

Toward a Pro-Life Future in the Empire State

A statement by the Catholic Bishops of New York State

Humanity's salvation history was forever changed when a poor, devout Jewish girl from Galilee affirmatively said yes to life and set in motion the birth, ministry, sacrificial death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Mary's fiat ("Thy will be done.") was a gift of love to humanity, given freely in spite of her inability to know all that would entail, but with more faith in the Lord than fear of the unknown. In this month of Mary, we have an opportunity to reflect on her example, even as Americans grapple with gathering societal unrest over the issue of abortion.

“Any woman – regardless of age, religious belief or affiliation, marital status or immigration status – who is pregnant and in need, can come to the Catholic Church and we will give you the services and supports you need to carry your baby to term, regardless of your ability to pay.”

Since the 1973 U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Roe v. Wade* effectively opened the door to abortion on demand throughout the land, an estimated 63 million unborn babies across the country have been killed in the womb before they could even draw their first breath of air. As we await a decision on *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, the recently argued Supreme Court case that could potentially overturn *Roe*, we pray for a positive outcome even as we acknowledge that abortion in New York would continue unfettered, and even be actively promoted as a social good by many elected officials. Sadly, New York, which legalized abortion three years before the *Roe* decision, has long been the abortion capital of the country, a tragic and sobering distinction.

Through the years, advocates for legal abortion have skillfully framed the narrative as one of “choice,” and “reproductive freedom,” completely ignoring the biological reality of what abortion is: the intentional killing of an innocent child in the womb. Even as sonogram technology and advances in neonatal medicine clearly show us the truth that what is being “terminated” is a human life, the pro-abortion movement refuses to address the science. The

abortion industry has been so successful in its messaging that the right to abortion has become inextricably linked to the notion of women's rights and equality for a significant portion of the country, which is why the prospect of a nation without *Roe* has led to fear and anxiety for many people.

Millions of our fellow Americans – even, it must be said, many of our fellow Catholics – have succumbed to this false notion, and we must respond to it in charity and with sensitivity, but with clarity. The fears and anxieties of a young woman faced with an unplanned pregnancy are valid. She is likely terrified. She may be overwhelmed with a plethora of legitimate questions: How will she provide for her other children with another baby on the way? Will the father abandon her? Will she be able to continue her education? Where will she and her family live? Who will provide childcare when she goes back to work? For many, abortion seems the only way out.

These feelings are real, and the challenges of an unplanned pregnancy are difficult. This presents a pastoral challenge for bishops, clergy, Church leaders and, indeed, for all faithful Catholics. Often, the Catholic Church is unjustly accused of being more concerned with the baby in the womb than with the mother and child once the infant has been born. As false as this notion is, it is incumbent upon us as shepherds to acknowledge and address that misperception.

As far back as the 1980s, the late John Cardinal O'Connor, a giant of the pro-life movement, made a pledge that we reaffirm today: Any woman – regardless of age, religious belief or affiliation, marital status or immigration status – who is pregnant and in need, can come to the Catholic Church and we will give you the services and supports you need to carry your baby to term, regardless of your ability to pay. Furthermore, we will not abandon you and your baby after delivery, but, rather, we will see to it that you have the resources that you and your child both need and deserve. No one will be turned away from life-affirming care. If you have had an abortion that you regret, whether recently or in the distant past, please come to us as well, so that we may offer you services to help you to heal.

We ask every Catholic parish, every Catholic Charities program, every Catholic health facility, every Catholic school, every Catholic college and university, and every religious community in our state to proactively engage with us in this pastoral effort. Together, through the New York

State Catholic Conference, we have gathered a list of many of the available resources at www.nyscatholic.org/HelpForMoms. You can also find a map to all Catholic parishes, schools and Catholic Charities agencies in the state at www.nyscatholic.org/places.

But our state and local governments must do their part as well. Elected officials constantly fall over themselves in rushing to announce new initiatives to ever expand abortion in order to garner votes. New York has long been one of the few states to require taxpayers to fund abortion through Medicaid. Planned Parenthood and other abortion providers have access to endless state funding streams. Perhaps the most egregious piece of abortion expansion legislation anywhere was the 2019 Reproductive Health Act. Championed by our previous governor, this act legalizes abortion on demand through nine months of pregnancy, declares abortion to be a fundamental right, allows non-physicians to perform abortions, and even removes criminal penalties for forced or coerced abortions. This year, our current governor codified a provision in the state budget requiring all health insurance plans to cover abortion, with virtually no exemptions for religious employers. Most recently, significant taxpayer funds were redirected to increase abortions in New York State.

