



Director's Statement – January 2026

Like many of you, I approach the New Year with a natural impulse to take stock—to reflect on what has given life, what has drained it, and what needs to change moving forward. I am, by temperament, someone who loves resolutions and goal setting. Over Christmas break, my wonderful, wise wife even introduced a new family ritual: we spent time naming what brought us life in 2025 and imagining how we might more intentionally live the year ahead together.

As I've reflected on this practice, I'm convinced Christian "resolutions" are not about self-improvement for its own sake. At their heart, they are about conversion—*metanoia*—a turning around, a re-centering of our lives toward God's will. Becoming more fully who God created us to be often requires letting ourselves be stretched, unsettled, and gently re-formed.

This is an ethos I carry with me as I return to work in 2026. I find myself drawn to a simple but demanding resolution:

May my life and work witness more faithfully and more fully to the Church's Gospel of Life.

That means remaining open not only to the teachings that come easily to me, but also to those that challenge my assumptions, unsettle my instincts, or resist neat alignment with my political or cultural loyalties.

Re-reading a line from Pope Leo XIV's *Dilexi Te* recently sharpened this resolution for me: "*We say one thing with our words, but our decisions and reality tell another story*" (no. 12).

Our Holy Father's words cause me to pause. I don't interpret them as an accusation; rather, as an invitation to a deeper, humbler *honesty*. They prompt me to ask where my own life reflects coherence, and where it does not.

As it relates to matters of life and dignity, I find myself reflecting on three issues that are especially charged and divisive in our public life today, ones my office consistently interacts with: *abortion, capital punishment, and immigration*. The Church's teaching on each is clear:

On Abortion:

Human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception. From the first moment of his existence, a human being must be recognized as having the rights of a person—among which is the inviolable right of every innocent being to life...**Since the first century the Church has affirmed the moral evil of every procured abortion.** This teaching has not changed and remains unchangeable...Formal cooperation in an abortion constitutes a grave offence...The inalienable right to life of every innocent human individual is a *constitutive element of a civil society and its legislation*.

On Capital Punishment:

Today, however, there is an increasing awareness that the dignity of the person is not lost even after the commission of very serious crimes...Consequently, the Church teaches, in the light of the Gospel, that “**the death penalty is inadmissible** because it is an attack on the inviolability and dignity of the person, and she works with determination for its abolition worldwide.

~CCC, no.2267

On Immigration:

The more prosperous nations are obliged, to the extent that they are able, to **welcome the foreigner in search of the security and the means of livelihood which he cannot find in his country of origin**. Public authorities should see to it that the natural right is respected that places a guest under the protection of those who receive him.

~CCC, no.2241

What unsettles me is the apparent disconnect between what we “say” and where our “feet” actually are. Let me explain what I mean by way of recent polling data:

- **59%** of U.S. Catholics believe abortion should be legal in all or most cases (Source: [PEW 2022](#))
- **55%** of U.S. Catholics favor the use of the death penalty (Source: [National Catholic Register article, December 2025](#))
- **54%** of U.S. Catholics support the “detention and deportation of unauthorized immigrants on a broad scale” (Source: [Catholic News Agency article, December 2025](#)).

This leads me to a question I continue to carry in prayer: *Am I allowing my Catholic faith to form my moral and political convictions—or have other loyalties begun, quietly but insidiously, to form my Catholic identity?*

To be clear, the Church does recognize a hierarchy of moral truths. Not all life issues carry the same moral weight. The protection of innocent human life—particularly in the face of abortion and euthanasia—is foundational. As our bishops state plainly:

“We must begin with a commitment never to intentionally kill, or collude in the killing, of any innocent human life”
(USCCB, [Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities](#)).

The Church’s witness here is, and must remain, clear.

And yet, that clarity does not grant permission to narrow our moral vision. The same Church that insists on the absolute protection of innocent life **also teaches** that human dignity is never forfeited—not by crime, not by circumstance, not by legal status. Life must not only be defended from direct attack; it must be supported, protected, and allowed to flourish.

A strong foundation is essential—but a foundation alone does not make a home. Without walls, doors, and shelter, even the strongest foundation remains incomplete.

This, for me, is another way of envisioning what it means to be *consistently for life*. If we allow this framework to examine our habits, priorities, and blind spots, it can, through God's grace, begin to illuminate how we might move forward together.

In that vein, I want to offer us all two invitations to start 2026:

Join us in worship on January 23 for the Annual Mass for the Gift of Life.

How we pray together informs what we believe and how we live our lives. The Eucharist forms us to recognize the Body of Christ not only on the altar, but in every vulnerable person entrusted to our care—especially those whose lives are inconvenient, misunderstood, or politically contested.

Let's commit to approaching this year with greater humility and a deeper willingness to encounter one another.

Living the Church's teaching is not easy. Growth requires honesty and grace. A simple framework of *HOW*—borrowed from the wisdom of 12-step communities—has been helpful for me:

Honesty about where I struggle or resist Church teaching.

Open-mindedness to the possibility that my vision may be incomplete or too narrow.

Willingness to be changed by the Gospel, even when it “costs” me something.

I am not suggesting we lessen our convictions and passions. Perhaps, though, God is calling us to deepen and broaden them, and to do so as a living, interacting community of faith. *We, can learn much from each other if we take the time to listen*, remaining vulnerable with one another in dialogue. In his counsel within the *Spiritual Exercises*, St. Ignatius of Loyola shares an insightful guide to effective conversation:

To assure better cooperation between one who is giving the Exercises and the exercitant, and more beneficial results for both, *it is necessary to suppose that every good Christian is more ready to put a good interpretation on another's statement than to condemn it as false*. If an orthodox construction cannot be put on a proposition, the one who made it should be asked how he understands it. If he is in error, he should be corrected with all kindness. If this does not suffice, all appropriate means should be used to bring him to a correct interpretation, and so defend the proposition from error.

~*Spiritual Exercises, no.22*

Although the context is specific to the spiritual director–retreatant relationship, the wisdom transcends that setting and speaks to relationships in general. It suggests to us that we grant each other the grace of interpreting each other's words and opinions in the best possible light—to refrain from the temptation of cynicism and presumption of the worst. Carrying a gentle spirit into dialogue, especially dialogue as it relates to hot-button social issues, can prevent walls from being erected too quickly, thus giving the Spirit the much-needed time work and bring us closer to Truth.

As this new year unfolds, my prayer is simple: that the Holy Spirit would soften our hearts, expand our moral imagination, and draw us into greater coherence between what we profess and how we live. May we remain steadfast in defending innocent human life, while resisting the temptation to reduce the Gospel of Life to any one single issue disconnected from all others. And may our Church in Northeast Ohio be known for its faithful, compassionate, and consistent witness to the dignity of every human person.

Please know of my prayers for you and your loved ones as we step into 2026 together.

Much pax,

~TD



Office for
Human Life

Catholic Diocese
of Cleveland

1404 East Ninth Street | Cleveland, OH 44114-1722 | (216) 696-6525 ext. 2335 | tdipre@dioceseofcleveland.org