

**Alvaré: Family Is a School of Love  
Says, 'Respect for Life Begins at Home'**

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**Where does one begin to promote the value and dignity of life in a culture that has shown itself antagonistic to protecting it? Helen Alvaré suggests beginning at home.**

**The George Mason University law professor said this today at the 6th World Meeting of Families, being held through Sunday in Mexico City. Her talk was titled "The Family and the Values of Human Life."**

**Alvaré, a consultor of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, was the director of planning and information for the Secretariat for Pro-life Activities of the U.S. episcopal conference from 1990-2000.**

**The professor spoke of the "genuine crisis of contradiction" between the teachings of the Church regarding life "and the policies and rhetoric of powerful national and international governments and organizations."**

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"There is also a commensurate crisis in the hearts of women, men and couples," she added, "who more and more seem to believe that their limited reason -- and worries -- about accepting new human life are sufficient for their needs, and for the needs of the world."

She said it was "alarming" the "gap between the Church's call to respect the 'language of the human body' and the gift of human life, and positions assumed by influential groups and governments about marriage and children."

The gap, she said, is owed to "an impoverished and incomplete appreciation for the meaning of life itself: loving service, death to self as the path to 'finding oneself.'"

### School of love

Posing the question of how one can "approach the institutions wielding worldly power [...] with the demand to respect all human life," she suggested beginning within the context of the family.

"For most people," she explained, "the family is the place where one learns to love, or not. [...] At crucial developmental periods prior to adulthood, if we do not come to understand the contents of attentive, secure, sacrificial love from our family, we will likely be impaired in ways difficult if not impossible to transcend in the matter of giving and receiving love."

Alvaré spoke of the family as a "school of love" that is "relentless" in assigning "homework on the subject of the give and take of love."

And marriage, she continued, "leads us toward grasping the value and meaning of procreation; we find ourselves, are taken aback at the remarkable feat of our love giving forth new life."

"The circumstances that correlate with and constitute marriage make it the place where new life can be given its most full-throated welcome," said Alvaré. "In marriage, we find the long-term commitment necessary to rear relatively slowly-maturing human infants to adulthood."

"We also find in marriage greater economic stability, extended families well-disposed to assist the new parents, and social satisfaction with the married couples' initiation into the ways of sacrifice, long-term planning and care for the next generation."

### Life lessons

The professor of law said the family is also where individuals learn many important life lessons: "The family is where we first see the building of a bridge between males and females, between younger and older, and between diverse personalities."

"In the close-range give and take between family members, we learn to model male or female traits and gifts. We learn the meaning of compromise, sacrifices and sharing. We learn what religion 'looks like' when it is lived out."

"Culture and values are transmitted, social capital is exchanged, and the practical skills necessary for living independently are acquired."

"In the family, we learn -- because we experience it totally with our bodies, our minds, our emotions and our spirits -- the relationship between adult love and the blessing of children," she added. "No matter how often this happens in history, every one who experiences it marvels at it."

She asked: "Is it any surprise, then, as John Paul II has said so often, that the family is where we get our first and most important glimpse of the character and quality of God's love?"

### Respect for life

Finally, Alvaré offered the family as the place where political division between those who promote respect for life and those who promote leading a dignified life can be mended.

"I have regularly made the case in my own country," she explained, "about the need to extend our moral imaginations so that those easily condemning injustice they can see -- violence, racism, sexism, and more -- could come to understand the injustice happening in places they cannot see such as in abortion clinics, and in the storage tanks housing hundreds of thousands of 'spare embryos.'"

"Recently, though, I have wondered if there is perhaps no one message or set of messages guaranteed to open up people's eyes to the entire panoply of causes on behalf of human life. Perhaps, instead of a message, there is a place.

"Perhaps there is a group of people, and a way of life, that can do this better than any message."

The place, she suggests, is the family: "The family which cares automatically for both the sanctity of human life, and its dignity -- can and will mediate respect for human life at all times and in all conditions better than any verbal formula.

"In the family we practice loving the human person in his or her entirety -- their body, their soul, their gifts, their promise, their hopes -- and we love persons from the first moment of their existence to their last.

"We do not say we want our spouse or our children or our mother to have life but not dignity, or dignity but not life."

"Marriage and the gift of children remain among the greatest blessings God has given us," Alvaré continued. "Human beings in history will always glimpse God's face in such love. The unique constellation of total union, commitment, fidelity, and openness to new life that is marriage, will continue to offer the safest haven for the children God entrusts us.

"Like our Mother Mary, our human exemplar, we must heed God's words, 'Do not be afraid' as we recommit ourselves to God's causes in marriage, motherhood and fatherhood."