
2026

Nancy Jo Benjamin Essay Scholarship

Accepting Submissions through April 1, 2026



2004 Ironwood Circle, Suite 130, South Bend, IN 46635 | 574.232.5433 | life@prolifemichiana.org

Background

Nancy Jo Benjamin was a devoted mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother. She worked at the University of Notre Dame for many years, but family always came first for Nancy Jo. Her daughter, Jackie, recalls how sharing baby-save stories from the abortion clinic with Nancy Jo always made her day. Now, her legacy of life and love lives on in our Nancy Jo Benjamin Essay Scholarship.

This scholarship cultivates pro-life leadership at a young age by encouraging students to articulate pro-life truth with compassion, and it is made available each year to two local middle school students.

The essay contest for students began in the year 2011. The scholarship awarded this year will be the sixteenth annual prize given by the organization for excellence in pro-life writing.

Right to Life Michiana accepts essay submissions from individuals with primary residences in St. Joseph County (IN), Elkhart County (IN), and all contiguous counties: Berrien County (MI), Cass County (MI), Kosciusko County (IN), LaGrange County (IN), LaPorte County (IN), Marshall County (IN), Noble County (IN), St. Joseph County (MI), and Starke County (IN).

Non-Discrimination Policy

The Nancy Jo Benjamin Essay Scholarship Contest is committed to a policy against discrimination based on sex, marital or parental status, race, religious creed, national origin, age, or disability.

2026 Nancy Jo Benjamin Essay Scholarship Prompt

Many people use terms “pro-life” and “anti-abortion” interchangeably, but they don’t always mean the same thing. While being against abortion is a necessary part of being pro-life, truly valuing life means more than opposing one issue. It means caring for and protecting every innocent human life, at every stage – from the unborn to the elderly, from the vulnerable to the marginalized.

In John 10:10, Jesus says, “I came that they might have life, and have it abundantly.” This reminds us that being pro-life is more than survival; it is about helping people live with dignity, purpose, and hope.

Write an essay reflecting on what it means to be pro-life. Be sure to answer the question: What is the difference between being “pro-life” and being “anti-abortion”?

Other questions to consider in your response:

- Why do the words we use matter when we talk about life issues?
- Do you believe it’s important to be both pro-life and anti-abortion?
- How can you personally live out a commitment to life in a way that reflects both truth and compassion?
- How can we demonstrate to the public in both word and action that we are not only anti-abortion, but truly pro-life?

Nancy Jo Benjamin

Essay Scholarship Guidelines

- The Nancy Jo Benjamin Essay Scholarship Contest is open to all seventh and eighth grade students in St. Joseph County (IN), Elkhart County (IN), and all contiguous counties: Berrien County (MI), Cass County (MI), Kosciusko County (IN), LaGrange County (IN), LaPorte County (IN), Marshall County (IN), Noble County (IN), St. Joseph County (MI), and Starke County (IN).
- Only one entry per student will be accepted.
- Up to two winners will be awarded cash prizes of \$250 each.
- Entries must be a minimum of three hundred words in length, typed, and double-spaced.
- Entries must follow the general rules of English grammar. Factual information must be up to date with references cited.
- All entries should include the student's name, school, grade level, and teacher or parent's email address at the top of each page.
- To be considered for the scholarship, entries must be submitted by Wednesday, April 1, 2026. Please email, hand-deliver, or mail entries to:

Attention: Essay Scholarship
Email: programs@prolifemichiana.org
Postal Mail: Right to Life Michiana
2004 Ironwood Circle, Suite 130
South Bend, IN 46635

- Please refer to the rubric on the last page of this packet for the criteria by which entries will be evaluated and scored by the scholarship judges. Right to Life Michiana reserves all rights to judgment in this contest. All decisions are final. All materials submitted to the essay contest become the property of Right to Life Michiana and will not be returned to the participants. Right to Life Michiana reserves the right to publish and/or publicly read all or any portion of entries received.
- Please direct questions to the Right to Life Michiana staff by emailing programs@prolifemichiana.org or calling the office at 574-232-5433.
- Winners will be notified by Friday, April 10, 2026, and will be honored at the Respect Life Prayer Dinner. The winners and their immediate family members will receive complimentary invitations to attend the dinner and accept the award.



Nancy Jo Benjamin Essay Scholarship Contest Rubric

Updated January 2024 by Right to Life Michiana

	Superior 6	Strong 5	Adequate 4	Marginal 3	Very Weak 2	Incompetent 1
Response to the Topic	Addresses the topic clearly and responds effectively to all aspects of the prompt	Addresses the topic clearly, but may respond to some aspects of the prompt more effectively than others	Addresses the topic, but may slight some aspects of the prompt	Distorts or neglects aspects of the prompt	Indicates confusion about the topic or neglects important aspects of the prompt	Suggests an inability to comprehend the question or to respond meaningfully to the topic
Originality of Concept	Shows strong evidence the writer has exercised critical thinking skills to issue an original response considering the prompt from multiple angles	Shows developing critical thinking skills used to issue an original response	Shows little evidence of critical thinking in issuing a response	Reiterates concepts borrowed from other sources without giving the prompt much original thought related to the topic	Reiterates concepts borrowed from other sources with no evidence of original thought related to the topic	Reflects no evidence of critical thinking on the topic
Quality and Clarity of Thought	Explores the topic thoughtfully and in depth	Shows some depth and complexity of thought	May treat the topic simplistically or repetitively	Lacks focus, or demonstrates confused or simplistic thinking	Lacks focus and coherence, and often fails to communicate ideas	Is unfocused, illogical, incoherent, or disorganized
Syntax and Command of Language	Has an effective, fluent style marked by syntactic variety and a clear command of language	Displays some syntactic variety and facility in the use of language	Demonstrates adequate use of syntax and language	Has limited control of syntax and vocabulary	Has inadequate control of syntax and variety	Lacks basic control of syntax and vocabulary
Grammar, Usage, and Mechanics	Is generally free from errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics	May have a few errors, but generally demonstrates control of grammar, usage, and mechanics	May have some errors, but generally demonstrates control of grammar, usage, and mechanics	Has an accumulation of errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics that sometimes interfere with meaning	Is marred by numerous errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics that frequently interfere with meaning	Has serious and persistent errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics that severely interfere with meaning
Organization and Support	Is coherently organized, with ideas supported by appropriate reasons and well-chosen examples	Is well organized and developed with ideas supported by appropriate reasons and examples	Is adequately organized and developed, generally supporting ideas with reasons and examples	Is poorly organized and developed, presenting generalizations without adequate and appropriate support	Has very weak organization, providing generalizations without support	Is disorganized, providing little or no relevant support
Facts and References	Shows strong evidence of research, effectively applying facts to strengthen arguments, and references sources appropriately	Shows good evidence of research, sharing facts pertaining to arguments, and references sources appropriately	Shows some evidence of research, sharing facts with little relevance, and references sources appropriately	Shows little evidence of research sharing facts with no relevance, and attempts to reference sources	Shows little evidence of research sharing facts with no relevance and no attempt to reference sources	Shows no evidence of research and shares no facts or references

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