

Protect the vulnerable

By Christopher Guntz

editor@CatholicReview.org

All our recent popes have reminded us to care for the vulnerable among us. But, as the scholar asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” we might ask ourselves, “Who is vulnerable?”

Let’s start with the easy ones: The unborn and the elderly.

Babies not yet born are incredibly vulnerable, because they can be aborted, can be harmed by alcohol or drug use during the mother’s pregnancy, and can be adversely affected if the mother is poor and does not have access to good prenatal care. Some say the baby is “just tissue” and should not be protected because it cannot sustain itself. I recall that even when my own kids were born, they could not do much to sustain themselves at first. A 9-month-old can’t do much more than scoot along the floor, drool a lot and get messy when they are fed. But no one can deny that “tissue” is actually a child.

The elderly deserve protection because as they age and are more vulnerable to illness, there are some who would deny them care. Some say, “They lived their life. They cannot have any quality of life, so they are better off if we let them take a lethal dose of pills.” An easy way to kill one’s self does not “take care” of people. Read Lois Lowry’s “The Giver” or see the movie of the same title about how a society fares when it values neither the youngest or oldest, however frail they may be.

Then we look at the poor: the homeless, the unemployed and underemployed, the folks working two minimum-wage jobs to feed their family. Also, those who work so closely hand-to-mouth that they cannot afford to take an unpaid sick day to care for an ill child or for themselves.

Then there are those who flee persecution in their homelands. They travel months to live in a refugee camp, only to wait many more months to see if the U.N. will approve their refugee status to begin a vetting process to move to a new country in

the hope of a better life.

Then there are the folks living in our cities surrounded by violence. When your own little world tells you that no life is valuable – when drugs and guns take our teens and young people – we all feel vulnerable.

Then there are the folks who seem better off, living comfortably with a roof over their heads and food to eat. But they're vulnerable, too – vulnerable to a culture soaked in violence, sex and chaos. No wonder some of these folks succumb to alcohol, drugs, despair and depression.

Then there are the first responders and military, putting themselves on the front lines and risking their lives every day.

We could keep going and going. Everyone is vulnerable in some way. Within the human condition, all are weak, all are sinners.

In Matthew's Gospel, we are reminded that when we give food or drink to the hungry or thirsty; when we welcome the stranger or visit those ill or in prison, we serve Jesus in the "least of these." (Speaking of which, check the third installment of our "Least of These" series, focusing on education of children with special needs, on pages 12-15.)

It seems a daunting task, and as I'm fond of reminding people, you can't save the whole world. But you can do your part. Look for the vulnerable in your community. Choose one or two segments of those who are most vulnerable and find a way to protect them.

Read more commentary [here](#).