



DIOCESE OF GRAND RAPIDS

Office of the Bishop

October 4, 2026

Dear Friends in Christ,

There are many times in our lives that we need to trust where the Lord is calling us. When the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary to tell her that she would conceive and bear a son, Mary responded with her fiat, "May it be done to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38). When Saint Francis of Assisi heard a voice calling, "Francis, rebuild my Church which is falling into ruin," he immediately began construction. The lives of the Blessed Virgin Mary and Saint Francis are examples of what can happen when we trust in the Lord, especially amid uncertainty, fear and suffering.

The saints are not only our role models of trust in the Lord's providence; they are also an example of how we are to love, accompany and encounter others. Today's Respect Life Sunday celebration falls on the Feast of Saint Francis of Assisi. There is a story in which Saint Francis meets a leper on the side of the road. He feels compelled to dismount his horse, kiss the man and offer him money. When Francis returns to his horse, the leper is nowhere to be found. Saint Francis presumes this leper was Jesus in disguise. How often have we found ourselves looking at 'the lepers of today' and riding by?

Like Saint Francis, we are called to stop and offer compassion. Through our conversations, advocacy efforts, and acts of service, we bear witness to God's love and inspire hope for those whose hearts are burdened. All individuals are bearers of God. Each of us is a gift to others.

During this Respect Life Month, let us reflect more deeply on how we can respect life at every stage and in every circumstance. Through the intercession of Saint Francis may we "become a model of holiness of life and a constant witness of peace" (Decree for the Jubilee Year, January 16, 2026).

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend David J. Walkowiak
Bishop of Grand Rapids