

Building a Culture of Life, One Student at a Time: ALL's Culture of Life Studies Program's New Approach to Pro-Life Education

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In November 2014, the country anxiously watched as Brittany Maynard, a brain cancer patient, told the world that she had the right to die. The media portrayed Brittany as a hero—a woman who took a stand against cancer. Instead of encouraging her in her fight against cancer, the public accepted her decision to end her own life as a fundamental right. Brittany was turned into a poster child for the pro-euthanasia movement almost overnight.

As we witness sad stories like Brittany's unfold, we ask ourselves what could have been done to prevent such a tragedy from happening. Since today's public has been conditioned to simply accept suicide as a "right," is it possible to reverse such an attitude? Euthanasia is rapidly becoming the next major crisis for the pro-life movement. But the real question is, are we ready? Is the next generation of pro-life leaders ready?

It comes as no surprise that young people are besieged with threats against life through media, the Internet, movies, books, and television. The culture of death has infiltrated every form of media with the lies of moral relativism which devalue human life and scoff at religion. As the sense of truth becomes muddled in the midst of the constant stream of anti-life messages, it is no wonder that students—even pro-life students—are struggling to assert themselves and speak on behalf of the truth. Some students, even if they know the truth, become overwhelmed with the apathy of their generation. Young people are starving for the truth and for solid formation. If we want our culture to become a culture of life, our focus needs to be on the education of youth.

Taking action through education

In response to the growing need for pro-life formation, American Life League, one of the largest pro-life grassroots organizations in America, launched the Culture of Life Studies Program—an educational initiative focused on preparing school-aged children and teens to be the next generation of pro-life activists. Unlike other pro-life education programs, the Culture of Life Studies Program is designed specifically for use within the normal school curriculum and teaches young people how to recognize and respond to threats to life.

Young people in today's society not only need a solid standard education, they also need instruction in how to deal with the culture. What good is teaching children to read the Church fathers, the philosophy of the ancients, and world literature if they are not going to do anything with the knowledge they have earned?

As Saint John Paul II beautifully points out in *Evangelium Vitae*, education plays a key role in teaching young people to recognize the sacredness and value of human life and in creating a foundation for the "culture of life." A true culture of life is more than just a community of activists or a once-a-month prayer commitment; it is way of life that upholds and respects the dignity and sacredness of every human being. Education enables students to challenge the belief systems of the current cultural climate and trains young people to respect life in every stage, from creation until death. Forming the young people of today into the pro-life leaders of

tomorrow starts today with the lessons learned in the classroom and in the home. Never has there been more need for a pro-life based educational curriculum that trains students to defend those discarded by society.

ALL's Culture of Life Studies Program

The Culture of Life Studies Program is dedicated to building a culture of life by providing educational supplements and multimedia resources that train students in grades K–12 to be effective communicators of the pro-life message. This program does more than just spread the pro-life message or fight against the evils of abortion and euthanasia; it forms a whole new generation in the culture of life.

ALL's Culture of Life Studies Program offers five series of courses for elementary, junior high, and high school. For elementary students, the series entitled Life Primer focuses on building a strong foundation from which young students can learn about the beauty of God's creation and develop concern and respect for others. Children in kindergarten through 3rd grade are exposed to the beauty of fetal development, the gift of life in people with special needs, and the need to care for those around us. Students engage in crafts, games, drama, art, and other activities that lay the groundwork for the culture of life. The Culture of Life Studies Program recently released its first supplement in the Life Primer series entitled *Life Is Precious*, which explores fetal development and the respect for human life through a four-week study in children's picture books.

Students in middle school and junior high begin to explore the threats to life in the series Life Foundations, which continues to instruct students in the truth through age-appropriate activities that respect the innocence of the audience.

As high school students prepare for college, they need to learn how to combat the threats to life and practice standing up for their beliefs, even when it seems unpopular. The Culture of Life Studies Program supports high school students by offering three types of supplements:

- Life Quest – 4-week or 8-week courses focusing on pro-life topics in history, religion, and literature
- Life Lens – 1–3 day lessons that can be integrated into any ongoing required course such as American Government or Medieval Literature
- Life Scope – 1–3 day lessons with a video supplement on pro-life topics, such as the soon-to-be released *Margaret Sanger and the American Acceptance of Birth Control*

The high school supplements for the Culture of Life Studies Program not only teach the truth and urge students to take an active role in the defense of life, but they encourage students to engage in the issues that pervade our culture. Each supplement series merges the study of the great books, Church documents, science, history, literature, and other subjects with pro-life topics and issues. The Culture of Life Studies Program forces students to think above and beyond what they are already learning in school and to see how they can take a stand for life in all academic disciplines in order to reclaim the culture.

For each new supplement, the Culture of Life Studies Program consults competent subject experts in the pro-life movement such as scientists, lawyers, historians, Catholic university professors, and theologians in order to provide students with accurate information that is faithful to Church teaching and up-to-date on pro-life issues.

Not only does each series fill a specific educational need, but each also provides flexibility for teachers and works alongside an existing course of study or curriculum. The Culture of Life Studies Program recognizes that teachers cannot add additional courses to an already hectic curriculum, so the supplements were created as structured guides for teachers and homeschool parents to help them seamlessly integrate the culture of life into an existing course of study without any hassle.

Responding to the threat of euthanasia

In the fall of 2015, the Culture of Life Studies Program plans to release an in-depth introduction to the topic of euthanasia for high school students, written in consultation with Julie Grimstad, Bobby Schindler, and the Pro-Life Healthcare Alliance. This one-lesson supplement introduces students to various terms used to describe euthanasia—such as “mercy killing” and “death with dignity”—and will teach how these terms are not only inaccurate but dangerous for the terminally ill, the disabled, and the efforts of the pro-life movement. By familiarizing students with anti-life terminology, this supplement sheds light on how the culture of death twists language to hide what is really happening during end-of-life procedures. This supplement is carefully designed to help both teachers and homeschool parents accurately present this delicate subject to their students in a way that builds critical thinking and real-life skills.

The supplement on euthanasia instructs students in what the Church teaches about end-of-life issues, suffering, and caring for the terminally ill. Through guided classroom instruction and assignments, student learn how to apply these teachings to daily life. Because it is so critical for high school students to become familiar with Church teaching directly from Church documents, the *Introduction to Euthanasia* supplement instructs students to read the actual documents and then assists them in decoding the difficult language found within. In the last section of the study, students critically examine the cases of Brittany Maynard and Terri Schiavo as examples of euthanasia by action and euthanasia by omission. By reading about and then discussing real-life cases, students are better able to understand the gravity of euthanasia and how it affects society.

Building a culture of life together

The future of the pro-life movement depends on young people. Without a proper foundation in the principles of the culture of life, the next generation of pro-life activists will be poorly equipped to deal with the growing threats to life in our society. Together with prayer and dedicated activism, education is one of the most powerful weapons we have against the culture of death. With an educational initiative like American Life League’s Culture of Life Studies Program, the future of the pro-life movement is assured.

Yet, students cannot win this battle on their own. They need the mentorship of their parents and teachers. So much depends on the education and formation of our young people. If we all work together, we can make the culture of life a reality for our country.

The *Introduction to Euthanasia* supplement will be made available through the American Life League Culture of Life Studies Program website, cultureoflifestudies.com, in the fall of 2015. In addition to elementary and high school programs, the website offers free lesson downloads, teacher support, and a blog with tips for integrating the culture of life into more difficult subjects. Check our website to see our latest product, *Life Is Precious*, and to sign up for e-mail updates on when our upcoming supplements will be available. More information can also be found on the Culture of Life Studies Program Facebook page at facebook.com/ALLCLSP.