



DICASTERIUM PRO LAICIS, FAMILIA ET VITA

LIFE IS ALWAYS A GOOD

Initiating Processes for a
Pastoral Care of Human Life



LIBRERIA
EDITRICE
VATICANA



DICASTERIUM PRO LAICIS, FAMILIA ET VITA

LIFE IS ALWAYS A GOOD

**Initiating Processes for a
Pastoral Care of Human Life**

On the occasion of the 30th Anniversary
of the Encyclical *Evangelium vitae*
25 March 1995 – 25 March 2025



LIBRERIA
EDITRICE
VATICANA

© 2025 Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life
00120 Vatican City
Tel. 06.69869300
E-mail: comunicazione@laityfamilylife.va
www.laityfamilylife.va
www.vatican.va
All rights reserved

You can freely download the publications of the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life on the theme of Human Life by scanning the following QR codes.



Life is always a Good



Family Global Compact



Keys to bioethics

Contents

- Presentation	4
- Introduction	6
1. The invitation of Pope Francis	10
2. Foundations and characteristics of Pastoral Care of Human Life	12
3. The perception of local Churches	15
4. Prerequisites for Pastoral Care of Human Life	17
5. A method for pastoral agents	21
6. Needed aptitudes	23
7. Pastoral agents	26
8. Themes	27
9. Means	29
10. Mission: sow “seeds of hope”	31
- Final Summary	32

Presentation

“Life is always a good” (*Evangelium vitae*, 31) and as such it should be presented, safeguarded, and enhanced in every situation



With this brief Pastoral Framework, presented on the occasion of the 30th Anniversary of the Encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* (25 March 1995), the Church aims to reaffirm the words of Saint John Paul II, as repeatedly emphasized by Pope Francis, and draw the attention of all people of good will who wish to be at the service of communities to effectively defend and promote every human person’s life.

In a time marked by extremely serious violations of human dignity, with many countries afflicted by wars and all sorts of violence – especially against women, children before and after birth, adolescents, people with disabilities, the elderly, the poor and migrants – we must forge a genuine Pastoral Care of Human Life to put into practice what is also reiterated in the recent Declaration *Dignitas infinita* of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith: “an infinite dignity, inalienably grounded in his or her very being, which prevails in and beyond every circumstance, state, or situation the person may ever encounter.” (No. 1). Therefore, every person’s life should always be respected, safeguarded, and defended. This principle, which is recognizable even by reason alone, is to be implemented in every country, village, and household.

It is linked to the consistency of the Catholic Church’s message about the value of the human person (cf. *Evangelii gaudium*, 214); today more than ever, it urges to put the respect for every person’s dignity and life at the centre of our commitment for the common good and fraternity (cf. *Dignitas infinita*, 1). Too many misunderstandings, mystifications, and subtle social practices and habits, legitimated by unfair laws, can mislead us about the fact that every person’s life is really always a good.

“When we speak of mankind, we must never forget the various attacks on the sacredness of human life. The plague of abortion is an attack on life. Allowing our brothers and sisters to die on boats

Summary

community pastoral discernment

Local Operational Phase		
Lines of action or interventions	Program	Verification
Carry out specific actions or interventions for each objective.	For each intervention, define: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Available people. • Resources: collaborators, means. • Timing. • Teams and facilities. 	Propose verification tools. Keep following the path. Verify at the end of every process or stage.
Ensure progressive-ness and interrelation between planned actions.		

Final

For diocesan, parish and

Discernment Phases			
1st Step		2nd Step	3rd Step
Situation analysis	Vision of the future	General objectives	Strategies and specific objectives
Identify challenges for life.	What do we want reality to look like in the future ? What can we do to achieve it?	Set the targets we want to reach with our educational and formative action.	Indicate the path we consider to be most appropriate to reach any target; concrete steps to follow; design a step-by-step process.
<i>It is better to choose more urgent challenges for our educational and pastoral mission.</i>	<i>This vision of the future should be open, inspiring, detailed, and positive.</i>	<i>There should not be many, two or three at the most.</i>	<i>Such steps should be concrete, progressive, and verifiable.</i>

in the strait in Sicily is an attack on life. Dying on the job because the minimum safety standards are not respected is an attack on life. Death from malnutrition is an attack on life. Terrorism, war, violence; so is euthanasia. Loving life means always taking care of the other, wanting the best for him, cultivating and respecting her transcendent dignity” (Pope Francis, *Address to participants in the meeting sponsored by the Science and Life association*, 30 May 2015)

We must strive to ensure the value of life is understood and welcomed by younger generations. The inalienable dignity of every human being is to be respected unconditionally. To this end, I encourage every bishop, priest, religious man and woman, and lay person to read this Pastoral Framework and strive to develop an *organic and structured* Pastoral Care of Human Life, which can provide workers, educators, teachers, parents, young people, and children the right formation to respect the value of life.

I am referring to an “organic” ecclesial pastoral care, since the Church is a dynamic living organism; it is the Body of Christ that grows bigger. It is entrusted with the priceless gift of life. As such, it is called to always defend, promote, and serve life, every human life. Therefore, the Pastoral Care of Life should engage all the “organs” that compose the Body of the Church, all its faithful, pastors, and lay people. It should be a constant and dynamic concern for every baptized faithful, fostering a united, clear, and consistent pastoral care, which is also well-integrated in all its aspects. In this respect, the Pastoral Framework does not aim to provide particular Churches with preset and ready-to-use “recipes.” Instead, it aims to initiate “processes” to develop a Pastoral Care of Human Life all over.

Therefore, I urge you to work together with the help of the Lord to create the conditions to welcome and accompany life anywhere and anytime. Life is not “something unforeseen from which to defend ourselves, but [as] a mystery that hides the secret of true joy.” (Pope Francis, *General Audience*, 1st December 2021). The future of the Church and humankind lies in the defence and promotion of human life, the gift of God.

Card. Kevin J. Farrell
Prefect
Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life

Introduction

Synodality and Pastoral Care of Human

This Pastoral Framework provides insights to initiate and develop a **methodology for the Pastoral Care of Human Life** in every particular Church.

The 2024 Final Document of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on synodality, approved by Pope Francis, reiterated that “the commitment to defending life and human rights [...] is part of the evangelising mission that the Church is called to live and incarnate in history” (Final Doc., 151). This call is based upon a shared baptismal identity of the faithful, lay people, and pastors (cf. Final Doc., 4). Thus, it is addressed to everyone. The gifts received in Baptism should be put to use for the good of all and for the protection of everyone, especially for younger children, the most fragile people, those who are more exposed to injustice. We need to invest in the formation of formators (cf. Final Doc., 143) on vital issues for our faith and the exercise of the mission. Indeed, we are called not only to address urgent themes regarding our ability to safeguard and promote the value of every human life, but to also do so with a renewed and appropriate approach to serve the mission that Christ entrusted to us.

We need pathways of “missionary transformation” (Final Doc., 11) starting from the *modus vivendi et operandi* that qualifies the Church, namely **synodality**. Even in relation to the mission of safeguarding human life, it reveals an essential practice, a **transformative method** in accomplishing the mission: we need to discern, share, transform everyone’s mind and heart to serve human life. “Authentic practices of synodality enable Christians to be a critical and prophetic voice against the prevailing culture. In this way, we can offer a distinctive contribution to the search for answers to many challenges faced by our contemporary societies in building the common good” (Final Doc., 47).

10 Mission: sow “seeds of hope”

“Respect, protect,
love and serve life,
every human life!”

Evangelium vitae, 5

Do not be discouraged by secularization, the lack of Christian values, laws that legitimize the worldwide suppression of life. Let us continue to foster a positive dialogue with culture, so that all younger generations can know the truth about the priceless value of every human life.

As believers, we are certain that the “seeds of life” are stronger than the “seeds of death.” Our strength lies in *initiating processes* (*Evangelii gaudium*, 223), taking care of them so that the beauty of the Gospel of Life can once again shine across the world. Let us be proactive, instead of waiting for the perfect moment that will never come. There are people waiting for our help, families that need us now.

We do not want to work on abstract concepts, for the life we are called to promote and defend is not a concept; it always manifests itself through a real person: a conceived child, a poor person on the street, a lonely and discouraged sick person, an abused woman.

Every human being is called by God to enjoy the fullness of life and is entrusted to the maternal concern of the Church.

We must act on a cultural and educational level to illuminate consciences, ensuring they are able to grasp the meaning behind any weak, lonely, or fragile person.

Every human life, unique and unrepeatable, is of inestimable value. This must be proclaimed and calls us to solidarity and fraternal love for the whole human family. Therefore, with Saint John Paul II, we remind the world of the call he addressed to all of us over thirty years ago: “Respect, defend, love and serve life, every human life!” (*Evangelium vitae*, 5), in every situation and stage of development.

ENVISAGING INSTITUTIONAL PASTORAL SERVICES

- Ensure **interconnectedness and coordination across pastoral fields** to conceive and propose together a Pastoral Care of Human Life.
- Establish a **diocesan council** for the Pastoral Care of Life.
- Promote the creation of **counselling agencies** with a Christian vision, and life support centres for people in difficult situations, to provide hope as well as material, moral, and spiritual support.
- Promote appropriate initiatives to offer **real alternatives** to abortion, in vitro fertilization, euthanasia, and suicide.
- Promote youth and family **associations**.

- Create **steady working tables** between those responsible for the Institutes for the Family of Catholic Universities of REDIUF and those responsible for diocesan and national Pastoral Care of Life.

FOSTERING CULTURAL DIALOGUE

- Dialogue between **parishes, schools, families**, associations, and movements for a **shared effort** aiming to develop the “culture of life,” putting everyone’s resources at the service of all.
- Fostering dialogue on the themes of life with **institutions** and the **world of culture**.
- Intensify the commitment to life within **national and international political dialogue**.

This is why, along with insights for reflection and pastoral action on urgent issues for particular Churches, this Pastoral Framework presents a working methodology based on the **conversation in the Spirit** and discernment. We hope this can help in the conversion and formation of lay faithful and pastors. In fact, conversation in the Spirit is a fruitful tool that enables listening in order to discern “what the Spirit is saying to the Churches” (Revelation, 2:7; cf. Final Doc., 45), even relating to understanding how and where to work to promote and defend every human life. **Conversion** is always at play in **conversation**, since the dynamics of listening in sharing open new ways of being and new paths for every person and the community.

Remember that “**ecclesial discernment** is not an organisational technique but rather a spiritual practice grounded in a living faith. It calls for interior freedom, humility, prayer, mutual trust, an openness to the new and a surrender to the will of God” (Final Doc., 82). And it “always unfolds within a particular context” (Final Doc., 85): this is why we believe it is necessary to start from the situation presented by bishops during their *ad limina Apostolorum* visits. They expressed concern over the most urgent challenges faced by the Church at the local level, which seriously endanger the protection of many human lives. These same challenges were discussed by our Dicastery with the heads of the Family and Life Offices of the Bishops’ Conferences across the world during a webinar held in April 2024, laying the foundation for this shared effort.

Today, countless approaches lead to the marginalization and discarding of people, violating their dignity with practices that allow its systematic exclusion. Just think of the unborn, the elderly, the poor, and the situation of women in many countries (cf. Final Doc., 54). Such approaches develop in the context of loneliness, social abandonment, fear, despair, and poverty, both within families and on the street. Yet, families are supposed to be

the place where relations of love, hospitality, and fraternity are built. Families are the place where the first **relational conversion** may occur between people, generations, communities, and villages.

In recent years, there has been a growing awareness that families are active participants and not just passive recipients of the pastoral care (cf. Final Doc., 64). This is especially true in relation to their irreplaceable role in educating to the value of and respect for the person's dignity and every human life.

In this regard, the formation of formators (cf. Final Doc., 143) must be planned from a pastoral standpoint, starting from the synodal method; they should know how to accompany young people, adults, couples, and families within local contexts, fostering discernment that always prioritizes the protection and preservation of life.

We therefore need to transform pastoral care planning in parishes and dioceses to develop a systematic action of formation, hospitality, and appropriate accompaniment on themes linked to human life, in every situation and phase of its development, according to the teaching proposed by Pope Francis, when he reminds us that "Every human being has the right to live with dignity and to develop integrally" (*Fratelli tutti*, 107). Such themes should be cross-cutting to any area of pastoral care: proclamation, Christian initiation, mystagogy, catechesis, charity, people's education in every phase of Christian life.

We thus hope that this brief Pastoral Framework will help initiate an ecclesial journey of genuine conversion to synodal and effective working methods to support human life wherever it is still offended, threatened, discarded, or selected.

DEVELOPING FORMATION PROGRAMMES

- Promote and form to a **shared and informed Christian anthropological vision** within the community.
- Form **consciences** and accompany the faithful in a discernment which is consistent with Christian anthropology, the Magisterium, and the truth of faith.
- Embed formation on foundations and themes related to the value of human life in **youth pastoral care**.
- Strengthen **family spirituality**, as well as **conjugal and family bonds**.
- Educate to the values related to **parenting, sexuality, and care**.
- Offer opportunities for formation, dialogue, and exchange on life themes within the **parish and diocesan community**, through an inductive method, starting from questions arising from people's everyday life.
- **Collaborate with experts from Catholic universities** that contribute to the diocesan pastoral care, to create opportunities for formation, encounter, and welcoming facilities, personal and family accompaniment centres.
- Envisage study seminars and opportunities for interdisciplinary formation within **Conferences of Bishops** and **particular Churches** for pastors and pastoral agents.
- Form parents and **teachers** in **Catholic schools**.
- Make use of learning and human resources from the **Institutes for the Family** of Catholic Universities joining the *Family Global Compact*.
- Promote a formative engagement in the **pastoral care of children** in parishes and dioceses: form children to the value of human life through experiences and appropriate languages.

8 Themes



- Health care of the poor
- New forms of poverty (lack of work or dignity in work, poor relationships within communities and families)
- Drugs and addictions
- Addiction to digital virtual reality
- Violence against women and children
- Digital violence
- Bullying
- Cybersex
- Value of elderly age
- Adoption and fostering.

END OF LIFE

- Palliative care
- Organ donation and transplants
- Spiritual accompaniment of the sick, the dying, and their families
- Living will/advance directives

- Euthanasia
- Assisted suicide
- Death penalty.

CROSS-CUTTING THEMES

- Being children
- Being creatures
- Care of the person and creation in the perspective of integral ecology
- Religious freedom and conscientious objection
- Children and young people's education
- Emotional and sexual education
- Gender ideology
- Integral development of the person.

RESEARCH

- Dignity of human embryos
- Research on humans
- Genetic manipulations.



1 The invitation of Pope Francis

The human being:
an inalienable
infinite dignity

“We need to restore
the primacy of the
human person and
the defence of his
or her dignity

Dignitas infinita, 1

The invitation of Pope Francis

“Dear brothers and sisters, every human life, unique and unrepeatable, has value in and of itself; it is of inestimable value. This must always be proclaimed anew with the courage of the Word and the courage of actions. It calls us to solidarity and fraternal love for the great human family and for each of its members.” (General Audience of 25 March 2020, 25th Anniversary of *Evangelium Vitae*)

How to respond to the invitation

We want to work and reflect together to build an organic Pastoral Care of Human Life that, starting from the respect for dignity, life, and the integrity of every human being, accurately reflects the **evangelizing and educational commitment of the Church** within families, communities, dioceses, and parishes worldwide.

8 Themes

The themes addressed by the Pastoral Care of Human Life change based on geographical areas and cultural contexts. They must be identified in relation to particular Churches' priorities. Each theme should be further explored through formation initiatives.

The following list is neither definitive nor exhaustive; it simply aims to provide dioceses and parishes with suggestions about some of the macro-issues that more clearly emerge from the *ad limina* visits carried out by bishops and that may be of interest across pastoral contexts.

BEGINNING OF LIFE

Life as a gift ● Affectivity and conjugal sexuality ● Care of unborn life ● Moral meaning of responsible procreation and birth regulation ● Beauty and vocation of paternity and maternity ● Threat of prenatal eugenics ● Voluntary abortion ● Sterilization issues ● Infertility/sterility ● Moral problems linked to in vitro fertilization ● Infanticide ● Surrogacy ● Decreased birth-rate ● Accompaniment and care of women who experienced abortion.

TROUGHOUT THE COURSE OF LIFE

Women's dignity and respect ●

Reciprocity of male and female and the value of sexual difference ● Accompaniment of frailties ● Fighting discrimination against people with disabilities ● Protection of migrants ● Protection of psychiatric patients and their families ● Prevention against the tragedy of suicide (especially among adolescents and young people) ● Education to solidarity and subsidiarity ● War ● Human trafficking ● Deportation ● Slavery ● Undignified and dangerous working conditions ● Detention under undignified conditions ● Health policies and quality care for everyone ●

7 Pastoral agents

To promote and spread the “culture of life,” it is essential to properly form the faithful to the respect of the person and human life, propose truths of reason illuminated by truths of faith, disseminating the Magisterium documents on ethical and theological foundations of the value of human life and their practical applications.

To this end, it is necessary to create places for encounter and dialogue with a clear and consistent language with the Magisterium; testimony and form to the respect of the dignity of the human person in every pastoral field: in the catechesis to children and adults, youth pastoral care, the accompaniment of engaged couples, families, missionary contexts, Catholic universities, and Catholic schools.

Most importantly, it is necessary to form **pastoral agents** who can in turn form families, spouses, and young people to respect human life in their everyday life choices. We live in a time of great existential and spiritual disorientation, which creates the need for a moral and spiritual accompaniment for the lay faithful. We need priests and lay people qualified and willing to carry out this ministry.

We cannot separate faith from the defence of dignity and human life. “No anthropology equals that of the Church regarding the human person [...] concerning the person’s dignity, intangibility, sacredness, capacity of education” (S. Paul VI, Sept. 4, 1968). Dignity exists and can never be lost because the individual exists; it extends to the entire person, regardless of his abilities, in any conditions and situations they may be, from conception until natural death. Today, this truth must be explained, narrated, and proclaimed.

As lay people and pastors, we are all called to contribute to an effective and resolute ecclesial action to form one another on issues that seriously challenge the respect for human being’s dignity and life, to **form consciences** and **accompany the faithful** through a consistent discernment with Christian anthropology, with the Magisterium, and the truth of our faith. As Pope Francis reminds us, we have the task of cultivating a wisdom that leads us to “a consideration of the ethical and spiritual quality of life at each of its phases. Think of human life at its conception, human life growing in the womb, life newly born, life as a child, a teenager, an adult... Think of life that has grown old and is ready to pass away – and eternal life!” (*Address to participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Academy for Life*, 25 June 2018).

The extremely serious forms of violation of human dignity and life – such as abortion, euthanasia and assisted suicide, artificial insemination, surrogacy and any other forms of violence and abuse, war, children and adolescents–soldier, terrorism, digital violence and gender ideology, abandonment of the poor and migrants, migrant rejection, lack of safety in the workplace, discarding the elderly – are “a telling sign of an extremely dangerous crisis of the moral sense, which is becoming more and more incapable of distinguishing between good and evil [...]. Given such a grave situation, we need now more than ever to have the courage to look the truth in the eye and to *call things by their proper name*, without yielding to convenient compromises or to the temptation of self-deception.” (*Dignitas infinita*, 47)

“*Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness.*” (Isaiah, 5:20)

One of the defining traits of our society is that it has lost its ability to identify good and evil. Many people see good and evil as two opposites with the same moral weight, or see evil as something necessary for good to happen. Yet, only good has substance and value; evil is a lack of good, not a minor extent of it. Therefore, we urgently need to invest in the formation of consciences. Any confusion between good and evil creates a sense of emptiness and terrible suffering in personal and social life.

2 Foundations and characteristics of Pastoral Care of Human Life



The situations that concern us are challenges. Revive our hope and make it the source of transformative actions.

Amoris laetitia, 57



Foundations upon which, together, we can forge a Pastoral Care of Human Life in every particular Church:

From the logic of performing activities to achieve objectives



To a logic of co-responsible and transformative discipleship

5

Generative accompaniment. This is the virtue that brings into play a constant generative dialogue involving a high level of consideration for the other and results in the ability to listen, as well as in a high level of courage in proposals.

6

The logic of **synergic integration**. It is the ability to think of the good of all, not just making compromises, but creating third solutions that are better than the previous alternatives.

6 Needed aptitudes



- ✓ Promoting the preciousness of human life is urgent
- ✓ Forming and accompanying people is important

PLEASE NOTE:
in pastoral care, we often plan activities carefully, yet overlook the most precious “resource”: high-quality formation and accompaniment of people.

3

Operational consistency. It is the ability to harmonize the difference between the vision you would like to follow and current reality. It allows us to develop possible strategies based on available forces.

4

The mentality of abundance. It is the ability to see the diversity of the members that compose a working or service group as an opportunity, rather than a limitation. Enhancing anyone’s contribution increases the sense of communion, in multiculturalism and historical sensitivity.

A FOUNDATIONS

1

Pastoral action always implies **pastoral theology**, that is, a systematic and practical reflection related to the promotion and defence of human life.

2

Through pastoral action, the Church expresses **God’s** constant and caring intervention in everyone’s life.

3

The **Gospel of life** is not simply a reflection, however new and profound; it is something concrete and personal, for it consists in the proclamation of the very person of Jesus Christ. This aspect must not be forgotten when it comes to defending and protecting every single human life. The expression “**human life**” refers to every single person, who must always be safeguarded, welcomed, and accompanied as a **sacred temple** of God’s presence.

B CHARACTERISTICS



1

Embedded in a dialogue within the Church, worldwide (with competent bodies of the Holy See/Dicasteries), on a particular level (among Bishops' Conferences and dioceses), with other organizations (Universities, Associations, etc.).

2

Attentive to the different phases of human life and to the conditions of social life that lead to inequality and injustice.

6 Needed aptitudes



Leadership for life:

The final result of a pastoral project depends on the formation of pastoral leaders that will take charge of the mission for life.

1

Creative fidelity. It refers to the ability to understand the richness of the traditions of Church teachings, as well as the aptitude to learn from them for the present.

2

Discernment. This is a profound look at reality and at oneself: the human being listens to a reality that surpasses him and through which the Holy Spirit speaks. This means letting the Lord illuminate your conscience with his Spirit to understand what is good and the path to follow. This is why discernment is experienced in prayer, listening to the Word, the Magisterium, and reading the Signs of times. Within the community, this allows the discerning group to listen to what "the Spirit says to the churches" (Revelation, 2:7) at a given time and avoid making decisions only based on merely human criteria.

3

In this call from reality, we now need to identify a personal invitation, a **vocation**, a real call to **conversion**. You see that God himself, through concrete situations, talks to the hearts of people and urges them to take charge of situations, as the Good Samaritan took charge of his brother. We ultimately wonder: what is this situation asking of us?

4

In the fourth moment of planning, the community elaborates the vision, proposes **small practical pastoral experiments** in the direction indicated by discernment and accommodates the needs identified by the community.

5

And finally, the most typical moment of planning: **operational planning**. This is when you set general objectives to be achieved during *processes, events, or given activities*. At the same time, though, it is a kind of planning that is open to the action of the Holy Spirit and therefore requires constant discernment, adjustment, and learning that are necessary to adaptation in the implementation phase.

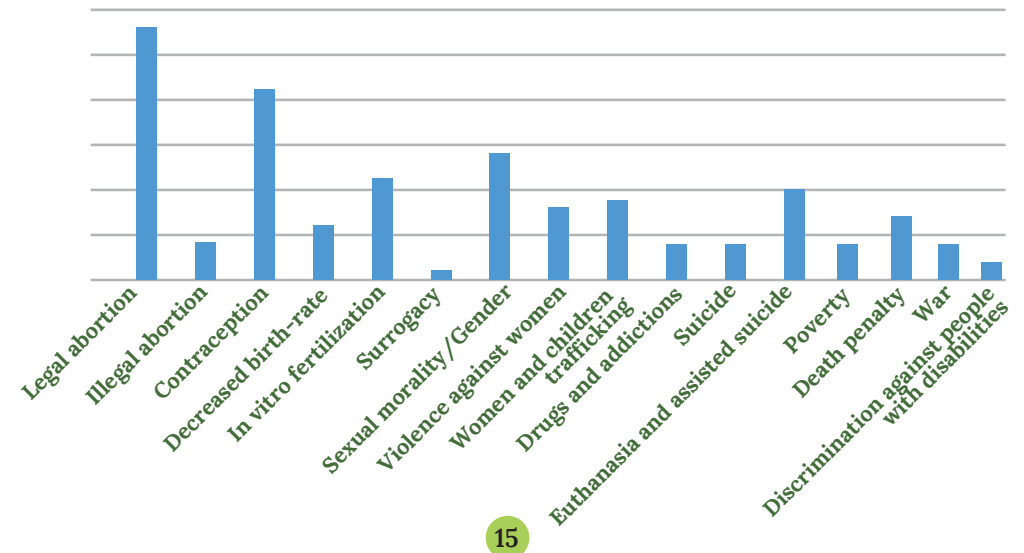
3 The Perception of local Churches

The Reality Principle



Listening to the experience of bishops during *ad limina* visits, along with many other ecclesial realities, made it possible to identify a widespread concern about serious violations of human life, as well as a clear need to look beyond beginning and end-of-life issues, which still remain a priority.

Priorities emerged during *ad limina* visits





Faced with today's "existential peripheries," the Church needs to develop new expertise to accompany young people, families, and communities. It is our duty to help those who live in loneliness, despair, and spiritual emptiness, especially in contexts of extreme poverty. Additionally, the relativization of the value of human life also extends to fields relating to the socio-economic development of many peoples across the world, who witness the "throwaway culture" (e.g., the elderly, violence against women, child abuse, poverty).

We need to courageously work so that all human beings are "recognized and treated with respect and love due to their inalienable dignity." (*Dignitas infinita*, 2)

This principle, which is fully recognizable even by reason alone, represents "a Gospel value that cannot be despised without greatly offending the Creator." (cf. *Dignitas infinita*, 4)

5 A method for pastoral agents



1

The starting point for pastoral planning is **contact with reality** as it is at present, namely the situation. Let us think of Jesus, who walks the streets, sees concrete situations of the people he meets, and understands them from **encounter** and **relation**, not statistics (which is useful, but not exhaustive). For pastoral agents, this phase is a descriptive brainstorming. It is aimed at bringing out reality through the various types of knowledge held by community members, based on their experiences and different perspectives. This way, objectives are not imposed a priori, but eventually result from community discernment.

2

Following the description of the situation, comes a **critical interpretation of reality by the pastoral community** in the light of the faith, the Gospel, and the Magisterium of the Church. In other words, it is about answering the question: what needs arise from this real-life situation? What is this situation telling us as Christians?



“The illusion that moral relativism provides the key for peaceful coexistence is actually the origin of divisions and the denial of the dignity of human beings.” (*Dignitas infinita*, 30)

Each situation is unique. Each person who wants to engage in pastoral care is unique. We need situational intelligence, empathy, intuition, and practical wisdom to implement the project. This is why the proposed planning model is **formative and transformative** not only in terms of results, but also in terms of the people who plan.



**Life is the
founding value**

4 Prerequisites for Pastoral Care of Human Life

Every mission requires servants that are tuned with the Holy Spirit and able to play music together.

Pope Francis, Nov. 5, 2024

- A** The project as an integral transformation process
- B** Building ecclesial intelligence
- C** Integral anthropology: the foundation of co-responsibility
- D** A formative style

A The project as an integral transformation process



In the field of pastoral care, the project of a Pastoral Care of Human Life is to be understood as an integral dynamism in Christian community and ecclesial relations. The aim of planning is not only to reach an agreement on objectives, activities, roles, or content, in a written project. On the contrary, the main purpose is to put in place a **transformation process of those who plan**, a **pastoral conversion**.

4 Prerequisites for Pastoral Care of Human Life



B Building ecclesial intelligence

Let us try to build **ecclesial intelligence** through consistent reflection, dialogue, listening, and observation of a reality where human life is increasingly offended and discarded.

We need to **“think together”** and experience the creative effect of discerning and discussing in the Spirit in any ecclesial community, diocese, parish, school, and in family groups.

Working alone is not effective! At first, the apostles did not have a project; they responded to a vocation, a call that defined their identity as disciples and the content of their mission.

C Integral anthropology: the foundation of co-responsibility



Christian anthropology covers the whole reality of men and women, and this is why it is referred to as “integral.” It makes it possible to identify in the human being the presence of a call, the vocation to conversion, and the following of the Lord Jesus. The following allows any Christian to be a co-responsible missionary disciple of the mission of the Church. Therefore, the integral anthropological view brings everyone’s co-responsibility towards the mission. It is the community as a whole (young people, parents, educators, consecrated persons, priests, and lay people) that, in the exchange of gifts, in differences of formation, tasks, charisms, and degrees, participates in the evangelizing mission of the Church. It is good to remember, in fact, that “Underlying the principle of the common good is respect for the human person as such, endowed with basic and inalienable rights ordered to his or her integral development” (*Laudato si’*, 157).



In many countries, attention to life issues is kept high by pro-life movements, but many of them mainly focus on civil and political action.

Pastoral care is an ecclesial action of the Christian community, lay people, and pastors together, which cannot be delegated and is called to address every situation in which human dignity is threatened, without confining itself to specific areas.

D A formative style



We need a formative style that can combine objectives with a vocation, a vision, and a mission.

The Bishops’ Conferences and dioceses have dedicated Offices for Family and Life: yet, taking pastoral action is not easy.

The proliferation of projects, improvisation, inconsistent objectives, sectorization, and random initiatives can make the pastoral work of formation and education to life ineffective.

What should we do to start this pastoral journey together?

It may be necessary to rethink the pastoral care style we are using, the way we proclaim and help people reflect on values that are no longer talked about within the family. **Nothing can be taken for granted:** today, the values and criteria of discernment grounded on our faith are not transferred. Nor is the inviolable value of human life, from conception to natural death. We need to encourage reflection starting from questions that arise from people’s everyday life.

We need depth, clarity, a simple language accessible to all; yet, we need to be vigilant, since becoming understandable does not mean becoming relativist in the Christian message.