

EMBARGOED UNTIL 13 OCTOBER 2018

Respect Life Sunday pastoral letter, 14 October 2018

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ

E te whānau whakapono a te Karaiti

Praising God for the gift of life is common to all world religions. **Deep down in the heart of every person is the knowledge that life is precious and often fragile.**

The worldwide human family recently experienced this belief as we watched with bated breath the heart-warming rescue mission of the Thai boys trapped in a cave. How fitting it was that all the boys, soon after their rescue, went to a monastery for a month's retreat as an act of respect for the one who had sacrificed his life saving theirs.

Respect Life Sunday reminds us that every day is an opportunity to reflect on the insight that life, far from being random or an act of self-determination, is in fact a gift.

The beautiful gift of parenthood is a collaboration with God in the creation of a new person made in God's image and likeness. It is sometimes said that every child is the fruit of God's love and their parents' love, "given a name".

Sometimes, however, the gift of life is not experienced as this profound communion of love, family and joy. Parenthood can be shattered or tested in a number of ways that cry out for mercy, tenderness, accompaniment and deep understanding. When grief or loss or regret come between a parent and a child - or the hope for a child - we see human nature itself express her pain and anguish.

Today, as shepherds or hēpara, **we stand close to those of you who carry the heavy pain and grief of an abortion.** Sometimes that anguish, when shared, met with a cold

detached judgement. That was wrong. We encourage those of you who need the burden of regret lifted, to share your story, and, in the words of Jesus, “find rest for your soul” (cf. Mt 11:29-30).

Others carry the pain and grief of what we might call ‘**empty arms**’ in different ways: perhaps the result of an inability to conceive; or the miscarriage of a deeply desired but never held baby; perhaps a child still-born and held only in death; or the result of having parented embryos that will never be implanted; perhaps a child given for adoption, a child given away into the arms of others; or a child who died prematurely through illness or accident, a child no longer present to be held; or perhaps a child now estranged or distant whom you entrust to the care of the Saints and the compassion of fellow human beings.

Pope Francis has called for a **revolution of tenderness** in our world. In that spirit, we offer today not explanations or answers but the assurance of listening hearts and humble prayers: for courage, for healing and forgiveness where needed, and for renewed purpose in our lives.

A burden or pain shared is one that is lightened. For some of you, telling your story to another person will bring forth a kind of **sacred space of deep, respectful listening**; an encounter in which you will feel God’s healing love. We might mourn, we might marvel and above all – for all of us – may we come to experience anew that we are the deeply loved family of God. And may we continue to build parishes where doors are open and all are made to feel at home.

+ Patrick Dunn, Bishop of Auckland
+ Steve Lowe, Bishop of Hamilton
+ Charles Drennan, Bishop of Palmerston North
+ John Dew, Cardinal Archbishop of Wellington
+ Paul Martin SM, Bishop of Christchurch
+ Michael Dooley, Bishop of Dunedin