

## Building Up Life Through Encounter

by Kimberly Baker

Life too often moves at a breakneck pace. Technology is always at our fingertips to help us achieve more and do more—and with greater speed. When this continuous, fast-paced lifestyle overwhelms us, we risk losing our human touch with others. In contrast, Pope Francis often speaks of creating a “culture of encounter,” which not only transforms the way we live in the world but also beautifully affirms and facilitates a culture of life:

To be called by Jesus, to be called to evangelize, and third: to be called to promote the culture of encounter. In many places . . . the culture of exclusion, of rejection, is spreading. There is no place for the elderly or for the unwanted child; there is no time for that poor person in the street. At times, it seems that for some people, human relations are regulated by two modern “dogmas”: efficiency and pragmatism. . . . Have the courage to go against the tide of this culture of efficiency, this culture of waste. (*World Youth Day Homily*, July 27, 2013)

In both our work and personal lives, we can promote a culture of encounter. Rather than reducing our interactions to rushed necessities, how would we bring life to our corner of the world if we risked being fully present to others? In doing so, we discover the gifts of others and bring out the best in them, drawing them closer to God’s love through such experiences.

A culture of encounter builds up a culture of life because it acknowledges the dignity of each person. Unlike the “dogmas” of efficiency and pragmatism, which disregard people who are weaker, slower, or in need, authentic encounters have a positive twofold effect: we discover more deeply the priceless value of another, and we strengthen our own ability to love.

Every life Christ transformed was based on an authentic encounter. He took time to talk with and heal others. Rather than being aloof or distant, he allowed the poor, the sick, social outcasts, and little children to come to him, as well as the “rich young man,” the wealthy Zacchaeus, and the Roman centurion. He did not let vanity or ambition change his behavior based on who was watching him. He never categorized people into who was “important” and who was not. He was “all things to all people,” not



in a frenzied desire for popularity or attention, but because he was grounded in his mission to bring each person to understand the love of his merciful Father in heaven. No person, whether rich or poor, healthy or sick, is unworthy of this encounter, for God will never cease calling us to himself.

Wherever we are, let us risk the time and effort to genuinely see people, strengthening a culture of encounter. In so doing, we will promote respect for life—every person’s life, at every stage and in every circumstance. Let us take the time to highlight the

dignity and goodness of those around us, perhaps especially when they cannot see it in themselves. Let us reject what Pope Francis calls the “culture of exclusion” and the culture of waste, which is dehumanizing and sets up false standards of success. In the end our greatness will be measured not by how much we accomplished but by how much we loved.

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This article was originally published on [www.USCCB.org](http://www.USCCB.org) on the Life Issues Forum.

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