be true witnesses to life. We have a responsibility to act; to lift our voices to ensure that our anti-abortion laws remain intact and to lobby for:

- Better health care services for all our people
- The appointment of outreach workers who would work at a local level to identify and make proposals to the relevant Authorities/Govt. Depts. to meet the physical, mental, financial, social and other needs of pregnant women who need support
- The availability of workplace crèches and community nurseries
- Better employer practice in relation to maternity and paternity leave
- The reduction of poverty and social exclusion
- More informed educational programmes/counselling facilities in schools, at university, and in local communities about issues such as family life, family and social values, life skills, responsible parenthood, natural family planning methods
- Well publicised information about centres/organisations where pregnant women in need can go for help.

Let us ask Our Lady of Guadalupe, who bore Jesus in her womb, to intercede to her Son to watch over our pregnant mothers and their children who are made in God’s image and likeness and to fill us with respect for life.

May God bless Deborah and members of Eternal Light Community as they embark with us on this important mission. Thank you.