



THE DIOCESE OF ROCKVILLE CENTRE

Office of Human Life, Family and Bioethics



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Dear Friends for Life,

THANK YOU FOR WITNESSING TO LIFE

Roe v. Wade may have been overturned, but the legal protection of innocent pre-born children is not guaranteed across the United States. By deconstructing the false premise that abortion is implicitly protected by the Constitution, *Dobbs v. Jackson* merely returned the authority to regulate abortion back to the people and their elected representatives at the state level. *Still* though, there are attempts to codify abortion rights at the federal level (e.g., Women’s Health Protection Act) and other regulatory attempts at the national level to hamper individual states’ protection for the pre-born (e.g. the Executive Order on Securing Access to Reproductive Other Healthcare Services and FDA permission for some retail pharmacies to dispense the chemical abortion pills). And so, there *still* is the need to advocate for life at the federal level—and, therefore, the mission of the March for Life endures.

Many, many thanks to all those who made the annual March for Life pilgrimage to Washington, D.C. in January (and to all those hosting and participating in local activities). We celebrated the sacredness of pre-born human life, witnessed to the unending need to protect it, advocated for just laws that affirm life and strengthen families, and rejoiced in the small but extraordinary victory of the *Dobbs* case. But *still*, there is much work ahead of us.

We are especially grateful to those who continue their daily, weekly, or monthly commitments to defend the innocent pre-born life in prayerful witness, side walk advocacy, counseling, and providing material aid and other pregnancy support. As well, many of you commit to ceaseless prayer and tireless efforts to educate others about the inherent value and inviolable dignity of life—at school, work, or in the legislative offices of our elected officials. *You* are the builders of the “authentic civilization of truth and love” to which Pope St. John Paul II implored us in *Evangelium vitae*. We are honored to walk alongside you.

THE MONTH OF MARCH AND DOWN SYNDROME

Looking forward to March, this is Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month and March 21 is recognized as World Down Syndrome Day. Down Syndrome is the most common chromosomal disorder, marked by the presence of an extra full or partial chromosome 21, hence it is also known as Trisomy 21. It affects one in 700 live births and is associated with certain health problems and developmental disabilities. Although having an extra chromosome 21 is not itself medically life-threatening in most cases, prenatal testing that suggests a Down Syndrome diagnosis (even if not confirmed with further testing) often *is* fatal—because the pre-born are not protected in many states, including New York, and societally we have accepted a eugenic approach to Down Syndrome in the womb.

Make no mistake: not only is it impossible to eliminate suffering in this world, but it is also irrational to believe suffering can be avoided by the intentional destruction of an innocent life made in His Image. Indeed, abortion does not cure Down Syndrome, it deprives the world of a great love and the unexpected joys of raising a special child.

Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you.

~Jeremiah 1:5

VENERABLE JEROME LEJEUNE, A CONTEMPORARY ROLE MODEL

Dr. Jerome Lejeune (1926-1994) was a geneticist and pediatrician in France who discovered the link between Down Syndrome and chromosome 21. He was a dedicated husband and father, whose Catholic faith and love for God, though humble and discreet, animated all his personal and professional endeavors. Moreover, his life story provides not only an exemplary model of Christian living and inspiration for courage in the contemporary battles to defend life, but it also offers a Lenten meditation on dying to self.¹

*Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.
For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will
find it. What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?
Or what can one give in exchange for his life?*

~Matthew 16:24-26

Professor Lejeune's pioneering research led to the discovery of a number of chromosomal abnormalities as well as the important link between folate and spina bifida for which it is now standard care for women to take prenatal vitamins to prevent this life-altering defect. As might be expected, the fruits of his intellectual prowess and hard work were accolades and prestige in the highest academic circles. But he took his medical vocation very seriously, and beyond dedicating his life to research and clinical practice as routine, he poured himself out to his patients and their families without measure, most especially children with Down Syndrome whom he fondly called "my little ones." He was especially disheartened with the realization that his research contributions would lead to methods identifying chromosomal mutations before birth which would then be used to justify selective abortions; he called this "chromosomal racism." Unlike his

¹ For more information on Dr. Lejeune's life, please see Clara Lejeune-Gaymard. *Life is a Blessing*. (Paris: Jerome Lejeune Foundation, 2010) and [Venerable Doctor Jerome Lejeune \(thepathtosainthood.com\)](http://thepathtosainthood.com)

academic counterparts, to him, “Every patient is my brother” and he worked tirelessly to give them the richest lives possible.

An exceptionally gifted scientist, but an even more brilliant defender of human life, Dr. Lejeune knew which was the more coveted path for eternal fulfillment. Upon receiving the William Allen Memorial Award at the meeting of the most prestigious American Society of Human Genetics in 1969, he proclaimed the beginning of life occurs at fertilization and exposed the institutionalization of the culture of death in his lecture entitled “On the Nature of Men.”² The audience response was of stunning silence. Aware of the repercussions for his blunt defense of life, he subsequently told his wife, “Today I lost my Nobel prize in Medicine.”

Undaunted by the professional ostracism that ensued, Dr. Lejeune followed his conscience and continued to testify to the inherent dignity of each unique human life created at fertilization—a fact based squarely in the science he knew so well as an internationally recognized expert in genetics—a truth he would not, indeed *could not*, forsake. For this unpopular position, he faced betrayal, contempt, harassment, humiliation, even physical assault, and ultimately, the figurative death of his professional acclaim.

At the same time, his selfless service to mankind had another dimension that flourished. He had a deep friendship with Pope St. John Paul II, he was loved by his patients, and he exercised a profound compassion for the suffering. Despite the ravages of lung cancer, he was appointed by Pope St. John Paul II and had served exactly thirty-three days as the president of the newly formed Pontifical Academy for Life, when he was called to his eternal reward on Easter Sunday in 1994. His cause for canonization was opened in 2007 and he was declared venerable in 2021 by Pope Francis.

Venerable Jerome Lejeune had a remarkable life that offers an exemplary model for all Christians, particularly for those in the prolife movement and the healthcare and medical research fields. We see his passion, his commitment, his diligence, and his courage which were unremitting even in the face of adversity and abandonment. In his example, he shows us a lived experience that united him to his patients, and even more profoundly to Christ on the Cross. Each of us has talents and opportunities that may be less public and grand, but nevertheless, all these gifts have promise to bring about no less remarkable results—eternal happiness in God’s Kingdom!

Venerable Archbishop Fulton Sheen wrote, “Charity is to be measured, not by what one has given away, but by what one has left.”³ When Dr. Lejeune’s daughter asked him on his deathbed what he wanted to leave his “little ones,” he replied, “No, I don’t mean to neglect them, but, you see, I don’t own very much. Besides, I gave them my whole life, and my life was all I had.”⁴

UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

It is easy to participate in the March for Life and mentally prepare for next year’s event, while forgetting the daily witness that must continue in that interval. Hopefully, the example of Venerable Jerome Lejeune’s life is an inspiration for you to be unafraid in taking even the ostensibly mundane opportunities in your daily activities to defend life.

Please review the myriad of opportunities to pray, educate, witness and support Life that are promoted in this February newsletter. In particular, **40 Days for Life**, a peaceful, prayerful witness in front of abortion

² [ajhg00374-0005.pdf \(nih.gov\)](https://www.ajhg.org/00374-0005.pdf)

³ Fulton J. Sheen, Ph.D., D.D., *Life of Christ*. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1958), 153.

⁴ Lejeune-Gaymard. *Life*, 119.

centers is underway right now. It is the natural extension of witness that puts into concrete action all the excitement inspired by the March for Life.

One simple step is to consider is joining us for our weekly **Rosary for Life**, Fridays at 3:00 p.m. (See [flyer](#) for link or go to our website, www.DRVClife.org.)

Let us also prepare to educate our legislators: to help them see the beauty of life from fertilization to natural death so they might work to oppose legislation and regulations that devalue and destroy human life. Keep up to date by checking our website for more information on upcoming opportunities such as **Lobby Day** to oppose assisted suicide on March 7 and the **International Gift of Life Walk** on March 25.

Finally, remember to proclaim Truth with clarity *and charity*; in the words of Venerable Jerome Lejeune: "I am not fighting people, I am fighting false ideas."⁵

PRAY ALWAYS

As we conclude the month of February dedicated to the Holy Family, let us continue to pray for each other and most especially for families, where the sacredness of life is first learned and nurtured.

Prayer to the Holy Family

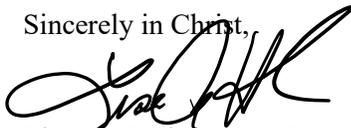
*Lord Jesus Christ, who, being made subject to Mary and Joseph,
did consecrate domestic life by Your unspeakable virtues;*

*Grant that we, with the assistance of both,
may be taught by the example of Your Holy Family
and may attain to its everlasting fellowship.*

*Who lives and reigns, world without end. Amen.*⁶

With the inspiration of Venerable Jerome Lejeune, may you have a fruitful Lenten season!

Sincerely in Christ,



Lisa A. Honkanen, M.D.

⁵ Lejeune-Gaynard, C., *Life*, 47.

⁶ [Prayer to the Holy Family - Prayers - Catholic Online](#)