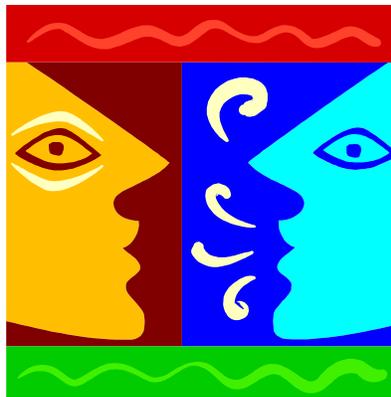


**A MODEL FOR SPONSORING  
A CATHOLIC LIFE AND JUSTICE DIALOGUE**



**Materials  
Recommendations  
Evaluations**

*Developed by*  
**Louisiana Catholic Conference  
Dioceses of Louisiana  
Jesuits of the New Orleans Province**

## BACKGROUND

*This booklet describes a process developed to begin a genuine dialogue with leaders of the Catholic pro-life and social justice movements in the dioceses of Louisiana and the New Orleans Province of the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits.) The **Life and Justice Dialogue** was sponsored by the Louisiana Catholic Conference and organized by staff of the Louisiana diocesan Justice and Peace, Catholic Charities, and Pro-Life Offices and the Social Ministries coordinator for the Jesuits of the New Orleans Province. Funding for the Dialogue was provided by Roundtable for Social Action, Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New Orleans and the Jesuits of the New Orleans Province. This funding allowed the sponsoring groups to charge only \$15 to each participant.*

*The Life and Justice Dialogue was born in response to the tensions and divisions that became apparent within the Catholic community during the 2004 elections. This retreat was designed to model a process that Catholic leaders in the social justice and pro-life ministries could use in their own ministries to promote a spirituality of dialogue.*

*The two-day dialogue was held in March 2007 at the Jesuit Spirituality Center in Grand Coteau. Planners felt that a peaceful retreat-like setting would contribute to peaceful discussions, and this proved to be the case. Seventy-seven lay and religious leaders attended including Bishop Roger Morin of the Archdiocese of New Orleans, two deacons, seven religious, fourteen priests, and two representatives from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (who acted as observers). One of the observers remarked upon the group's civility despite dealing with such weighty, often emotionally-charged issues.*

*The dialogue was the first step of an experiment to build some common ground between two groups of Catholics passionately committed to their causes. There are a number of components that could be changed about the process to make it more successful for groups that want to offer a similar experience. These suggestions are offered in this booklet. The experiment is now continuing at the diocesan and Jesuit province level as we seek ways for Catholics to act together in the public arena.*

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE DIALOGUE**

At the outset of the Dialogue, participants were told that they would have the opportunity to...

- Experience a spirituality of dialogue, i.e., one that is humble; respectful of scripture, Catholic teaching and tradition; accepting of differing perspectives; and searching for a full-bodied expression of our Catholic identity.
- Clearly articulate their perspectives and convictions on pro-life and social justice issues with the assurance of a receptive hearing by those whose perspectives may be different.
- Demonstrate their willingness to search for common ground.
- Reflect on the process used in the retreat and construct from it a model that can be used in their own ministries
- Experience a setting and context that is prayerful and conducive to reconciliation.

## **REQUIREMENTS FOR PARTICIPATION**

Before registering, participants were asked to make a commitment to...

- demonstrate a willingness to admit that they don't know everything and an openness to learn from each other;
- embrace scripture, Catholic teaching and tradition as a means of creating a common language;
- be patient with the process;
- work toward an ability to see through the eyes of the other.

## SAMPLE LETTER OF INVITATION TO PARTICIPANTS

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

You are invited to attend a Catholic Dialogue seeking common ground on Catholic pro-life and social justice teaching and practice. The Catholic Dialogue is a two day retreat for Catholic leaders. It is being held at the Jesuit Spirituality Center at St. Charles College in Grand Coteau on October 18 and 19, 2005. The Catholic Dialogue is sponsored by the Louisiana Catholic Conference with the participation of each Louisiana diocese, the Jesuits of the New Orleans Province and their lay colleagues. The cost of the retreat is \$15 per person. Attendance is limited and is by invitation only.

The retreat is made possible through grants from the Roundtable, the Society of Jesus, New Orleans Province (The Jesuits) and Catholic Charities - New Orleans.

The Catholic Dialogue is a response to the tensions that became apparent within the Catholic community during the 2004 elections. Catholics are passionate about our chosen ministries and those passions can create divisions. This retreat will model a process that Catholic leaders in the social justice and pro-life ministries can use in their own parish and diocese to promote a spirituality of dialogue.

Participants must commit to a willingness to admit that we don't know everything and an openness to learn from one another; to embrace scripture, Catholic teaching and tradition as a means of creating a common language; to be patient with the process; and to work toward an ability to see through the eyes of the other. Much of our Catholic identity is based on the belief that we are made in the image and likeness of God and is articulated in the first principle of Catholic Social Teaching - the Life and Dignity of the Human Person.

Please join us on this retreat; the first of its kind.

## **GROUND RULES AGREED ON BY PARTICIPANTS**

*As part of the initial small group session, each group was asked to develop a set of ground rules that the entire group of participants should abide by during the Dialogue. The following set of ground rules were agreed to by all participants.*

*We share the common ground of Catholic Social Teaching.*

1. Ground the Dialogue in spirituality.
  - Begin each session with prayer.
  - See Christ in others
  - Give the Holy Spirit time to work in the silence.
  - Enter in with love.
  
2. Commit to an atmosphere that is nonjudgmental, non-threatening and respectful.
  - This includes both verbal and non-verbal communication
  - Don't interrupt
  - Avoid stereotypes, labels, generalizations, presuppositions
  - Audit "sidebar" comments
  - Be appropriately passionate
  - Ask for clarification (e.g., vocabulary)
  - Keep focus on the issue
  - Be succinct
  
3. Use Active Listening techniques
  - Listen respectfully
  - Imagine yourself in the other's shoes
  - Seek first the truth in others
  
4. Lighten Up!

## DIALOGUE AGENDA

### DAY ONE

Time	Activity	Leader/ Presenter
9:30	Arrival - Coffee and pastries	
10:00	Opening Prayer	Committee Member
10:15	Introduction about how the Dialogue came about, including LCC's role and interest	Danny Loar
10:20	Briefly review agenda	Facilitator
10:25	Briefly articulate expectations	Facilitator
10:35	Presentation: <i>"Epistemological Humility and The Elements of True Dialogue"</i>	Facilitator
10:50	Small groups: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Introductions</li> <li>▪ Sharing experiences of positive and negative dialogues.</li> <li>▪ What hinders true dialogue?</li> <li>▪ What fosters true dialogue?</li> <li>▪ Based on this, what ground rules to we want to recommend for this retreat? (put recommendations on flip chart)</li> </ul>	Small groups led by facilitators
11:50	Large group - Develop a set of ground rules	Facilitator
12:10	Lunch	
1:30	Panel Presentation on the personal experience of coming to understand and embrace "the other"; sharing their stories of struggle and peace with bridging commitments to both pro-life and social justice. The panel included a pastor from a parish of very poor migrants, a birth mother long involved in the social justice movement, and a post-abortion counselor working with low-income women.	Panel

Time	Activity	Leader/ Presenter
3:00	Small group discussions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What are your basic convictions about to the Pro-Life/Social Justice teachings of the Church?</li> <li>▪ What are the values you share in common with those whose convictions are different from yours?</li> <li>▪ How do you sense you differ?</li> <li>▪ How can these differences be bridged?</li> </ul>	Small group facilitators
4:00	Break	
4:15	Large Group Sharing focusing on... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ How was the previous discussion helpful?</li> <li>▪ What was difficult about it?</li> </ul>	Facilitators
5:20	Preparation for liturgy	
5:30	Liturgy <i>Recommendations:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>Include a litany of contrition as part of the penitential rite (included in this booklet)</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Incorporate a prayer for healing into liturgy</i></li> </ul>	Celebrated by a priest participant.
6:30	Dinner	
8:00	Social During this time, participants will be asked to write down one thing they've taken away from the day. These will be posted.	

## DAY TWO

Time	Activity	Leader/ Presenter
8:00	Breakfast	
9:00	Morning Prayer	Committee member
9:10	Presentation on <i>Catholic Moral Theology and its Relationship to the Issues We Face Today</i> (30 minute talk; 15 minutes for questions)	Moral Theologian
10:00	Break	
10:15	Presentation on Common Ground Distinction between position and interest as we move forward	Facilitator
10:45	Small Group Discussions – What is Our Common Ground? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What new possibilities do we see in our search for common ground on these issues?</li> <li>▪ What are the values at work here?</li> <li>▪ Where are we still fuzzy?</li> </ul>	
11:30	Report backs and naming common ground	Facilitator
11:45	Next steps – where do we go from here in our dioceses and/or provinces? Each	LCC Director
11:55	Prayer Service	Led by a participant
Noon	Lunch, then depart	

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGES IN THE AGENDA

Based on the evaluations from participants and our debriefing meeting, the steering committee would consider making the following changes in the agenda:

1. The Dialogue should be lengthened by 1-2 hours to allow for time for an individual dialogue between a pro-life and a social justice leader. This dialogue should be well structured, with specific questions and time limits for each answer. Some suggested questions are:
  - a) *Describe how you first became involved in this movement.*
  - b) *What are the convictions and values that keep you involved?*
  - c) *What is your understanding of the movement that I'm in?  
(pro-life or social justice)?*At the end of the conversation, each "listener" should describe to their partner what they heard the other saying. Ideally, this should be done at the end of the first day. In addition to the activity above, participants should be encouraged to pair off during meals with a person from the other ministry. Different questions could be suggested to help move the discussion and understanding along.
2. It might be helpful to have the moral theology talk earlier in the process so that there is a common understanding of church teaching. This would allow for the more academic/theological presentation to take place before the more subjective panel's witness presentations.
3. Too much time may have been spent in the early stages setting the ground rules and reviewing expectations. Participants came ready to discuss issues, and it took a long time to get to that point.
4. A valuable final exercise would have been to strive to reach a common legislative agenda for the entire group. Alternatively, this could be done at the province or diocesan level as a follow-up meeting.
5. Provide more time for individual or group prayer and add a liturgy to the second day.

**DIFFERENCES BETWEEN DEBATE AND DIALOGUE**

*In order to emphasize that the goal of the retreat was to DIALOGUE with each other, not DEBATE each other, the facilitator led the entire group in a process of identifying the differences between the two approaches. They identified the following:*

<b>DEBATE</b>	<b>DIALOGUE</b>
Win-lose	Win-Win
My point of view	Listening
Disprove the other	Understand the other
Don't want to be changed	Open to change
Techniques	Spirituality
Anger	Relationship
No humor	Humor
Argue the point	Reiterate to understand
Win	Humble and open

**THE BASIC PROCESS FOR REACHING COMMON GROUND**

The facilitator presented a simplified three step process that individuals and groups can use to begin to narrow differences and move toward common ground:

- A. *Speak*
- B. *Listen*
- C. *Demonstrate understanding*

Each individual or group on differing sides must do all three steps, sometimes numerous times until real understanding is reached.

## SAMPLE EVALUATION FORM

Objective	Definitely Achieved	Somewhat Achieved	Did Not Achieve
1) Participants will experience a spirituality of dialogue, i.e.; one that is humble, respectful of scripture and Catholic teaching and tradition, accepting of differing perspectives.			
2) Participants will have to opportunity to clearly articulate their perspectives and convictions on pro-life and social justice issues with the assurance of a receptive hearing by those whose perspectives and convictions may be different.			
3) Participants will demonstrate their willingness to search for common ground.			
4) Participants will be able to reflect on the process used in the retreat and construct a model that can be replicated.			
5) Participants will experience a setting and context that is prayerful and conducive to reconciliation.			
Objective	Definitely Helpful	Somewhat Helpful	Not Helpful
1) Overview of the elements of true dialogue			
2) Panel presentation			
3) Small group sessions			
4) Time for private reflection			
5) Meal times and social			
6) Presentation on Catholic moral and social teaching			
7) presentation on common ground			
8) Concluding planning sessions			

## SOME HELPFUL COMMENTS FROM EVALUATIONS

The following sampling of suggestions from the participants' evaluations could be helpful for groups interested in sponsoring a similar dialogue.

- *“Provide for some way to express respect for persons who have strong opinions different from each other.”*
- *“Have handouts of common rules with questions for small group discussions prepared ahead of time”*
- *“More time for reflection”*
- *“Provide factual information on issues similar to or expanding on the presentation of Fr. LaBove’s (moral theology). However conflict resolution presented by Fr. Doussan is vital.”*
- *“We need more time to get our positions stated clearly. There needs to be more context and less process. More time for diocesan planning. “*
- *“Define pro-life in terms of more than just abortion: euthanasia, contraception, stem-cell issues, etc. that make up the entire pro-life spectrum. More guidance on implementing as part of electoral process.”*
- *“Longer-more time to come to trust, more time for understanding, more time to find common ground”*
- *“More discussions of the ‘hot button’ issues”*
- *“Less time spent on establishing group rules; I feel that we could have had other discussions instead of time allotted for this process”*

- *“Add one day between 1 and 2 to expand/increase and rotate dialogue groups.”*
- *“Consider the floor open with debate from 2 sides-which will lead to an opportunity to establish common ground and reconciliation.”*
- *“Just more time...relationships will help to open the floor to deeper discussion.”*
- *“Larger group with more representation from other Diocese-functional units. One day, 9AM-5PM...and do it quarterly!”*
- *“It sure would have been much easier to know who was present at this event at the beginning. I have spent this conference still wondering who is who and what the respective jobs were/are”*
- *“Sorry, I didn’t think your handouts were “balanced” – (particularly referring to the Fr. John Kavanaugh article, which is included in this booklet)”*
- *“Persons have opportunity to express presentations; Social Justice-more concrete-more specifically, only abortion was concrete. “Poll” persons on their acceptance of teaching (social) i.e., capitalism, immigration, etc”*
- *“Provide reading material before the session, add more info on Church’s teaching (Fr. LaBove could have gone for 2 more hours-very interesting!)”*
- *“Define certain terminology so we can be on the same page”*
- *“Better preparation/training for small group facilitators-some were excellent, some not.”*

## PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

**PEOPLE PLANNING:** The most important element of hosting a successful Dialogue is getting the right mix of people involved. The planning committee makes the following recommendations:

- **Planning Group.** Just like the participants in the process, the group planning the Dialogue also needs time to get to know and trust each other. They need to abide by the same requirements for participation expected of each of the Dialogue participants. They must be viewed by participants as being of “one heart.” A sufficient number of face-to-face planning meetings need to be held so that the planning group has the time and space to get to know one another.
- **Participants.** Participants should be selected by the planning committee and presented with the requirements for participation prior to accepting the invitation to join the Dialogue. An open invitation to the Dialogue could potentially be an opening to a much less productive Dialogue. The Louisiana Planning Committee agreed to invite participants who they knew would be able to listen and not feel the need to debate during the Dialogue. This meant that some of the strongest leaders from each movement needed to be excluded from the event because their passion for their cause may have impeded their ability to enter into an open dialogue.
- **Facilitator.** The Louisiana Life and Justice Dialogue owed its’ success to a superb facilitator. The qualities and skills that he brought to the process, and that should be sought in other facilitators included:
  - 1) an excellent ability to do and teach conflict resolution.
  - 2) a thorough understanding of Catholic social teaching.
  - 3) the ability to quickly gain the trust of ALL participants.
  - 4) outstanding group facilitation skills
- **Panelists.** The panelists were chosen because of their lived experience of commitment to both the pro-life and social justice movements and their ability to integrate the values and positions of both movements in their personal lives and their ministries.
- **Moral Theologian.** Search for someone who will take a more practical than academic approach to Church moral teaching.
- **Group Facilitators.** Unbiased facilitators to lead small groups should be trained prior to the Dialogue. Training should not only include the process, but techniques for turning debate into dialogue.

**A DIOCESAN PLANNING MODEL.** The following recommendations were developed by the USCCB Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities to be used by groups planning a diocesan-wide Dialogue.

**Initiate Dialogue Retreat**

1. Social Justice and/or Pro-Life staff of hosting diocese present model to bishop, including nominations for the planning committee. When approval of model and committee members is obtained, planning begins.
2. Finalize 2 co-chairpersons and 4-6 planning committee members, consisting of half social justice and half pro-life representatives.

**Planning Committee Tasks**

*may be assigned to individual members, but final results approved by full committee*

1. Set date and time of dialogue.
2. Set and approve Goals and Objectives of the Dialogue.
3. Approve all speakers.
4. Create agenda.
5. Gather and assemble Dialogue Packet, including agenda, articles of interest, prayers, resource lists, etc.
6. Promote event to invite-only audience of diocesan staff, religious provincials, state Catholic conference directors, etc.

**Individual Committee Member Tasks**

1. Funding: Grant or participant fee (Funding through a grant may not be possible, so alternative sources may have to be researched and obtained.)
2. Registration
3. Housing
4. Meals
5. Sacramental arrangements (Mass, Reconciliation, etc.)

## SCRIPTURE FOR REFLECTION

### [Isaiah 49:8-15](#)

Thus says the LORD: In a time of favor I answer you, on the day of salvation I help you; and I have kept you and given you as a covenant to the people, to restore the land and allot the desolate heritages, saying to the prisoners: Come out! To those in darkness: Show yourselves!

Along the ways they shall find pasture, on every bare height shall their pastures be. They shall not hunger or thirst, nor shall the scorching wind or the sun strike them; for he who pities them leads them and guides them beside springs of water.

I will cut a road through all my mountains, and make my highways level. See, some shall come from afar, others from the north and the west, and some from the land of Syene.

Sing out, O heavens, and rejoice, O earth, break forth into song, you mountains. For the LORD comforts his people and shows mercy to his afflicted.

But Zion said, "The LORD has forsaken me; my Lord has forgotten me." Can a mother forget her infant, be without tenderness for the child of her womb? Even should she forget, I will never forget you.

### [John 8:1-11](#)

Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. But early in the morning he arrived again in the temple area, and all the people started coming to him, and he sat down and taught them.

Then the scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery and made her stand in the middle. They said to him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?" They said this to test him, so that they could have some charge to bring against him.

Jesus bent down and began to write on the ground with his finger. But when they continued asking him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her."

Again he bent down and wrote on the ground. And in response, they went away one by one, beginning with the elders. So he was left alone with the woman before him. Then Jesus straightened up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She replied, "No one, sir." Then Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on do not sin any more."

## ARTICLE FOR REFLECTION

### The Values Vote

By Fr. John F. Kavanaugh, SJ |

as it appeared in America: The National Catholic Weekly NOVEMBER 29, 2004

First, a confession: I couldn't do it. I wanted to vote for one of the two nominees from the dominant parties, but I just could not offer my vote to either. I went for the Green candidate, since he was for universal health care and conservation policies that 20 years from now we will all wish had been enacted. This might make Republicans happy, since I did not vote for Kerry. And it might anger the Democrats, since I threw my vote away, as they say.

And yet I think Democrats and Republicans, indeed America itself, have their own confessions to make.

*America's Moral Schizophrenia.* The split between the Republican and Democratic parties in many ways embodies the fatal division that individuals make when they separate their personal lives from their cultural and political worlds. Some Republicans seem to think that reproduction issues are the only moral issues. Some Democrats seem to think that reproduction is the only area that is exempt from moral questioning. Both sides are wrong.

And they both have become specialists in the art of denial. What they miss is that all politics involves morality. Every part of life is a moral arena. Our problem in the United States is partial amorality: we are fiercely committed only to certain selected ethical issues, and we steadfastly deny that other ethical problems even exist. What is more, we strangely isolate the personal realm from the social. But sexual expression and reproduction are never merely private choices. These choices themselves influence and are influenced by our social and economic environment. People who trumpet capitalism and individualism fail to realize that

those very forces drive human choices about sex and child-bearing. Others who trumpet sexual autonomy and private choice over the fate of the unborn fail to realize that those very values legitimize pro-choice wars and self-interested individualism.

The mindless rhetoric of both sides was one reason why so many were relieved that the political campaign was finally over. The problem was not that people were tired of rational argument and informed data. They were just frustrated with the inane repetition of slogans and distortions. Extreme ideologists, like Pavlov's dog, salivate at the sound-bite signal of their preferred taste. The Pavlovian right gives George W. Bush credit for everything. The Pavlovian left gives him credit for nothing. The right thinks him an angel; to the left he is a devil. Until the right and left muster the courage to be a little self-critical of their own ideologies, the moral wound afflicting America will only widen.

*Republican Religiosity.* It is amazing how far removed from the Gospel are what pass for "Gospel values" today. If you think that concern for food, clothing and shelter for the least among us is some kind of liberal pap, you do not read the Gospel, much less believe it. If you think that the pride of a "self-made man" or nation, that amassing of wealth in the hands of a few or that the arrogance of power have nothing to do with evangelical faith, maybe you should question what you put your faith in. If the use of embryonic stem cells and cloned humans is wrong, does privatizing it for the profit of corporations make moral sense? If respect for human life is indeed shown by concern for unborn human beings, is it not also shown when one feeds the hungry or removes people from death row or questions the killing of innocents under the rubric of "collateral damage"? The common thread between left and right is the belief that there are acceptable reasons to kill humans. They just have different candidates for the killing.

*Democratic Delusions.* I was once in your party. I still look for any Democrat who might be aware of the great dis-ease that is

abortion on demand in our society. If you could make your tent as large as the Republicans do, you might win some elections. But the most oppressed faction within your party is the Democrats for Life. You do not want them even to have place at the table, much less to offer an opinion. You make abortion a litmus test to run for office, to sit as judge and even to be taken seriously. You do not want to debate about the direction of the party, but that is the very debate you must enter. You may think all women, all the poor, all the working class support you. But you have broken trust with millions of them, offering them only a combination of Republicanism lite and abortionism heavy.

On my reading, John Kerry is a decent and smart man. Kerry, however, gave more attention to the gun lobby than to people who think human fetuses might merit as much consideration as a dog. And yet in the United States, second-trimester humans do not even have the regulative protection we give to laboratory mice. A hard-core minority, chanting “back-alley abortions” and “teenagers with hangers,” has so entranced the party that a Democratic candidate dares not entertain the possibility of a national consensus on at least making abortions “rare,” as Clinton and the party used to say. This minority is so rigid it would rather sacrifice the careers of people like Dick Gebhardt and Tom Daschle at the altar of the abortion lobby than question its dogma.

“Moral values” – even the moral values unacknowledged as such – indeed influenced the 2004 presidential election. Pundits have offered explanations ranging from the ridiculous to the helpful, from the preposterous to the plausible, usually spun to their own ideologies. If the two parties do their own self-serving interpretation, it will be an opportunity missed. Democrats and Republicans will never learn as long as each side presumes the other to be either moronic theocrats or secularist do-gooders.

*John F. Kavanaugh, S.J., is a professor of philosophy at St. Louis University in St. Louis, Mo.*

## LITANY OF CONTRITION USED IN LITURGY

*written by Fr. John Powell, S.J.*

The response to each prayer statement is: "*Lord, forgive us for not recognizing You.*"

Lord God, who is pregnant without a husband, a child with no parents, and whose days are long and lonely, whose nights are dark with despair . . .

Lord God, who lives in a tenement and combs through the garbage cans of others to find the food to stay alive . . .

Lord God, who cannot read or write, who lives on welfare and whose name no one knows. . .

Lord God, whose body is heavy with child and whose heart is heavy with grief . . .

Lord God, tiny in your mother's warm womb but about to die because there is no room for you in the Inn of our world . . .

Lord God, who is cold and shivering in the wintertime slums, who knows no warmth in his house or in his heart . . .

Lord God, who toys are broken bottles and rusty tin cans, who is called a "burden" to society . . .

Lord God, who is deformed, whose body is twisted, who overhears the suggestion that he never should have been allowed to live . . .

Lord God, whose body is adult but whose mind is that of a small child, who does not understand why others are impatient or derisive . . .

Lord God, whose body reeks of pungent odors because he has no place to bathe, whom people avoid because he is uneducated, unskilled, unwanted . . .

Lord God, who is a terrified child yet carrying a baby under her heart, and who is tempted to take the easy way out . . .

Lord God, who is bent under the memory that she has taken the life of her unborn child because someone said it was the only thing to do...

Lord God, who was laid off last week, who cannot pay the rent or feed his kids, and whose wife is carrying another child . . .

Lord God, whose vision is blurred with age, whose hands are shaky and memory faded, whose skin is wrinkled and whose bones ache . . .

Lord God, in the twilight of life, who watches the traffic of life whiz by without anyone ever stopping to ask how you are . . .

Lord God, whose only warmth is raw liquor, whose only joy is the sting of a hypodermic needle . . .

Lord God, who cries bitter tears over the daily slaughter of the holy innocents, but who is afraid to speak out, afraid to experience the pro-life loneliness, who hides behind a thousand excuses . . .

Lord God, whose belly is huge and clothing stretched with new life, but whose eyes are sad and empty . . .

Lord God, who is in pain, twisting and sweating on a lonely bed, and who knows that no one will come with concern, knowing that no one cares . . .

Lord God who is blind, whose days are darker than our nights, who gropes through life and who wonders what a day in Autumn must be like, who wonders about green grass and blue skies ...

Lord God, who feels that he is without voice, without power, without any ability to shape his own life or destiny, who has "given up" on life . .

Lord God, who feels trapped in a life of pain, who can see only the escape of suicide ...

Lord God, who just couldn't take it any longer, and who walks the streets again, selling her body and fearing that she is also selling her eternal soul. . .

Lord God, who is so poor that he claims the discarded things of others as his treasures.

Lord God, who is imprisoned in a world of addiction, a snake pit of bottles and pills and needles, and who sees no way out . . .

Lord God, whose spouse has left you with small children still to be raised . . .

Lord God, who dreads waking up in the morning know that every day will be a carbon copy of yesterday, with all its depression and the lonely ache for something more. . . .

Lord God, on whose child's body are the bruises of abuse, on whose soul are the scars of neglect . . .

Lord God, who is punished for or burdened by the color of his skin . . .

Lord God, who thinks that love is only a word because real love has never touched his life or warmed his world . . .

Lord God, who has come into my life needing the warmth of my heart and the touch of my helping hands, and who has gone away unnoticed because I was too taken up with my own concerns . . .

Lord God, who has come into my life through others wanting to help me, and who has found me too proud, too aloof to admit that I need help

Lord God, who has stirred in my heart while I was distracted, looking elsewhere for meaning and satisfaction, and who was met by my coldness and rudeness . . .

Lord God, who lives in me, loves in me and through me, who walks patiently after me...

Lord God, who comes into my life each day in a thousand different faces, in a thousand voices, challenging me with a thousand invitations to make my life an act of love . . .

*Lord, have mercy            Christ, have mercy            Lord, have mercy.*

May Almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and lead us into the awareness of His presence in all the days of our lives. Amen

## **The Louisiana Planning Committee**

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