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Pastoral Plan for ADQOISL6

Abortion - Religious aspects

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# PASTORAL PLAN FOR PRO-LIFE ACTIVITIES


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## PASTORAL PLAN FOR PRO-LIFE ACTIVITIES

*All should be persuaded that human life and the task of transmitting it are not realities bound up with this world alone. Hence they cannot be measured or perceived only in terms of it, but always have a bearing on the eternal destiny of men. . . . For God, the Lord of life, has conferred on men the surpassing ministry of safeguarding life in a manner which is worthy of man. Therefore from the moment of its conception life must be guarded with the greatest care, while abortion and infanticide are unspeakable crimes.*

Constitution on the Church  
in the Modern World

**R**ESPECT FOR HUMAN LIFE has been gradually declining in our society during the past decade. To some degree this reflects a secularizing trend and a rejection of moral imperatives based on belief in God and His plan for creation. It also reflects a tendency for individuals to give primary attention to what is personally rewarding and satisfying to them, to the exclusion of responsible concern for the well-being of other persons and society. These trends, along with others, have resulted in laws and judicial decisions which deny or ignore basic human rights and moral responsibilities for the protection and promotion of the common good. In this category are efforts to establish permissive abortion laws, the abortion decisions of the United States Supreme Court in 1973 denying any effective legal protection to the unborn child, and the growing attempts to legitimize positive euthanasia through so-called "death with dignity" laws.

In the Declaration of Independence, our Founding Fathers point to the right to life as the first of the inalienable rights given by the Creator.

In fulfillment of our pastoral responsibilities, the members of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops have repeatedly affirmed that human life is a precious gift from God; that each person who receives this gift has responsibilities

toward God, toward self and toward others; and that society, through its laws and social institutions, must protect and sustain human life at every stage of its existence. Recognition of the dignity of the human person, made in the image of God, lies at the very heart of our individual and social duty to respect human life.

In this Pastoral Plan we hope to focus attention on the pervasive threat to human life arising from the present situation of permissive abortion. Basic human rights are violated in many ways: by abortion and euthanasia, by injustice and the denial of equality to certain groups of persons, by some forms of human experimentation, by neglect of the underprivileged and disadvantaged who deserve the concern and support of the entire society. Indeed, the denial of the God-given right to life is one aspect of a larger problem. But it is unlikely that efforts to protect other rights will be ultimately successful if life itself is continually diminished in value.

In focusing attention on the sanctity of human life, therefore, we hope to generate a greater respect for the life of each person in our society. We are confident that greater respect for human life will result from continuing the public discussion of abortion and from efforts to shape our laws so as to protect the life of all persons, including the unborn.

Thus this Pastoral Plan seeks to activate the pastoral resources of the Church in three major efforts:

1. an educational/public information effort to inform, clarify and deepen understanding of the basic issues;
2. a pastoral effort addressed to the specific needs of women with problems related to pregnancy and to those who have had or have taken part in an abortion;
3. a public policy effort directed toward the legislative, judicial and administrative areas so as to insure effective legal protection for the right to life.

This Pastoral Plan is addressed to and calls upon all Church-sponsored or identifiably Catholic national, regional, diocesan and parochial organizations and agencies to pursue the three-fold effort. This includes ongoing dialogue and cooperation between the NCCB/USCC on the one

hand, and priests, religious and lay persons, individually and collectively, on the other hand. In a special way we invite the continued cooperation of national Catholic organizations.

At the same time, we urge Catholics in various professional fields to discuss these issues with their colleagues and to carry the dialogue into their own professional organizations. In similar fashion, we urge those in research and academic life to present the Church's position on a wide range of topics that visibly express her commitment to respect for life at every stage and in every condition. Society's responsibility to insure and protect human rights demands that the right to life be recognized and protected as antecedent to and the condition of all other rights.

Dialogue is most important—and has already proven highly fruitful—among Churches and religious groups. Efforts should continue at ecumenical consultation and dialogue with Judaism and other Christian bodies, and also with those who have no specific ecclesial allegiance. Dialogue among scholars in the field of ethics is a most important part of this interfaith effort.

The most effective structures for pastoral action are in the diocese and the parish. While recognizing the roles of national, regional and statewide groupings, this Plan places its primary emphasis on the roles of diocesan organizations and the parish community. Thus, the resources of the diocese and parish become most important in its implementation.

## **I. Public Information/Education Program**

In order to deepen respect for human life and heighten public opposition to permissive abortion, a two-fold educational effort presenting the case for the sanctity of life from conception onwards is required.

The first aspect, a public information effort, is directed to the general public. It creates awareness of the threats to human dignity inherent in a permissive abortion policy, and the need to correct the present situation by establishing legal safeguards for the right to life. It gives the abortion issue continued visibility, and sensitizes the many people who have only general perceptions of the issue but very little by way of firm conviction or commitment. The public information effort is important to inform the

public discussion, and it proves that the Church is serious about and committed to its announced long-range pro-life effort. It is accomplished in a variety of ways, such as accurate reporting of newsworthy events, the issuance of public statements, testimony on legislative issues, letters to editors.

The second aspect, an intensive long-range education effort, leads people to a clearer understanding of the issues, to firm conviction, and to commitment. It is part of the Church's essential responsibility that it carry forward such an effort, directed primarily to the Catholic community. Recognizing the value of legal, medical and sociological arguments, the primary and ultimately most compelling arguments must be theological and moral. Respect for life must be seen in the context of God's love for mankind reflected in creation and redemption and man's relationship to God and to other members of the human family. The Church's opposition to abortion is based on Christian teaching on the dignity of the human person, and the responsibility to proclaim and defend basic human rights, especially the right to life.

This intensive education effort should present the scientific information on the humanity of the unborn child and the continuity of human growth and development throughout the months of fetal existence; the responsibility and necessity for society to safeguard the life of the child at every stage of its existence; the problems that may exist for a woman during pregnancy; and more humane and morally acceptable solutions to these problems.

The more intensive educational effort should be carried on by all who participate in the Church's educational ministry, notably:

- Priests and religious, exercising their teaching responsibility in the pulpit, in other teaching assignments, and through parish programs.
- All Church-sponsored or identifiably Catholic organizations, national, regional, diocesan and parochial, carrying on continuing education efforts that emphasize the moral prohibition of abortion and the reasons for carrying this teaching into the public policy area.
- Schools, CCD and other Church-sponsored

educational agencies providing moral teaching, bolstered by medical, legal and sociological data, in the schools, etc. The USCC Department of Education might serve as a catalyst and resource for the dioceses.

—Church-related social service and health agencies carrying on continuing education efforts through seminars and other appropriate programs, and by publicizing programs and services offering alternatives to abortion.

Although the primary purpose of the intensive educational program is the development of pro-life attitudes and the determined avoidance of abortion by each person, the program must extend to other issues that involve support of human life: there must be internal consistency in the pro-life commitment.

The annual Respect Life Program sets the abortion problem in the context of other issues where human life is endangered or neglected, such as the problems facing the family, youth, the aging, the mentally retarded, as well as specific issues such as poverty, war, population control, and euthanasia. This program is helpful to parishes in calling attention to specific problems and providing program formats and resources.

## **II. Pastoral Care**

The Church's pastoral effort is rooted in and manifests her faith commitment. Underlying every part of our program is the need for prayer and sacrifice. In building the house of respect for life, we labor in vain without God's merciful help.

Three facets of the Church's program of pastoral care deserve particular attention.

### **1) *Moral Guidance and Motivation***

Accurate information regarding the nature of an act and freedom from coercion are necessary in order to make responsible moral decisions. Choosing what is morally good also requires motivation. The Church has a unique responsibility to transmit the teaching of Christ and to provide moral principles consistent with that teaching. In regard to abortion, the Church should provide accurate information regarding the nature of the act, its effects and far-reaching consequences, and should show that abortion is a violation of God's laws of charity and justice. In many instances,

the decision to do what is in conformity with God's law will be the ultimate determinant of the moral choice.

2) *Service and care for women and unborn children.*

Respect for human life motivates individuals and groups to reach out to those with special needs. Programs of service and care should be available to provide women with alternate options to abortion. Specifically, these programs should include:

- adequate education and material sustenance for women so that they may choose motherhood responsibly and freely in accord with a basic commitment to the sanctity of life;
- nutritional, pre-natal, childbirth and post-natal care for the mother, and nutritional and pediatric care for the child throughout the first year of life;
- intensified scientific investigation into the causes and cures of maternal disease and/or fetal abnormality;
- continued development of genetic counseling and gene therapy centers and neo-natal intensive care facilities;
- extension of adoption and foster care facilities to those who need them;
- pregnancy counseling centers that provide advice, encouragement and support for every woman who faces difficulties related to pregnancy;
- counseling services and opportunities for continuation of education for unwed mothers;
- special understanding, encouragement and support for victims of rape;
- continued efforts to remove the social stigma that is visited on the woman who is pregnant out of wedlock and on her child.

Many of these services have been and will continue to be provided by Church-sponsored health care and social service agencies, involving the dedicated efforts of professionals and volunteers. Cooperation with other private agencies and increased sup-



port in the quest for government assistance in many of these areas are further extensions of the long-range effort.

### 3) *Reconciliation*

The Church is both a means and an agent of reconciliation. As a spiritual entity, the Church reconciles men and women to God. As a human community, the Church pursues the task of reconciling men and women with one another and with the entire community. Thus all of the faithful have the duty of promoting reconciliation.

Sacramentally, the Church reconciles the sinner through the Sacrament of Penance, thereby restoring the individual to full sacramental participation. The work of reconciliation is also continually accomplished in celebrating and participating in the Eucharist. Finally, the effects of the Church's reconciling efforts are found in the full support of the Christian community and the renewal of Christian life that results from prayer, the pursuit of virtue and continued sacramental participation.

Granting that the grave sin of abortion is symptomatic of many human problems, which often remain unsolved for the individual woman, it is important that we realize that God's mercy is always available and without limit, that the Christian life can be restored and renewed through the sacraments, and that union with God can be accomplished despite the problems of human existence.

### **III. Legislative/Public Policy Effort**

In recent years there has been a growing realization throughout the world that protecting and promoting the inviolable rights of persons are essential duties of civil authority, and that the maintenance and protection of human rights are primary purposes of law. As Americans, and as religious leaders, we have been committed to governance by a system of law that protects the rights of individuals and maintains the common good. As our founding fathers believed, we hold that all law is ultimately based on Divine Law, and that a just system of law cannot be in conflict with the law of God.

Abortion is a specific issue that highlights the relationship between morality and law. As a hu-

man mechanism, law may not be able fully to articulate the moral imperative, but neither can legal philosophy ignore the moral order. The abortion decisions of the United States Supreme Court (January 22, 1973) violate the moral order, and have disrupted the legal process which previously attempted to safeguard the rights of unborn children. A comprehensive pro-life legislative program must therefore include the following elements:

- a) Passage of a constitutional amendment providing protection for the unborn child to the maximum degree possible.
- b) Passage of federal and state laws and adoption of administrative policies that will restrict the practice of abortion as much as possible.
- c) Continual research into and refinement and precise interpretation of *Roe and Doe* and subsequent court decisions.
- d) Support for legislation that provides alternatives to abortion.

Accomplishment of this aspect of this Pastoral Plan will undoubtedly require well planned and coordinated political action by citizens at the national, state and local levels. This activity is not simply the responsibility of Catholics, nor should it be limited to Catholic groups or agencies. It calls for widespread cooperation and collaboration. As citizens of this democracy, we encourage the appropriate political action to achieve these legislative goals. As leaders of a religious institution in this society, we see a moral imperative for such political activity.

## **MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION OF PROGRAM**

The challenge to restore respect for human life in our society is a task of the Church that reaches out through all institutions, agencies and organizations. Diverse tasks and various goals are to be achieved. The following represents a systematic organization and allocation of the Church's resources of people, institutions and finances which can be activated at various levels to restore respect for human life, and insure protection of the right to life of the unborn.

### **1. State Coordinating Committee**

A. It is assumed that overall coordination in each state will be the responsibility of the State Catholic Conference or its equivalent. Where a

State Catholic Conference is in process of formation or does not exist, bishops' representatives from each diocese might be appointed as the core members of the *State Coordinating Committee*.

B. The *State Coordinating Committee* will be comprised of the Director of the State Catholic Conference and the diocesan Pro-Life coordinators. At this level it would be valuable to have one or more persons who are knowledgeable about public traditions, mores and attitudes and are experienced in legislative activity. This might be the Public Affairs Specialist referred to under the Diocesan Pro-Life Committee, or, e.g., an individual with prior professional experience in legislative or governmental service. In any case, it should be someone with a practical understanding of contemporary political techniques.

C. The primary purposes of the *State Coordinating Committee* are:

- to monitor the political trends in the state and their implications for the abortion effort;
- to coordinate the efforts of the various dioceses; and to evaluate progress in the dioceses and congressional districts;
- to provide counsel regarding the specific political relationships within the various parties at the state level.

## **2. The Diocesan Pro-Life Committee**

a) *General Purpose*—The purpose of the Committee is to coordinate groups and activities within the diocese (to restore respect for human life), particularly efforts to effect passage of a constitutional amendment to protect the unborn child. In its coordinating role, the Committee will rely on information and direction from the Bishops' Pro-Life Office and the National Committee for a Human Life Amendment. The Committee will act through the diocesan Pro-Life Director, who is appointed by the Bishop to direct pro-life efforts in the diocese.

### **b) Membership**

- Diocesan Pro-Life Director (Bishop's Representative)
- Respect Life Coordinator

- Liaison with State Catholic Conference
- Public Affairs Advisor
- Representatives of Diocesan Agencies (Priests, Religious, Lay Organizations)
- Legal Advisor—Representative of Pro-Life Groups
- Representatives of Parish Pro-Life Committees
- Congressional District Representative(s)

c) *Objectives:*

1. Provide direction and coordination of diocesan and parish education/information efforts and maintain working relationship with all groups involved in congressional district activity.
2. Promote and assist in the development of those groups, particularly voluntary groups involved in pregnancy counseling, which provide alternatives and assistance to women who have problems related to pregnancy.
3. Encourage the development of "grass-roots" political action organizations.
4. Maintain communications with National Committee for a Human Life Amendment in regard to federal activity, so as to provide instantaneous information concerning local Senators and Representatives.
5. Maintain a local public information effort directed to press and media. Include vigilance in regard to public media, seek "equal time," etc.
6. Develop close relationships with each Senator or Representative.

### **3. The Parish Pro-Life Committee**

The parish Pro-Life Committee should include a delegate from the Parish Council, representatives of various adult and youth parish organizations, members of local Knights of Columbus Councils, Catholic Daughters of America Chapters and other similar organizations.

*Objectives:*

- a) Sponsor and conduct intensive education programs touching all groups within the

parish, including schools and religious education efforts.

- b) Promote and sponsor pregnancy counseling units and other alternatives to abortion.
- c) Through ongoing public information programs generate public awareness of the continuing effort to obtain a constitutional amendment. The NCCB, the National Committee for a Human Life Amendment and the State and Diocesan Coordinating Committees should have access to every congressional district for information, consultation and coordination of action. A chairperson should be designated in each district who will coordinate the efforts of parish pro-life groups, K of C groups, etc., and seek ways of cooperating with non-sectarian pro-life groups, including right-to-life organizations. In each district, the parishes will provide one basic resource, and the clergy will have an active role in the overall effort.
- d) Prudently convince others—Catholics and non-Catholics—of the reasons for the necessity of a constitutional amendment to provide a base for legal protection for the unborn.

#### **4. The Pro-Life Effort in the Congressional District**

Passage of a constitutional amendment depends ultimately on persuading members of Congress to vote in favor of such a proposal. This effort at persuasion is part of the democratic process, and is carried on most effectively in the congressional district or state from which the representative is elected. Essentially, this effort demands ongoing public information activity and careful and detailed organization. Thus it is absolutely necessary to encourage the development in each congressional district of an identifiable, tightly-knit and well organized pro-life unit. This unit can be described as a public interest group or a citizens' lobby. No matter what it is called:

- a) its task is essentially political, that is, to *organize people* to help persuade the elected representatives; and
- b) its range of action is limited, that is, it is focused on passing a constitutional amendment.

As such, the congressional district pro-life group differs from the diocesan, regional or parish pro-life coordinator or committee, whose task is pedagogic and motivational, not simply political, and whose range of action includes a variety of efforts calculated to reverse the present atmosphere of permissiveness with respect to abortion. Moreover, it is an agency of the citizens, operated, controlled and financed by these same citizens. *It is not an agency of the Church, nor is it operated, controlled, or financed by the Church.*

The congressional district pro-life action group should be bipartisan, non-sectarian, inclined toward political action. It is complementary to denominational efforts, to professional groups, to pregnancy counselling and assistance groups.

Each congressional district should have a chairperson who may serve as liaison with the Diocesan Coordinating Committee. In dioceses with many congressional districts, this may be arranged through a regional representation structure.

#### *Objectives of the Congressional District Pro-Life Group*

1. To conduct a continuing public information effort to persuade all elected officials and potential candidates that abortion must be legally restricted.
2. To counterbalance propaganda efforts opposed to a constitutional amendment.
3. To persuade all residents in the congressional district that permissive abortion is harmful to society and that some restriction is necessary.
4. To persuade all residents that a constitutional amendment is necessary as a first step toward legally restricting abortion.
5. To convince all elected officials and potential candidates that "the abortion issue" will not go away and that their position on it will be subject to continuing public scrutiny.
6. To enlist sympathetic supporters who will collaborate in persuading others.
7. To enlist those who are generally supportive so that they may be called upon

when needed to communicate to the elected officials.

8. To elect members of their own group or active sympathizers to specific posts in all local party organizations.
9. To set up a telephone network that will enable the committee to take immediate action when necessary.
10. To maintain an informational file on the pro-life position of every elected official and potential candidate.
11. To work for qualified candidates who will vote for a constitutional amendment, and other pro-life issues.
12. To maintain liaison with all denominational leaders (pastors) and all other pro-life groups in the district.

This type of activity can be generated and coordinated by a small, dedicated and politically alert group. It will need some financial support, but its greatest need is the commitment of other groups who realize the importance of its purposes, its potential for achieving those purposes, and the absolute necessity of working with the group to attain the desired goals.

### **Conclusion**

The challenges facing American society as a result of the legislative and judicial endorsement of permissive abortion are enormous. But the Church and individual Catholics must not avoid the challenge. Although the process of restoring respect for human life at every stage of existence may be demanding and prolonged, it is an effort which both requires and merits courage, patience, and determination. In every age the Church has faced unique challenges calling forth faith and courage. In our time and society, restoring respect for human life and establishing a system of justice which protects the most basic human rights are both a challenge and an opportunity whereby the Church proclaims her commitment to Christ's teaching on human dignity and the sanctity of the human person.

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