

they not been "wanted." What does this do to their sense of self-worth, especially in other settings when certain people do not "want" them?

I once spoke at a cemetery service at a grave containing the aborted bodies of several hundred babies. At the end of the service, each person present placed a rose on the grave and departed. Most people missed the scene at the very end. A very young girl, just able to walk, took a rose to the grave by herself and placed it there. She was, indeed, closest to her brothers and sisters in that grave. The youngest had compassion on her peers, who might have seen the sun that day as she did.

I have often seen the truth in the words of the Second Vatican Council, "Children too have an apostolate of their own. In their own measure they are true living witnesses of Christ among their companions" (Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People, #12). They will respond actively to the pro-life message, as did the two who wrote me and said, "Hi, I'd like to begin this letter by thanking you for last week's homily. I was deeply moved and so was my younger brother. Although we are both young, I'm 17 and he's 12, we've been taught how precious life is. But we did not fully understand what goes on in abortion till your homily... We both want to get on the mailing lists of pro-life organizations."

Children particularly like to wear the Precious Feet pin, showing the exact size and shape of a baby's feet at 10 weeks after conception. It was a child's idea to put those feet on top of pink and blue ribbons. A major pro-life organization then made the combination into a pin!

I once met a 7-year old named Nick among a group of young people peacefully demonstrating outside an abortion mill. "This must be your first time taking part in

something like this," I said to him. "Oh no, Father," he exclaimed. "I've protested abortion in New York, Chicago, Atlanta, and other places..."

A group of summer campers I once served, ages 8 to 10, sent a joint letter to the local paper to speak up for pre-born children. These and many other projects can be organized in parishes and schools, or as part of Confirmation service projects. Preaching and teaching will lead even the young to action. Silence will only allow the killing to continue.

I will allow a fourth grade girl to finish this article with her letter to us.

"Dear Christians, I was so excited about what my life in this world would be. I thought about all the things I would like to do like playing with toys, riding a bike, going to the zoo, and having a dog. I wanted to see movies, go to school, make friends and go to the park and the circus. I wanted to celebrate Christmas and receive Jesus in Holy Communion. I looked forward to listening to music, dancing, swimming in a pool, playing soccer, and having dolls. I am very sad that I never got to do any of these things. My mother did not let me be born. I just don't understand one thing. Why didn't any of you help me? I wish you had. No one heard my crying voice."

From,
"An unborn baby"

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Presenting the Abortion Issue to Children

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At the start of the homily, I asked for a volunteer from among the youngest, smallest members of the congregation. Sharon, who was about six, came forward. I had her stand next to me facing the people and asked her, "Sharon, are there people out there who are bigger than you?" "Yes!" she exclaimed. "Are there people out there who are older than you?" "Yes!" she exclaimed. "Are there people out there who are stronger than you?" "Yes!" she exclaimed. "Are there people out there who are more important than you?" "No!" she declared, with even more conviction in her voice. All the other children understood the same thing.

And thus they understood the key problem in the abortion tragedy. Abortion builds on the lie that the smallest and weakest among us have less value and can even be discarded. Teaching children about abortion is not as difficult as many think. Children are particularly receptive to the message of equality of all people, and to the truth that might does not make right. They have a keen sense of justice and fairness. They know what it means to need protection from dangers they can neither withstand nor understand. They know what a baby is, and they know it is wrong to kill a baby.

Furthermore, they have not been around long enough to practice the mental gymnastics and exercises in denial that are necessary for developing and maintaining a pro-choice position.

It is not necessary to teach children the details of reproduction before they learn that abortion is a bad thing. The basis for teaching about abortion is not the reproductive system, but the dignity and worth of every human person, whether that person is big or small, young or old, healthy or sick, wanted or unwanted, convenient or inconvenient.

The basis for teaching young people about abortion is the same basis on which we teach that the commandment "Thou shalt not kill" applies to any other category of people.

Some may be afraid to use the word "abortion" with children, reasoning that as someone once told me, "they don't understand all the aspects of it." Let's face it: nobody does. We do not aim to teach them "all the aspects." The key point with children is that when they hear the word "abortion", they know it is something bad, something that kills, something to be avoided. Education is not just concepts. We influence children not only in how they think about abortion, but in how they feel about it. They should be trained to reject it, and to see it as a part of the list of injustices and evils in the world rather than part of the list of rights, freedoms, and choices. The Pontifical Council for the Family has written, "Before adolescence, the immoral nature of abortion, surgical or chemical, can be gradually explained in terms of Catholic morality and reverence for human life" (1995: The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality, n.137).

Some express a concern that children will be traumatized if we tell them that abortion kills babies. I once sat in on a staff meeting at which a proposal was made to set up a sign on parish property that said, "Abortion Kills Children." The staff voted down the proposal on the basis that it would give nightmares to the school children who would see it. A few

days later I was in that same school, and in the corridor of the first and second grade students I saw posters on the wall, made by the students themselves. The posters had skeletons coming up from the grave, people falling off an abyss, and various other nightmare scenes, with the message: "DRUGS KILL." "SAYING YES TO DRUGS IS LIKE SAYING YES TO MR. DEATH."

Where is our consistency? Is it only the politically incorrect messages that will give our children nightmares?

The pro-life message will not harm our children. What will harm them, however, is the "pro-choice" mentality, which will train them to think that human life is a disposable item, and which, if unchallenged, may lead them to an abortion mill someday.

If parents sometimes object to my pro-life preaching because their children are present, I gently point out to them that I share their concern for their children's welfare. I then tell them that it is better that they hear about abortion from me, in the presence of their parents who can discuss their questions and calm their fears, than if they hear about abortion from pro-choice people who will tell them the false and dangerous lie that abortion is "no big deal." Worse yet, of course, is if the first time they hear anything substantial about abortion is from the "counselor" who is trying to sell them one.

Parents are the primary educators of their children. This requires that priests and other educators cooperate closely with them. It does not mean, however, that either the parents or other educators have the right to keep their children from the truth. In one instance when I spoke to seventh graders about how abortion harms women, one

set of parents objected because I had not received their permission to bring up the topic in class. I assured them that I had no intention of bypassing their parental authority and that, in fact, I welcomed their input. I pointed out that people differ in their judgment of which matters require special parental approval and which do not. I then invited them to be at least equally upset over the fact that their daughter can actually obtain an abortion and be harmed by it without their knowledge or consent, as they were upset that their daughter had heard about abortion and its harmful effects without their knowledge or consent. Public health records in New York State show 231 abortions on thirteen year-old girls in 1990.

I know of another case in which parental permission was obtained for all the students in the class, except one, to see a photo of an aborted baby. After school the student whose parents had denied permission insisted that her friend let her see the picture. On returning home she passionately challenged her mom, "Why did you not want me to see what is really happening to these babies! Why was I not allowed to see the truth?"

It is particularly appropriate that children share our concern about abortion. After all, they are closer in age to those who are being killed. Furthermore, they were considered "non-persons" before the law during the first nine months of their existence! If I were born after the Roe vs. Wade decision, I would take that as a personal insult! What loss today's children have sustained from abortion! Those aborted would have been their classmates, their friends, their husbands and wives! Psychological research is being done on the impact of this tragedy on those whose lives might have been taken, had