

Every life matters

From the unborn to the born to the aged, whether healthy or infirm, mentally able or disabled, rich or poor, male or female, irrespective of culture, race, nation or language, every human life matters. Sadly, the recurring and escalating cycles of violence in our rainbow nation in the form of abortion, molestation, kidnapping, neglect, abuse, rape, homicide, femicide and xenophobia all seem to reveal the opposite, namely an alarmingly low respect for human life in South Africa. What lies at the heart of this problem and how can we restore respect for human life in our city and nation again?

From a human perspective and in our efforts to protect and promote essential human rights, we might have done so at the expense of corresponding responsibilities toward one another. Our quest for freedom of choice, speech, expression and association appears to have become so centred on self concern, own-group concern and own-culture preservation, that we have inadvertently neglected equally important and corresponding responsibilities that bring these rights into balance. These include responsibilities of mutual respect, dignity, equality and tolerance. This balanced combination of human rights and corresponding responsibilities is a hallmark of a healthy society. The stark reality of human history reveals the unfortunate fact that when human rights become overly focussed on self and self-preservation, it does so at the expense of other human lives. As John Donne aptly put it: "No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main." Our value lies not in our individual ethnicity, gender, age, ability, disability or geography, but in our shared value as members of the human race.

From God's perspective, our value as human beings is not limited by, nor determined by social or other factors, but by the fact that we share in a divine membership of the human family. Every human life matters primarily because every human being was created by God and created in His image. This intrinsic value is what makes us all equal in the eyes of God, equally loved, equally precious and to be treasured and protected as equals. Biblically, all human life begins at conception and God calls the unborn His children before they are born and He protects and nurtures them. So should we. God regards children as treasures and gifts. So should we. God regards the aged, infirm and disabled with respect and honour. So should we. God regards females with dignity and respect. So should we. God welcomes and protects the foreigner and stranger. So should we.

As image bearers of God, it is time to humbly adjust our hearts and convictions accordingly. As the church, we call all in our city and nation to restore the awareness of God's value of human life again. This needs to be expressed in more than mere attitude or words, but in action as we all willingly come to the aid of the unborn, unwanted babies, pregnant women, abused women, foreigners, disabled, infirm and aged. After all, God not only gave us value by creating us in His image, He proved His love for us all by giving His Son, Jesus Christ to die in our place to make it possible for those who embrace Him as Saviour and Lord to belong to His family forever. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). This is His message to all humanity. In light of His message, God calls us as church to demonstrate this love and message by loving Him

first, then by loving all those He created in His image as we love ourselves. This is God's will and His heartbeat. May His love, as it works in and through us, restore the value of human life to where it belongs, namely as precious and treasured in the eyes of God, simply and profoundly because we all are His image bearers.

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