

MaterCare International (Canada)
257-C LeMarchant Road
St. John's, NL
A1E 1P8



Telephone: (709) 579 - 6472
Toll Free: (888) 579 - 6472
Fax: (709) 579 - 6501
Email:

Response to the Homily of Pope Francis, January 1st, 2020:
Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God,
53rd World Day of Peace

January 15, 2020- The Holy Father Pope Francis, at the Vatican Basilica on Wednesday, January 1st, 2020, gave a homily emphasizing the dignity of women on the Solemnity of Mary¹, Mother of God. In this homily, he began by stating, “On the first day of the year, we celebrate this nuptial union between God and mankind, inaugurated in the womb of a woman.” It is vital we recognize the significance of this union and the role of motherhood. Motherhood has fundamental significance for all Christians, for it was a young woman’s fiat that became a part of God’s covenant. Mary nourished and nurtured the baby, the Son of God, in her womb for 266 days. This was the most intimate relationship between a human being and God. All mothers therefore share in some way this special gift of intimacy with God when they give a “sincere gift of self” through their own birthing experiences.

Tragically, as the Holy Father acknowledged, “Women are sources of life. Yet they are continually insulted, beaten, raped, forced to prostitute themselves and to suppress the life they bear in the womb. Every form of violence inflicted upon a woman is a blasphemy against God, who was born of a woman. Humanity’s salvation came forth from the body of a woman: we can understand our degree of humanity by how we treat a woman’s body. How often are women’s bodies sacrificed on the profane altars of advertising, of profiteering, of pornography, exploited like a canvas to be used. Yet women’s bodies must be freed from consumerism; they must be respected and honoured.”

The global community is guilty of the culpable sin of omission. We have failed to do something we can and ought to do, which is to care for mothers in need during pregnancy and childbirth. Proof of this is found in the rising maternal mortality rates (MMRs) resulting from complications that can be prevented and treated in the United States². In addition, mothers globally suffer the violence of neglect from the international community reflecting continuously high preventable MMRs. We welcome the words of the Holy Father to remind us that, “There are mothers who risk difficult journeys desperately seeking to give a better future to the fruit of their womb, yet are deemed redundant by people with full stomachs but hearts empty of love.”

In MaterCare International’s decades of experience, we have seen MMRs remain unacceptably high in countries like Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda. In Kenya mothers remain unheard and uncared for, their health not prioritized by local leaders. In 2020, we will conduct needs assessments for new projects in Uganda and Rwanda where, according to World Health Organization 2017 reports³, the MMR in Rwanda is 184 to 387 deaths per 100,000 live births, Uganda’s ratio has consistently been high at 278 to 523 deaths per 100,000 live births. These rates increase in rural areas which lack access to obstetrical care.

We echo the Holy Father when he says, “Every form of violence inflicted upon a woman is a blasphemy against God, who was born of a woman.” -Pope Francis, Holy Mass on the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, 53rd World Day of Peace.

1

http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20200101_omelia-madredidio-pace.html

² “The estimated maternal mortality rate (per 100,000 live births) for 48 states and Washington, DC (excluding California and Texas, analyzed separately) increased by 26.6%, from 18.8 in 2000 to 23.8 in 2014.” <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/27500333>

³ https://www.who.int/gho/maternal_health/mortality/maternal/en/