

# Pope St. John Paul II's Challenge to Our Church:

## The Inspiration for *Walking with Moms in Need*



On March 25, 2020, the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord, the Church celebrated the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the papal encyclical *Evangelium vitae* (*The Gospel of Life*). This prophetic document, written by a great saint of our time, Pope John Paul II, reaffirmed the Church's constant teaching on the value and inviolability of every human life.

In this encyclical, the Holy Father explains that the Gospel of Life is at the *heart* of Jesus' saving message to the world. Through the Incarnation of Christ, God reveals to us the dignity of all human life. Each of us is made in the image and likeness of God, reflecting his glory and his imprint. We are therefore called to "respect, defend and promote the dignity of every human person, at every moment and in every condition of that person's life."<sup>1</sup>

*Evangelium vitae* highlights the special and particular role of women in bearing the gift of life to the world. Pope John Paul II offers heartfelt thanks to these "heroic mothers," who, placing their trust in God, "devote themselves to their own family without reserve, who suffer in giving birth to their children and who are ready to make any effort, to face any sacrifice, in order to pass on to them the best of themselves."<sup>2</sup>



Pope John Paul II also outlines the many challenges that expectant mothers may face, including lack of support from the father, financial strains, concerns about her own health or that of her child, and pressures from family and friends. The Holy Father recognizes that an "unborn child is totally entrusted to the protection and care of the woman carrying him or her in the womb."<sup>3</sup> For this reason, it is particularly important that the Church come alongside mothers, offering them encouragement, assistance, and support.

Through Christ, we have received the gift of the Gospel of Life in its fullness. As members of the Church, we are the *people of life and for life*. It is our duty to proclaim the truth of the Gospel of Life to the world, for "*to proclaim Jesus is itself to proclaim life*."<sup>4</sup> Pope John Paul II tasked us with building a culture of life to combat the forces at work in the culture of death. He challenged us:

*With great openness and courage, we need to question how widespread is the culture of life today among individual Christians, families, groups and communities in our Dioceses. With equal clarity and determination we must identify the steps we are called to take in order to serve life in all its truth.*<sup>5</sup>

In honor of *Evangelium vitae*'s 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary and in answer to Pope John Paul II's call, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Committee on Pro-Life Activities launched a nationwide effort entitled, ***Walking with Moms in Need***. Parishes, through the support of their bishops and pastors, are invited to join this effort to increase the Church's outreach and support to pregnant women facing difficult or unexpected pregnancies. This special anniversary has provided the Church with an opportunity to assess, expand, and better communicate resources to pregnant moms and families in need.

Pregnant and parenting moms in need are in our parishes and our neighborhoods, but in desperation, they are turning to other places for help. We know the needs and challenges can be immense for women in difficult pregnancies, especially