# for Life 2006 Day f

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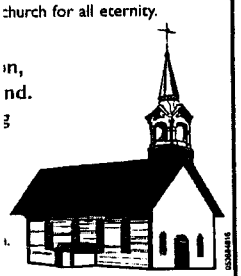

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By Geraldine Durrant

# 'Disposable' society cannot see

**IN his Encyclical Letter *Evangelium Vitae* – the Gospel of Life – the late Pope John Paul II addressed not just Catholics but people of good will everywhere.**

His four aims in writing it were:

I to reaffirm the dignity of every human person, created and loved by God

I to renew the Church's commitment 'to the defence of the world's poor, those who are threatened and despised, and whose human rights are violated'

I to invite people of good will everywhere to reflect on 'the extraordinary increase and gravity of threats to the life of individuals and peoples, especially where life is weak and defenceless

I and to appeal to every person, 'in the name of God' to respect, protect, love and serve life. All life.

As a means of furthering these ends, the Pope proposed that a Day for Life should be celebrated each year, in every country around the world, as a way of acknowledging the sanctity of human life from conception to death.

The primary purpose of the proposed Day, he said, would be "to foster in individual consciences, in families, in the Church and in civil society, a recognition of the meaning and value of human life at every stage and in every condition."

"Human life," declared the Pope, "is a precious gift to be loved and defended in each of its stages. The Commandment 'You shall not kill' always requires respecting and promoting human life from its beginning to its natural end. It is a command that applies even in the presence of illness and when physical weakness reduces the person's ability to be self-reliant."

This year the fifth Day for Life will take place in England and Wales on July 2, and in Ireland on October 2.

Its theme is disability and the day will celebrate the life and presence of disabled people in the Church and within the wider community.

It will also seek to promote a more just and humane society in which all people can hope to reach their full potential and in which the lives of the disabled are not threatened before birth by genetic screening and procured abortion, or by being denied necessary medical treatment when they are old, helpless or ill.

To mark the Day, bishops from Ireland, Scotland, England and Wales have joined forces to produce a series of pod casts.

Listening to a pod cast is a bit like hearing a radio broadcast, except that listeners can tune into the world wide web at any time and from anywhere they have access to a computer.

There will also be the opportunity to hear what four disabled people from Ireland, Scotland, England and Wales have to say about what the Day for Life means to them in a series of four short 'video nation' films, which are online from the middle of June.

Among those who tell their personal story is Glaswegian Frances who has been disabled from birth.

Frances describes how she tried to walk when she was younger, but the experience was so painful that she eventually decided she'd get on faster in a wheelchair.

As she got older, finding employment wasn't easy, but Frances now works for the social services in a disability resource centre in her home town, and is also involved in disability awareness work at her parish church.

"That's been very important to me because my faith is important to me. I want disabled people to feel that they are part of the Church.

"I know that when I was young, I often felt very disengaged from the Church, as a disabled person. That's why I feel that it's very important for the Church to be open to all.There have been some times when I think: 'Where is God in this situation? Is He here at all?' But the Spirit has always been there to calm me down and move me. Every day I ask the Holy Spirit to inspire, protect and guide me."

Frances also works with other disabled Christians in an inter-faith group on disability, helping to ensure that local churches, which are no longer exempt from the Disability Discrimination Act, comply with the law.

But 'discrimination' isn't just about physical access, says Frances.

"It's about our visibility: it's about a 'theology of disability' in the Church: it's about training Churches to look at how disabled people can best contribute."

And certainly the threat to the lives of unborn disabled babies has never been greater.

Newly-released figures show that there are now 50 pe cent more babies with Down syndrome being aborted eac year than born.

In a survey by the Down Syndrome Association som mothers diagnosed with 'in perfect' babies reported fee ing pressured into having eve very late abortions by medic staff who gave them sparse inaccurate information abo their baby's condition, an very little in the way of su port.

And the Office of Nation Statistics report for 2004 gav

**John Paul II: Started the yearly Day for Life which he said should be in every country of the world**

**Rev Joanna Jepson: Fear over cleft palate abortion**

# Follow in footsteps of Christ and be enriched by one another

n Continued from p 17

life and mission of the Church.

The Church's primary motive, however, should not be just to comply with legislation, but to follow in the footsteps of Christ, who called us to love one another just as he loved us. Christ's teachings and actions brought disabled people from the "roads and lanes" (LK 14:16-24) of society into the centre of his ministry. That is why the Church supports interventions to improve the lives of disabled people, calls for their lives to be lived to the full and insists that every person, irrespective of age, ability, sex or race, has a right to life.

On his visit to England in 1982 Pope John Paul II asked us to "keep the sick and disabled at the centre of our lives, to treasure and recognise the debt that we owe them".

"We begin", he commented, "by imagining that we are giving to them; we end by realising that they have enriched us".

And then in 2005 Pope Benedict XVI reinforced this request by inviting the Church to "work increasingly in favour of disabled people in society, in the working world and in the Christian community, remembering that every human life is worthy of respect and must be protected from conception until its natural end"

This is the task of the whole Church: to work constantly to create a culture of inclusion, equality and respect for each and every human life.


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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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