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## Poland: Sanctity of Life Day. Pro-life initiatives backed by the Church

“Appreciating the full value of every human life is a constant challenge for us”, said Fr **Robert Wieladek**, head of the National Centre for Family Pastoral Care within the Polish Bishops' Council for the Family, just a few days ahead of March 25, when the Polish Church celebrates Sanctity of Life Day. Those words are encouraging for the various pro-life initiatives, including the Spiritual Adoption of the Unborn initiative, consisting in a nine-month daily prayer for “a baby in danger of being murdered in their mother's womb.” **Fifty million abortions each year.** Among the various projects for promoting human life, figures the one by the Polish 'Yes to Life' Foundation, which last Wednesday received a blessing from Pope Francis for the 'Voice of the Unborn' bell. The Pontiff expressed the hope that “its sound may convey the message that every life is sacred and inviolable.” The bell will be brought to a cathedral in Zambia - thereby becoming the fourth world country where the chiming of the bronze bell will mark the value of every human life. Over the past years, the Foundation brought the bells not only throughout Poland, but also in Ukraine and Ecuador. **Bogdan Romaniuk**, “Yes to Life” Vice-President, told the press that the Foundation is planning to bring them also to France, Mexico and Nicaragua. Romaniuk pointed out that globally 50 million unborn babies are “murdered by abortion” every year. “The sound of our bells - he added - must prompt reflection, thus resulting in fewer abortions every year.” The bell for Zambia has been adorned with a special casting of the rings of the bishops of the African country and of Poland, united by the inscription recalling “the spiritual bond between the Catholic Church in Zambia and in Poland”, forged in Warsaw on May 17, 1970. **Greater social solidarity.** Since 2004, the National Pro-Life Day is celebrated on 24 March each year, right before the day marking Sanctity of Life Day in Poland, established 25 years ago in response to John Paul II's encyclical “Evangelium Vitae.” Pursuant to a decision of the Polish Parliament, the Pro-Life Day must “Encourage reflection on the responsibilities of national authorities, civil society, and the general public for the protection and respect of every human life, especially of the weakest among us.” Moreover, the Day is expected to promote greater social solidarity, encouraging activities for supporting and helping those most in need. The Sanctity of Life Day in Poland, however, was not the first of its kind. Since 1984, this Day is celebrated in the USA on the third Sunday in January; it is also one of the preparatory stages for the world's largest March for Life. **The Day in Foligno.** The first National Sanctity of Life Day was launched in the Italian town of Foligno in 2021, due to the fact that among all the regions in the European Union, Umbria was ranked third among those with the lowest birth rate. The objective of the Day in Umbria is “rediscovering and protecting the values of life and the family, the foundations of a healthy society.” **Polish legislation.** Besides promoting the staunch defence of unborn life, Poland has one of Europe's most restrictive abortion laws. In fact, the laws in force since 2020 allow the termination of a pregnancy only if it constitutes a serious threat to the life of the mother or if the unborn child is the result of a criminal offence such as rape or incestuous intercourse. The most recent legal provisions also stipulate sanctions for any person or doctor who helps pregnant women to obtain an abortion. An activist of the pro-abortion group Dream Team was sentenced to eight months' probation and 240 hours of community service last month on these very grounds. The ruling, along with other restrictions to “abortion rights” in Poland, sparked off protests from a part of civil society, which had become accustomed to resorting to 'on-demand' abortions without difficulty during the years of the programmatically atheistic Soviet regime. Official figures show that, compared to previous years, the number of abortions dropped dramatically in 2021. While in the years 2018-2020 pregnancy terminations in Poland averaged 1,100, only 107 were estimated for the year 2021. However, the figures provided by government agencies are disputed by many civil society organisations, estimating the number of abortions in Poland to be close to 15-30 thousand a year, and stressing that numerous women travel to countries where such practices are not illegal in order to terminate their pregnancies.

