

Amen: Lessons learned about human life

Growing up in a close-knit family of 10, we learned early on about Catholic social teaching.

Mom and Dad were intensely involved in parish food drives at the holidays for as long as I can remember. They chaired the parish blood drive, at which I volunteered/was drafted to help with set-up and take-down. Of course, as soon as I was eligible to donate blood, that was expected, too.

For many years, their house was the repository for donated items for a program for unwed mothers. Fortunately, most of us had grown up and moved out by that time, so upstairs bedrooms could be converted to “warehouse space.” Their washer and dryer ran nearly nonstop with donated onesies and other baby clothes. Then clothes, diapers and other necessities were assembled into layettes that gave new moms a start when their babies were born. The program continued to provide mothers with support through monthly meetings, mentoring and additional diapers and supplies as needed.

Our home was “Positively Catholic.” We went to Catholic elementary and high schools, while Dad worked as a public school teacher.

Our parish was the center of a lot of family activity. We learned the tenets of our faith and what it meant to live out that faith in the world from our little suburban Chicago church.

My parents did not simply share church teachings about the inherent dignity of every human life - they were great examples. As a U.S. senator recently accused a

judicial nominee, Catholic dogma “lived loudly” within Harold and Therese Gunty.

From her chair in the living room of their small home, Mom coordinated the parish St. Vincent de Paul Society, checking on local families that needed assistance and ensuring they had their immediate and long-term needs met. Other than those who occasionally - and loudly - disagreed with his ball-and-strike calls as a Little League umpire, I don't think I ever found anyone who had a bad word to say about my father.

My folks showed the face of Christ to those they met.

They instilled respect for life in us. For example, my eldest sister continues to work with the program for unwed mothers, and another sister volunteers with her parish St. Vincent de Paul conference.

As we mark Respect Life Month in October, we have a chance to reflect on the church's embrace of all human life from conception to natural death. That “seamless garment,” first coined by Chicago Cardinal Joseph Bernardin about 35 years ago, observes rightly that so many issues touch on the inherent dignity of every person.

We must especially attend to the vulnerable at especially fragile times. The unborn child in the womb and the terminal patient considering physician assisted suicide need our constant vigilance. When our society allows people to abort a child or pressure an ailing person to take a lethal dose of medicine, we must speak out against these perils. At the same time, we must work to end poverty and oppose injustice, violence in our cities and oppression of refugees.

Similar opportunities abound. To highlight the sanctity of all human life, several of our parishes will participate in Life Chains in Eldersburg, Jarrettsville, Taneytown, Westminster and elsewhere to pray for a culture of life Oct. 1. More than 1,500 cities and towns across the country will bear that witness to the community.

My family had a boots-on-the-ground respect for life. You can too: join one of these Life Chains or find a way to stand up for the dignity of every human.

