

## Everyday Activism

*The pro-life movement needs people to creatively witness through personal relationships and daily actions*

by Robert [A. Destro](#)

In May 2011, doctor-assisted suicide emerged “as the most controversial cultural issue in Gallup’s 2011 Values and Beliefs poll, with Americans divided 45 percent versus 48 percent over whether it is morally acceptable or morally wrong.” Also in 2011, Gallup found that only half of American adults consider abortion to be “morally wrong” and even fewer would support laws “allowing pharmacists and health providers to opt out of providing medicine or surgical procedures that result in abortion.” How is it possible that more people are not opposed to these practices after nearly 40 years of organized, pro-life political activism at the local, state and national levels?

If we hope to change more hearts, we need to look at these and other pro-life issues through what world-renowned *National Geographic* photographer and speaker Dewitt Jones calls “a new lens,” which enables individuals “to look at the ordinary and see the extraordinary.” It is a process of discerning the needs and potential of others that Jones calls “everyday creativity.”

Applied to the pro-life movement, we might call it “everyday activism.” For most people, activism is political. But everyday activism is personal and inherently local. An everyday activist will try to learn as much as possible about themselves and about the personalities of family members, friends and neighbors. An everyday activist learns how humans grow, how we develop, how we learn and process information, and how we decline and die. Without this knowledge — and the wisdom and understanding it imparts — it is impossible to help others withstand the societal pressures that lead people to have abortions, to abandon sick and elderly loved ones in nursing homes, or to vote for laws that do not respect the dignity of human life.

Consider patients who have what neuroscientists call “[acquired brain injuries](#)”, from elderly people with some forms of dementia to soldiers injured while

serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. Caused by events such as trauma, stroke, disease or substance abuse, acquired brain injuries are far more common than most people realize, and depression and thoughts of suicide are significant problems among those who have suffered them. A lack of companionship, rehabilitation or treatment — or insurance companies that refuse to pay for these services — makes patients with these injuries likely candidates for doctor-assisted suicide and euthanasia.

At the same time, modern neuroscience teaches us that the brain is plastic, and that it can rewire itself to compensate for injuries if a rehabilitation program stimulates the brain around the injured area. And the elderly, who may be lonely and depressed because their friends are gone and their families live far away, often begin to recover if neighbors visit regularly and see that their needs are being met. In short, pro-life advocates can do much good if they are willing to step into the breach.

We become everyday activists whenever we use our knowledge and skills to help others, even if we think of ourselves only as friends and volunteers. And as servant-leaders, we can hone our problem-solving skills and can ask hard questions of both experts and politicians while remaining humble.

Pro-life activism comes in many forms, but the most fruitful activism of all takes place during interactions with family members, friends, neighbors, parishioners, customers and business partners. We are most successful at this task when we work daily to win the hearts and minds of those around us.

From the perspective of everyday creativity, every concerned citizen can be an activist. A stay-at-home mother might devote her spare time to taking a census of the homebound residents throughout her neighborhood, or a retiree might visit a local nursing home with his grandchildren to ensure that no one is deprived of “the human element” that science confirms is so essential to healing and mental health.

We must not forget that “all politics is local” and that Jesus built his Church from the “ground up.” [If we want the poll numbers to change](#), each of our friends and neighbors needs to hear the Gospel of Life “in his own native language” (Acts 2:8), and it is our obligation to teach it in all that we say and do. When

we spread this Gospel as everyday activists, we can transform the world.

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