

A LIVING EXAMPLE

Building a culture of life at home

By Ed Rivet

Pope John Paul II repeatedly issued the clarion call for Catholics to counteract the present culture of death by building a new culture of life. The Church teaches that the foundation of every society, indeed of the whole world's civility, is the family. The love between spouses, and between parents and children, is meant to reflect the life-giving love of the Trinity. This love is at the heart of a culture that sincerely respects the pinnacle of God's creation — human beings.

It is not enough, though, for us to follow the teachings of our faith by refusing to participate in the culture of death. Merely adopting a pro-life mindset is only responding halfway to the call to build a pro-life culture. Think about what the word "build" implies. It is not passive. It involves acquiring materials, using tools and laboring to create something tangible. If we are going to build a culture of life, starting in our homes, we need to be thinking about the materials, tools and labor needed to get the job done.

The bottom line is that building a culture of life will necessarily involve living by example, creating a culture that encompasses both an internal mind-set and a way of daily living.

Of course, prayer is both a tool and a labor of love that will enhance your family's life-affirming attitude and empower you to share that attitude with others. Devotional prayers to the Holy Family can open up graces to the patience, purity and courage that the Holy Family demonstrated. Peaceful homes that foster a purity of heart in children could readily produce a generation of courageous young people who will change the world for life.

The materials provided to build this culture of life also include the teachings of the Church. The guidance provided by Scripture, sacred tradition and magisterial teachings is an incredible gift, but like any gift, it has to be received. The remarkable material we have to build from includes Pope John Paul II's catechesis on the theology of the body. This teaching helps to illuminate what it means to be made in the image and likeness of God. Once you see yourself and every other person from this perspective, a profound reverence for life becomes automatic.

The next observation will perhaps be unexpected and unsettling to some. For husbands and fathers still in their parenting years, an essential tool for building a culture of life is to embrace and practice the Church's teaching regarding procreation. Contraception may *seem* invisible and in no way a negative factor in your marriage, but it is a subtle and insidious poison to marital love and the culture of life.

Having lived a part of my married life on each side of this line, I can assure you that the *freedom* and blessings that come from living in this truth far outweigh the *fear* that drives one to use contraception. Pick up the tool that is natural family planning (NFP) and live the virtues necessary to practice it. You will develop a deeper love for your wife, and respect for life within practice.

Finally, let your children see you do something that puts your pro-life convictions into action: Donate items to a pregnancy resource center; attend a pro-life event or pray outside an abortion clinic; or contact your representatives about an important piece of legislation. Putting our faith into action in these ways creates a lasting impression about our role in shaping society.

Indeed, building takes effort. Whether you are studying the theology of the body, practicing NFP or supporting a life-affirming ministry, learn from the model of St. Joseph. He knew well the admonition of Psalm 127:1; which states, "Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it." Joseph relied on spiritual strength as much as the work of his hands to provide for his family. Your living example will serve your own family's well-being as well as that of your community, nation and world.



ED RIVET writes from Michigan, where he is a member of St. Peter Council 6534 in Eaton Rapids. He has served as legislative director for Right to Life of Michigan since 1988 and has taught natural family planning with his wife, Michelle, since 1998.