



Promotion and Protection of Human Life: Concrete Problems Emerging from Pastoral Care of the Family

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Analysis of Ad Limina Visit reports

- Analysis of the reports provided by the Bishops on their ad limina visits to the Dicastery, drawing from them the themes mentioned by the Bishops themselves.
- 49 reports analyzed on a total of 137 Episcopal Conferences and Synods of the Eastern Churches.

Pros and Cons of the Analysis

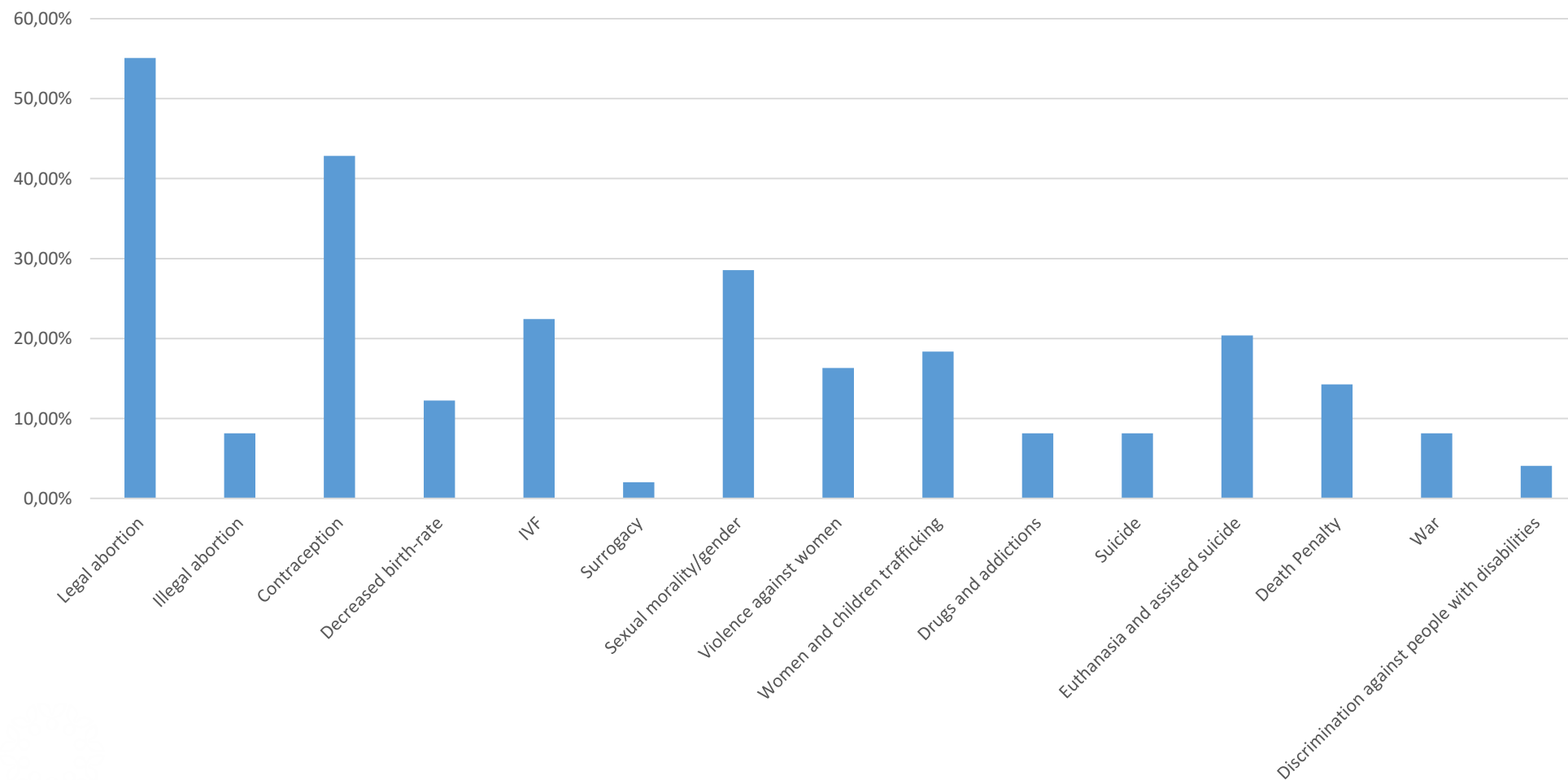
Pros

- Qualified interlocutors (Episcopal Conferences)
- Many local Churches represented and coming from all areas of the world.

Cons

- Topics perceived by the Bishops as priorities, also on the basis of contingencies (e.g. national bills discussed at that time).
- About half of the visits occurred before 2020.

Challenges at a global level

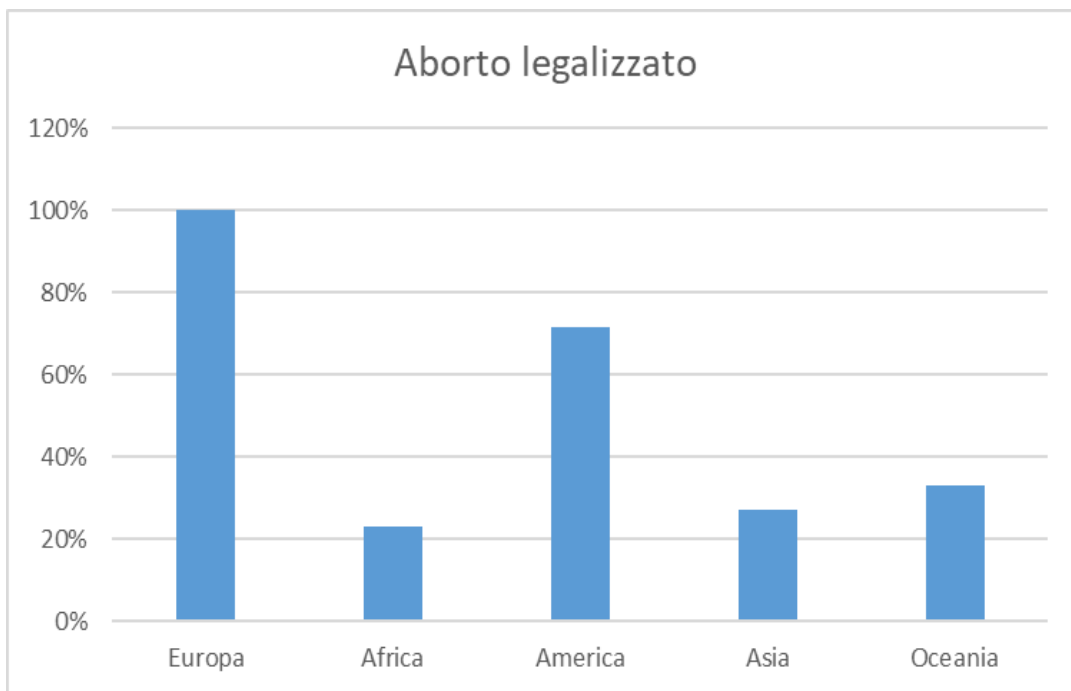


Preliminary remarks

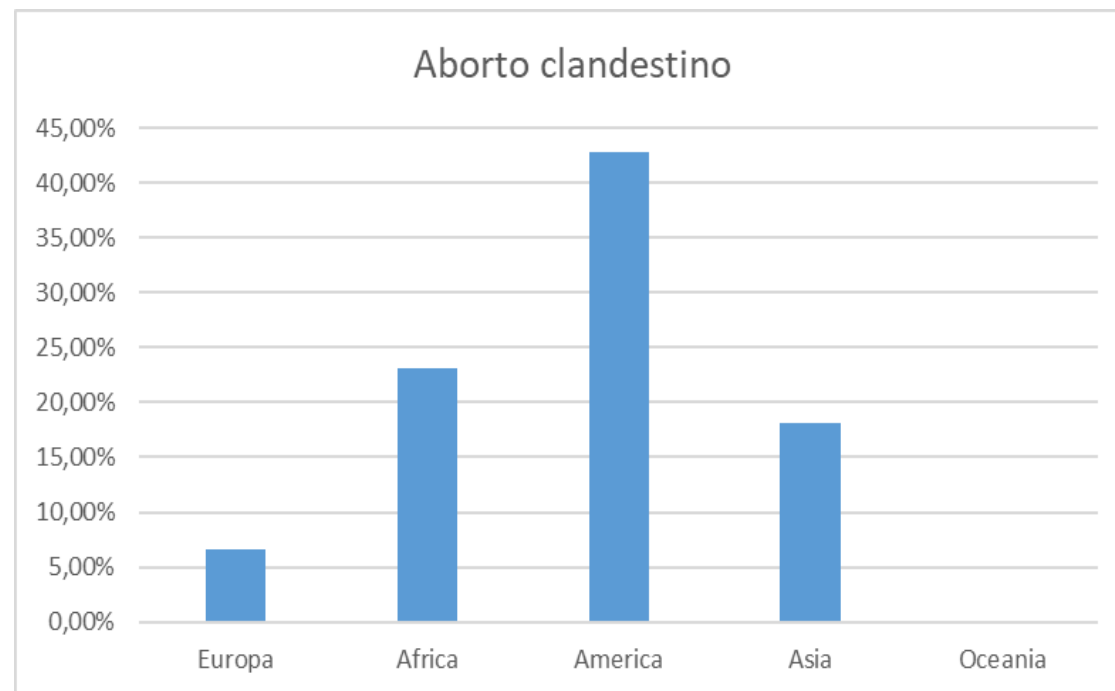
- From the ad limina visits, the awareness already emerges that the pastoral care of life is not limited to questions of the beginning and end of life, but embraces all issues that extend to the social, educational, cultural and political spheres.
- However, between the different continents there are some differences in the priorities perceived by the Bishops.

Legal abortion/Illegal abortion

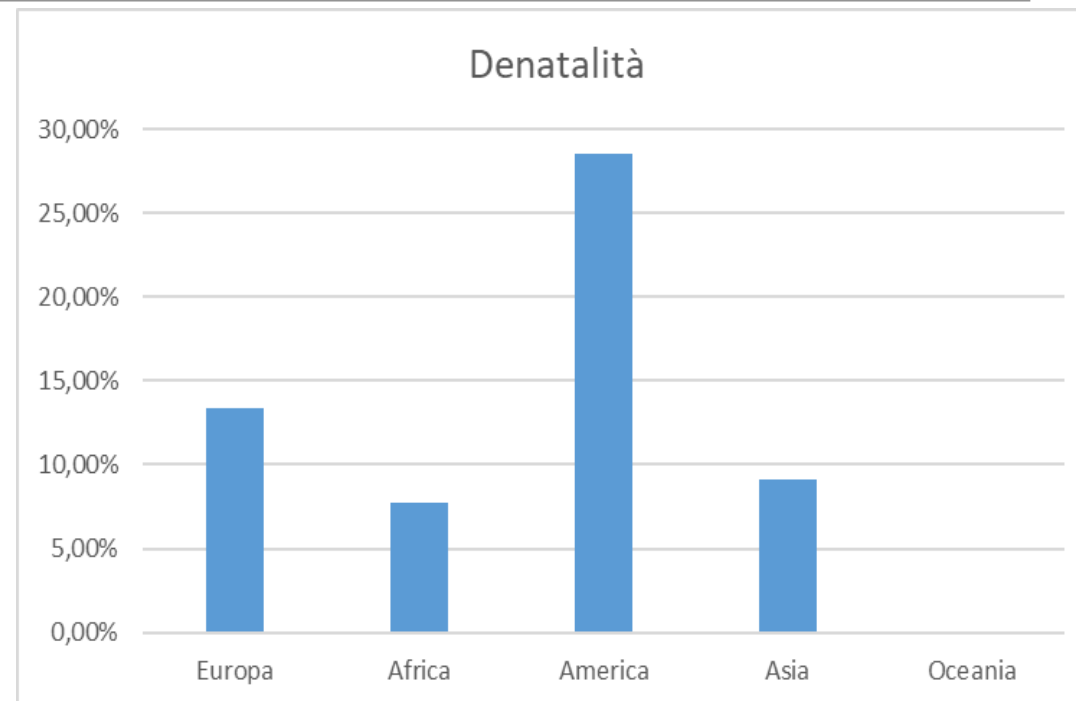
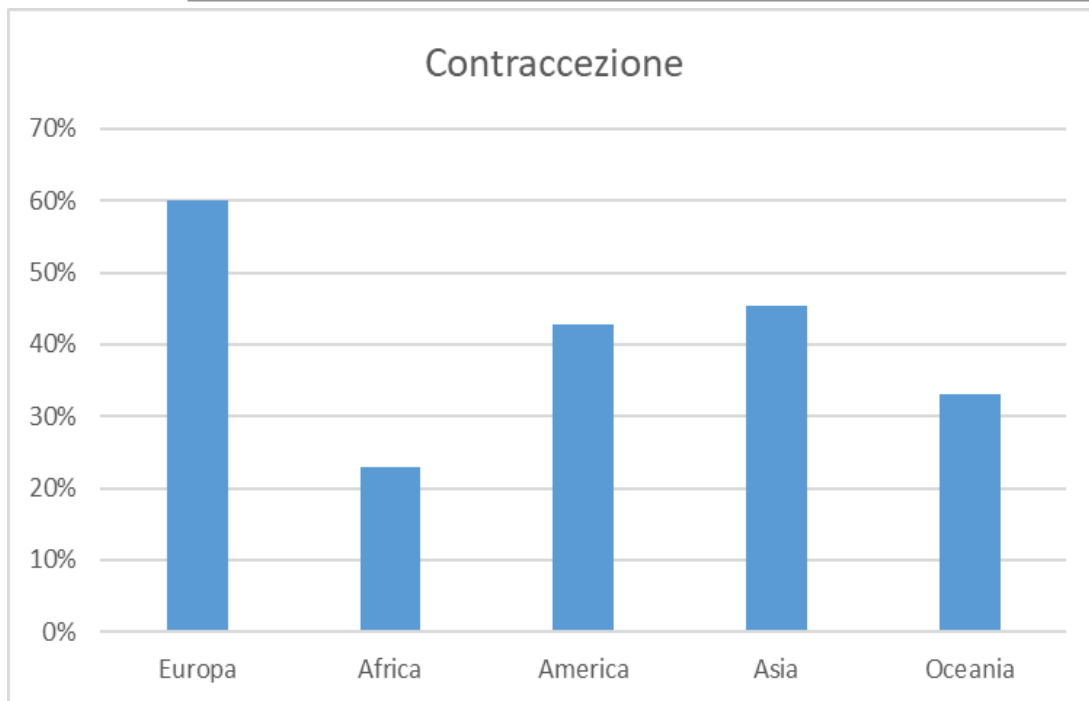
Aborto legalizzato



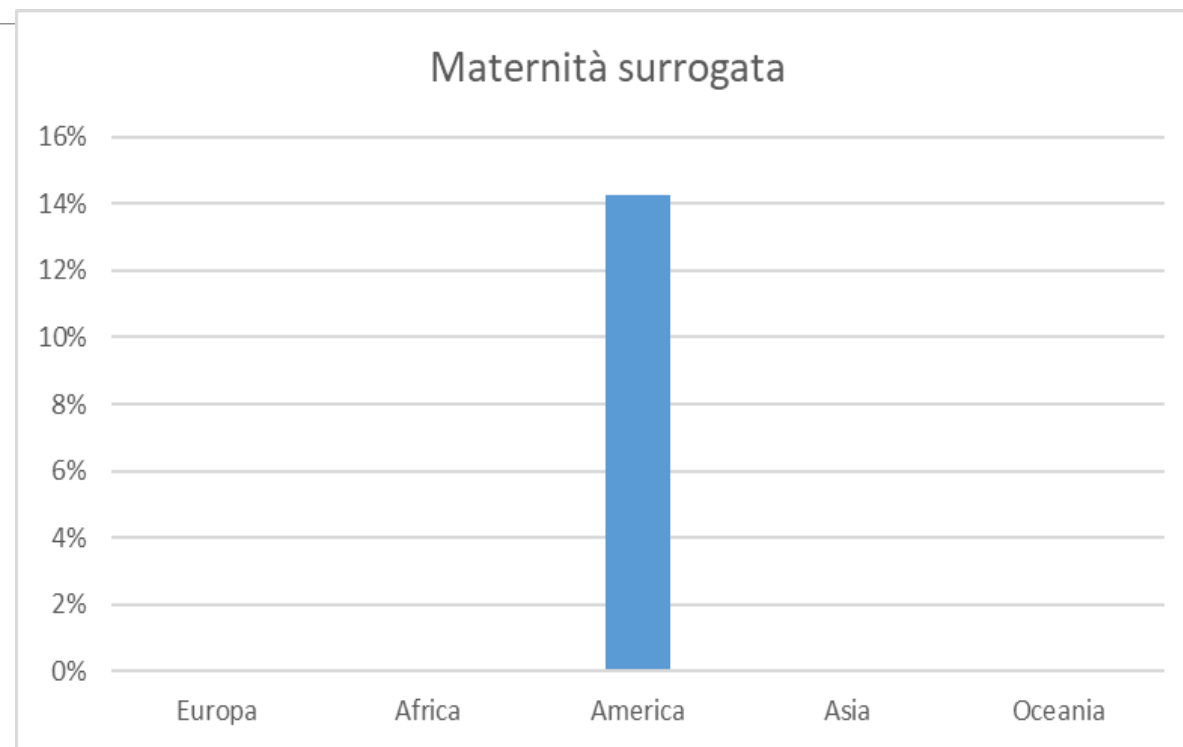
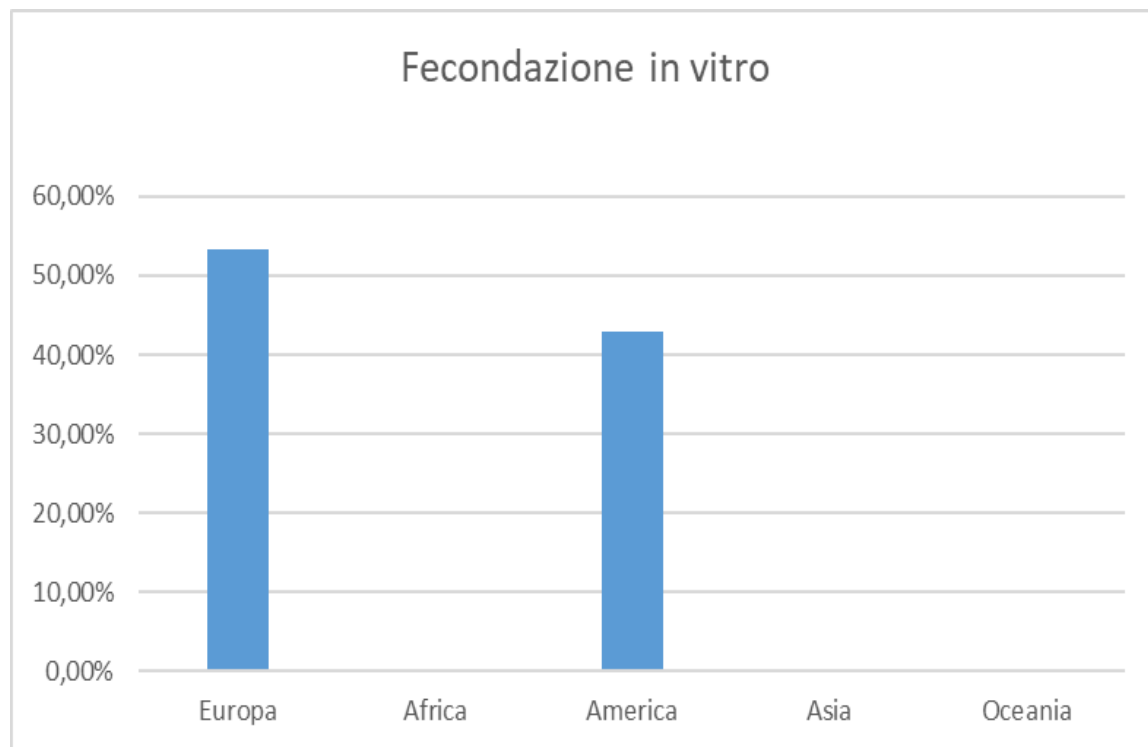
Aborto clandestino



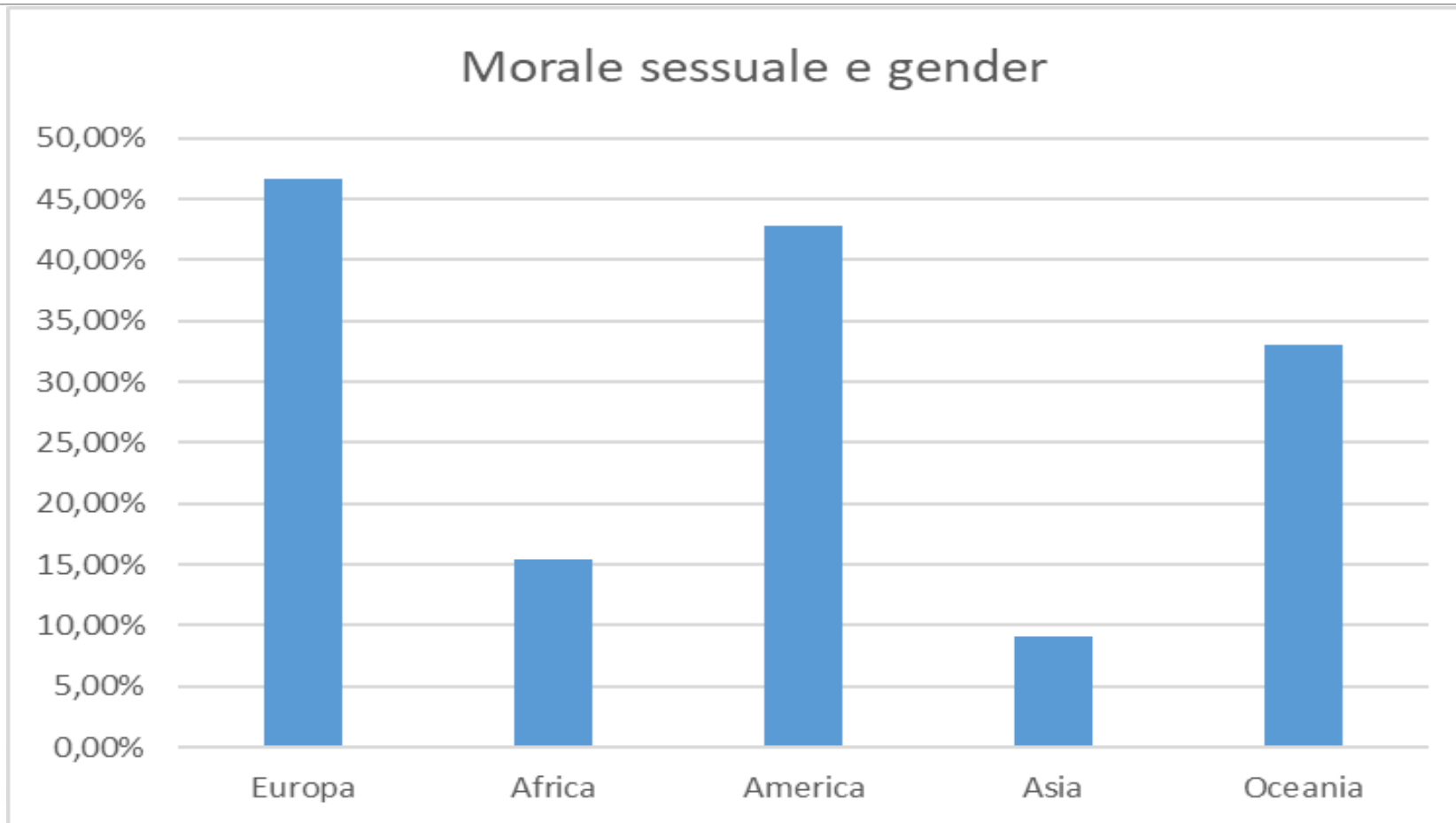
Contraception/Decreased birth-rate



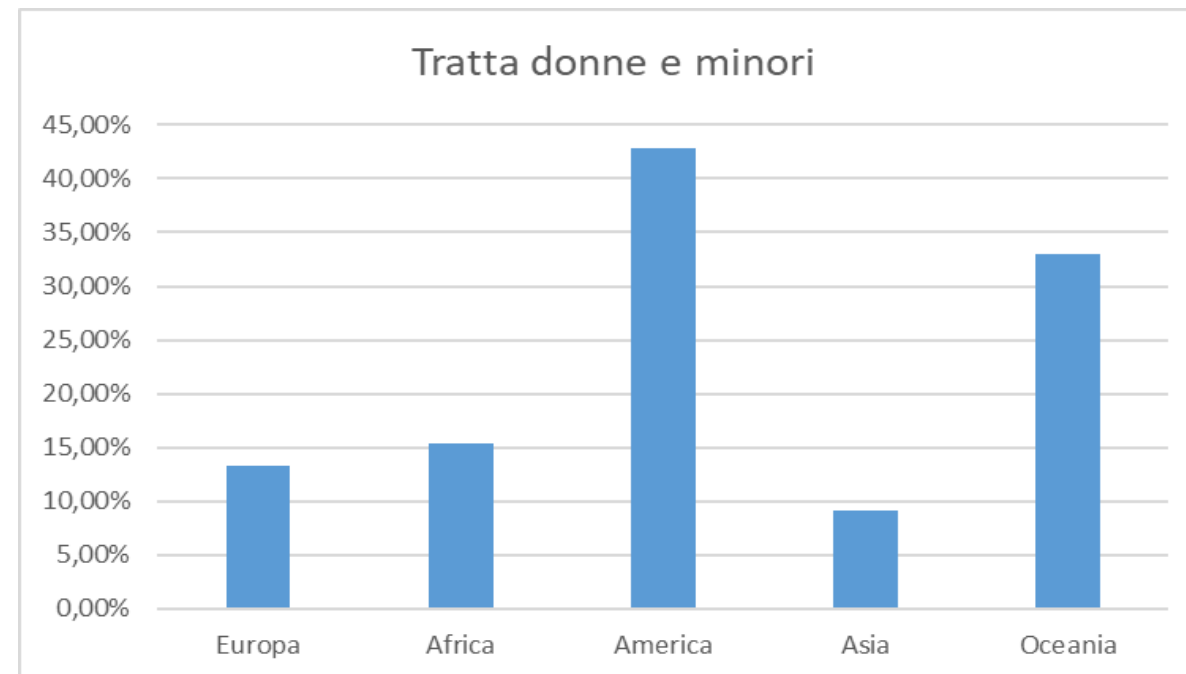
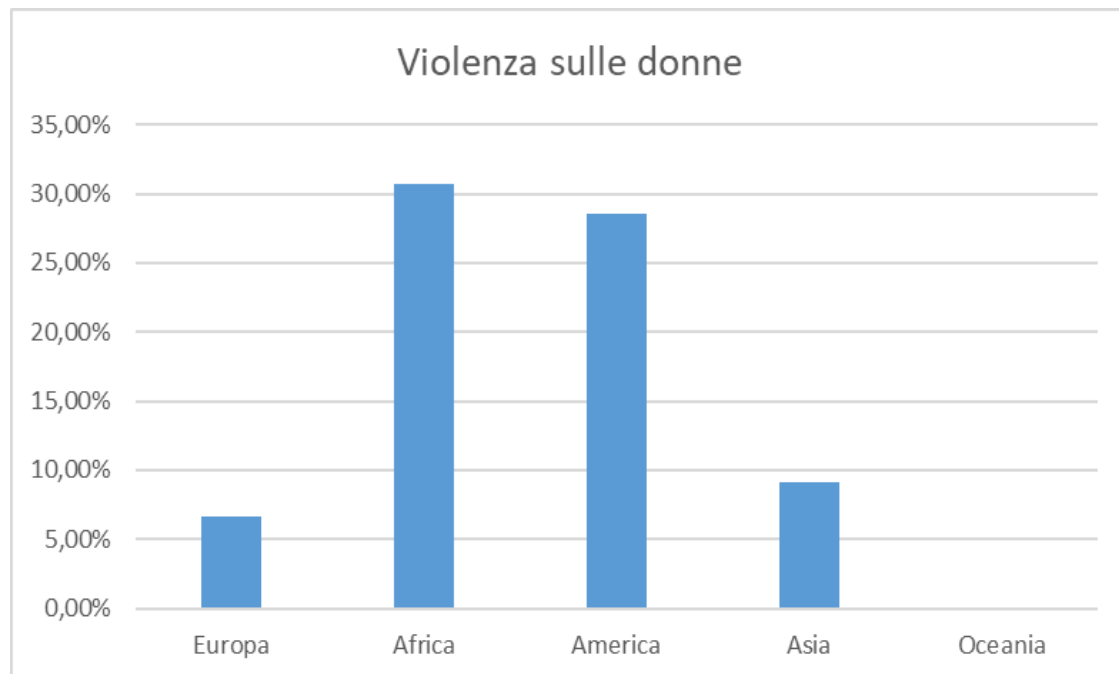
IVF /Surrogacy



Sexual morality and gender

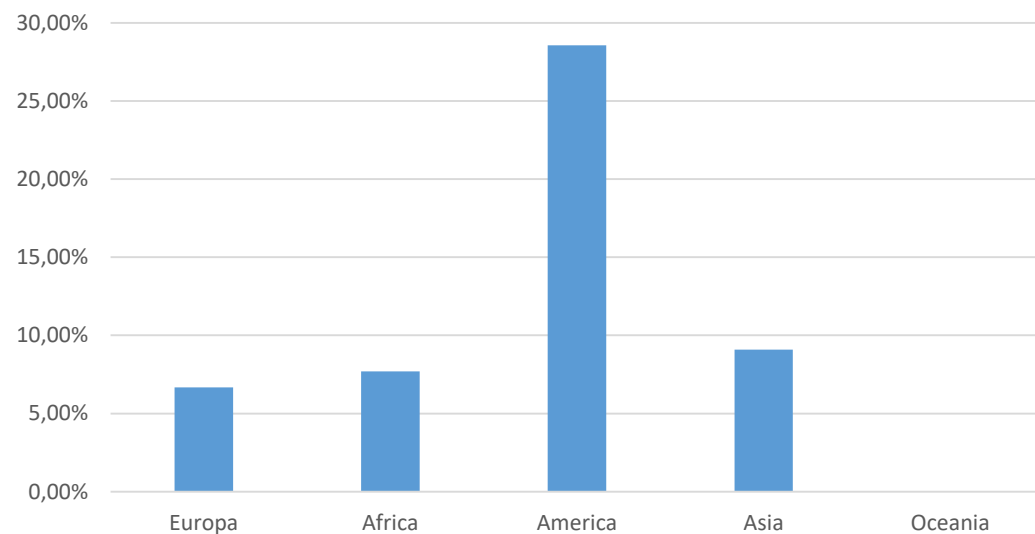


Violence against women/Women and Children trafficking

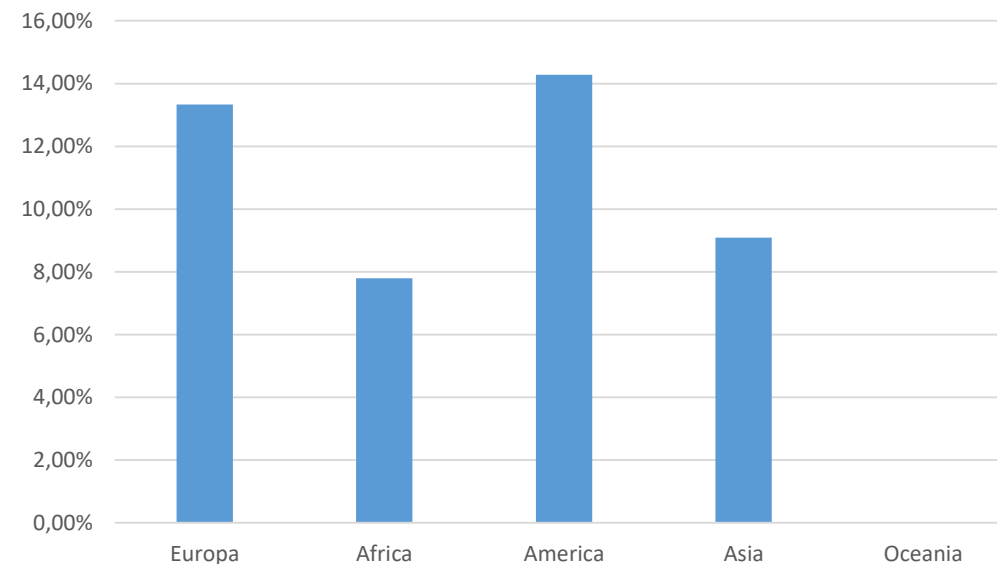


Drugs and addictions/Suicide

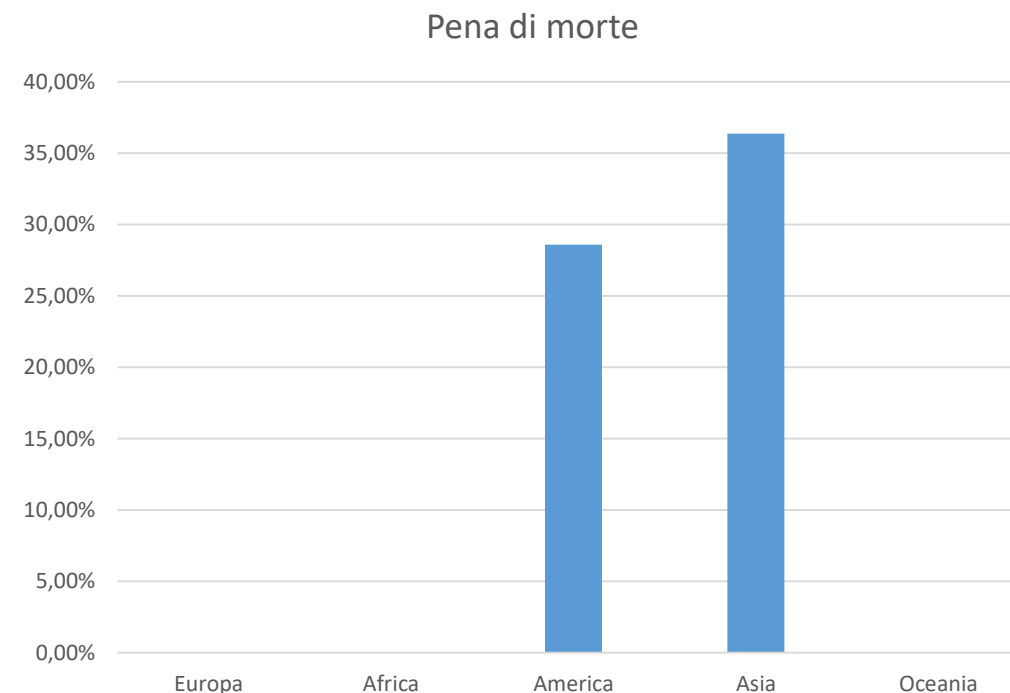
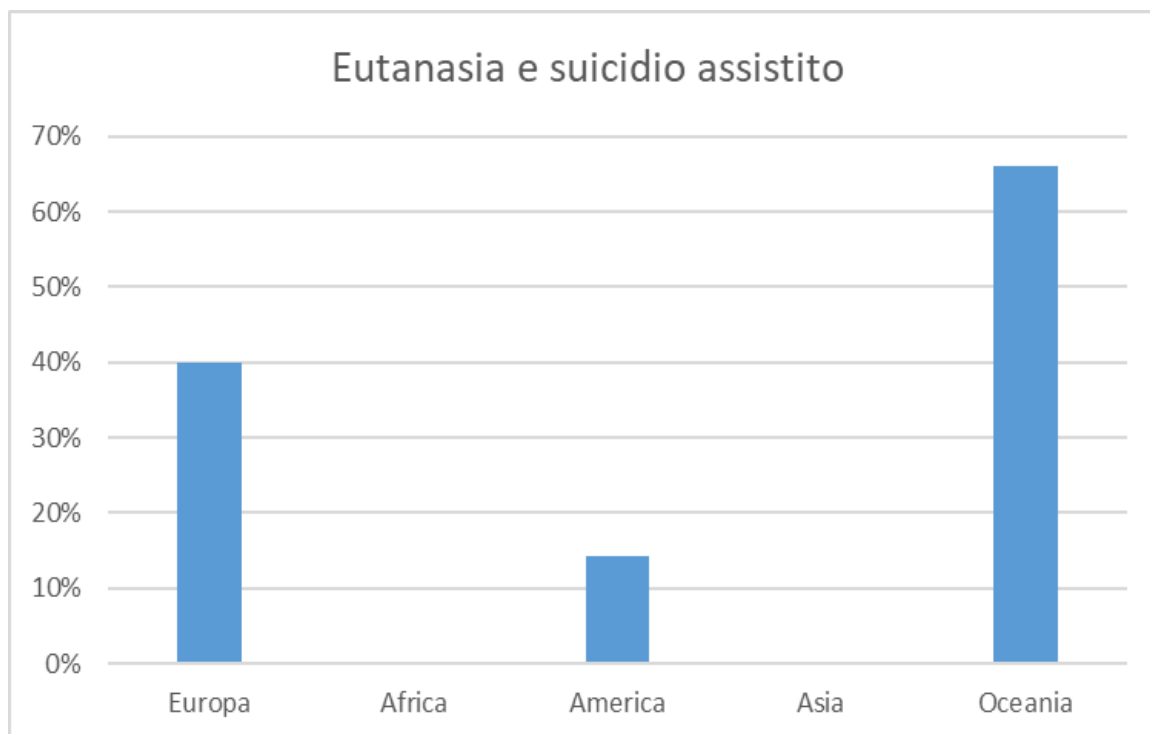
Droga e dipendenze



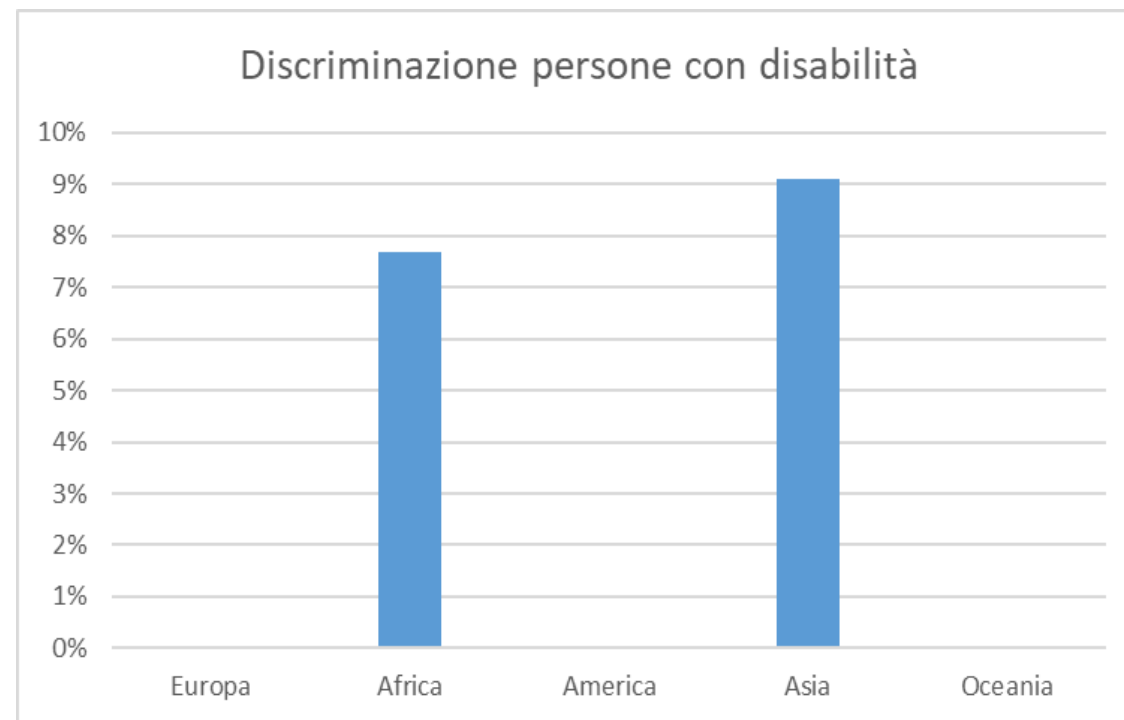
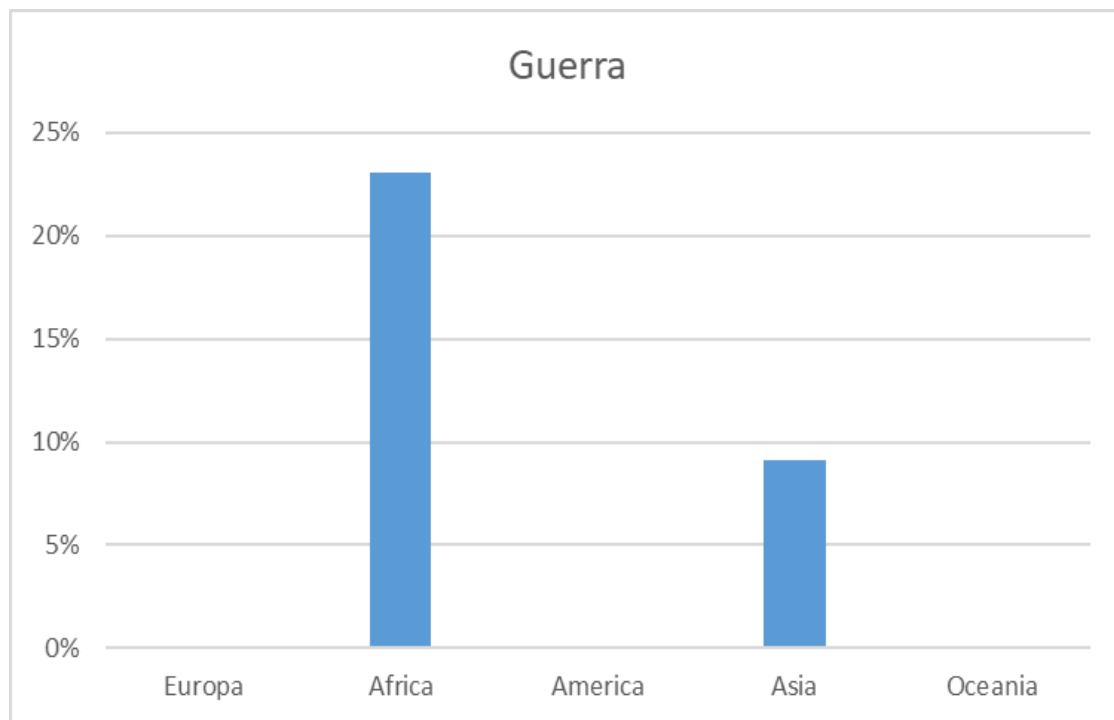
Suicidi



Euthanasia and assisted suicide/Death Penalty



War/Discrimination against people with disabilities



Questionnaire

- To deepen and systematize the analysis, in November 2023 we prepared a questionnaire and sent it to some contacts, selected among members and consultors of the Dicastery, pastoral operators and academic experts.
- The responses to the questionnaire, in addition to touching on various themes that had already emerged from the ad limina visits, contributed to better delineating the aims and tools of the pastoral care of human life.

1. Is there a specific pastoral care in your Dioceses to promote and enshrine the value of human life?

- There is not always a specific pastoral care at diocesan level.
- Often the pastoral care of human life is integrated with that of the family or that of healthcare workers, other times it is linked to doctrinal issues, still others it is carried out in the spiritual accompaniment of the sick or through the charitable and cultural activity of lay organizations and religious orders.
- The pastoral care of human life involves both clergy, religious and lay people, with responsibilities that change depending on the contexts.

2. What does the expression “pastoral care of human life” mean?

- **Evangelization:** service and testimony on the dignity of the person.
- **Social action:** respect for life from conception to natural death. Promotion of human flourishing and dignity, care of fragility.
- **Moral and doctrinal formation:** Theoretical and formative reflection on life. Truths of reason enriched by truths of faith. Ethical issues and social doctrine of the Church. Study of official Church documents. Ethics of medical decisions, social justice, environmental ethics. Spaces for meeting and dialogue. Common language and consistent with the Magisterium.
- **Prayer and spiritual support:** Encounter with God that illuminates awareness of the gift of life. Hospital chaplains and administration of sacraments to the sick. Theological reflection and pastoral accompaniment on birth and death.
- **Cultural dimension:** Assumption of responsibility. Report attacks on life. Leader training. Community involvement. Representation of Christian values in public debate.

3. Which themes should be part of a pastoral activity for the promotion and care of human life?

- **Beginning of life.** Life as a gift, eugenics. Married life, care of unborn life. Abortion, responsible procreation, sterilization, infertility, IVF. Paternity and maternity, infanticide, birth regulation. Surrogacy.
- **End of life:** suicide, palliative care, organ donation and transplants, accompanying the dying. Living will/advance directives.
- **Social:** accompaniment of frailties, people with disabilities, migrants, psychiatric patients. Trafficking, deportation, slavery, undignified and dangerous working conditions, detention. Health policies. Health care of the poor. Addictions. Value of elderly age. Adoption. Quality care for everyone.
- **Research:** dignity of human embryos, research on humans, genetic manipulations.
- **Cross-cutting themes:** Religious freedom and conscientious objection, children's education. Integral development of the person. Young people, emotional and sexual education, gender ideology. Being children, creatureliness.

4. In your opinion, what is the relationship between pastoral care of human life, bioethics and bio law?

- The common objective is the promotion of life and human dignity. In an ideal context, bioethics, biolaw and pastoral care of human life are coherent and complementary, as they are founded on Christian anthropology.
- However, bioethics, which studies moral principles and values to make decisions in the medical and scientific fields, and biolaw, which regulates rights and duties in the context of clinical practice and biomedical research, sometimes lose their orientation, because they reduce the "infinite dignity" of the person to the quality of life or respect for self-determination.
- Even in the ethical and legal disorientation of the contemporary world, the Church can reaffirm values and principles starting from the pastoral level, through teaching, testimony and charity.
- The dignity of every human being is recognizable by reason alone, but pastoral care can strengthen this awareness, revealing that life is a gift from God.

5. Are you aware of good practices for training lay faithful to live the Christian faith and moral life in a coherent manner?

- **Pastoral letters.**
- **Community activities** dedicated to families and parents.
- Conferences, **academic training** courses structured on moral teaching and social doctrine of the Church.
- **Campaigns and marches** for life.
- **Prayer** vigils.
- **Volunteering** experiences and **charity**.
- **Associations** for the promotion of life.
- Presence in the **media** and in public debate.
- However, the **impact** of these initiatives is **perceived as decreasing** at a social level.

6. Within pastoral care of human life, which objectives do you consider truly urgent to accompany lay people and families to face the challenges of our time in a Christian way?

- promote a **shared anthropological vision** in the Christian community
- **listening and accompanying** people in difficulty
- **interconnectedness and coordination** between pastoral areas
- strengthen Christian **communities** starting from the parish level
- strengthen family **spirituality**, strengthen family **bonds**
- understand the **values** related to **parenting, sexuality and care**
- offer **hope and support** without condemnation
- **catechesis and training** of young people and engaged couples in the culture of life
- strengthen the influence of **associations**
- offer concrete **alternatives** to abortion, IVF, euthanasia and suicide
- **reduce inequalities**
- **improve the commitment** to the protection of life compared to the current debate between political parties

7. How can the pastoral care of human life be achieved in practice? In your opinion, what does it mean and which type of pastoral action should be offered for the formation of lay people and to support a "culture for life"?



- Monitor social, cultural and legal trends regarding the protection of human life and develop pro-life proposals, without simply protesting.
- Coordinate with universities, scientific societies, NGOs, businesses and institutions that are pro-life, including those outside the Church.
- Create and coordinate specific services at the level of Episcopal Conferences, dioceses and parishes, in particular life support services.
- Train trainers and volunteers. Training teachers in Catholic schools. Include the pastoral care of human life in the training of seminarians and in marriage preparation courses.
- Develop media presence, both of pastors and committed lay people. Participation of Catholic associations in public debate. Strong testimonials in the media, which can have an impact.
- Educate children and young people about emotional life.
- Help the excluded through socialization and charity.
- Organize prayer vigils, marches and public demonstrations for life.
- Offer spiritual accompaniment to the sick and their families.

8. How does the pastoral care of human life intersect with the pastoral care of the family and with respect to which themes?

Family pastoral care is a privileged area for putting into practice the values and principles of pastoral care of human life, with particular reference to:

- marital love and welcoming of nascent life, treatment of infertility
- adoption
- dignity of the elderly person, strengthening intergenerational bonds
- inclusion of people with disabilities
- charitable commitment, care of sick people, closeness to widows and widowers
- training in moral values, education in affectivity
- fight against domestic violence
- prevention and treatment of addictions
- accompaniment of the dying

Why a pastoral care of human life in synergy with family pastoral care?

All issues that call into question the value of life and the dignity of the person, on which the family is no longer able to have an effective educational action, require a renewed pastoral commitment.

If the offices of family pastoral care and life pastoral care are distinct in the local Churches, for organizational reasons, close collaboration is still necessary. Synergy is fundamental.