



January 20, 2023

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

This weekend, the first reading we will hear at Mass comes from the prophet Isaiah announcing to the Israelites, “The people who have walked in darkness have seen a great light” (Isaiah 9:2). This verse from Scripture often causes me to reflect on the darkness of our world and the small glimmers of light that remind us to hope against all odds.

On January 22, 1973, the Supreme Court ruled to legalize abortion in the United States, a decision that has had lasting effects on the way American society has valued the sanctity of human life for the past 50 years. On June 24, 2022, this ruling was overturned, providing state governments the legal framework, motivation, and momentum to pass laws and create services to protect and support vulnerable women and their unborn children in need.

Since June 2022, the demand for reliable care and easily accessible resources has never been stronger, and the Diocese of Baton Rouge has set out to expand ministries and social services for an even greater population of women in unplanned pregnancies who may need accompaniment and encouragement.

- In July, in partnership with [Catholic Charities of Baton Rouge](#), our diocese founded [Walking with Moms in Need](#), a national initiative instituted by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops that creates parish-based resource support for women in vulnerable pregnancies. Today, half of our diocese's church parishes have leaders or core teams meeting regularly to implement this initiative.
- A few parishes have also implemented a similar program called [Embrace Grace](#), a Christian but not specifically Catholic ministry, which focuses on providing mentors and small prayer groups to pregnant women in need.
- Last fall, diocesan representatives met with executives of [St. Vincent de Paul Society of Baton Rouge](#) to learn more about the myriad services that SVDP provides, including the [Bishop Ott Sweet Dreams Shelter for Women and Children](#), [Dining Room](#), [Community Pharmacy](#), and [Distribution Centers](#). The group also discussed community needs, overlap, and possible areas of collaboration for Walking with Moms in Need.
- The Diocese is working with Catholic Charities, [local pregnancy centers](#), and maternal wellness providers to train volunteer Doulas to walk with women in unplanned pregnancies. Those interested in participating are invited to a

Doulas and Donuts gathering on February 18, 2023, at 10:30 a.m. in the Westerfield Center on the Campus of the Catholic Life Center.

- The Diocese has continued supporting Catholic Charities' various maternity, adoption, and early childhood services, including Sanctuary for Life, a maternity home program for pregnant, homeless women over the age of 18.
- Finally, the Diocese has also continued to walk with women and men who have been affected by abortion in the past through Entering Canaan, a confidential day of healing which takes place four times a year. The first women's event of the year will take place on February 4, 2023.

As the leader of this faith community, I cannot begin to express my gratitude for the work that has been done and will continue to be done within our geographical boundaries and beyond. This weekend, let us remember all of those who are experiencing or have experienced unplanned pregnancies, those who have been affected by abortion, and those who have lost their lives to abortion. May we also pray for courageous men and women who are willing to serve their neighbor and work to continue building up the culture of life within our community.

"The people who have walked in darkness have seen a great light." May this light continue to burn bright into the darkness for years to come.

Hope in the Lord,

*+ Michael S. Duca*

Most Reverend Michael G. Duca  
Bishop of Baton Rouge



*For more information on any of the ministries mentioned above and additional resources and contact information, please visit <https://diobr.org/respectlife> or email Randall Waguespack at [rwaguespack@diobr.org](mailto:rwaguespack@diobr.org).*