Abortion and Faithful Citizenship
By Deirdre McQuade

Abortion is the most widespread direct attack on innocent human life in the United States. Today, nearly one in four pregnancies ends violently in abortion. As a preeminent threat to human dignity with far-ranging social and political consequences, abortion warrants sober consideration as we head to the polls this fall.

Catholics are called in a special way to examine candidates' positions on the issue against their own conscience, a conscience which is well-formed by Church teaching. Far from being simply the sole choice of a mother, the question of having an abortion involves matters of justice and compassion for all involved: For unborn children and their mothers, but also their fathers, siblings, and grandparents, and the character of our society.

Over 35 years have passed since *Roe v. Wade*, the 1973 Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion for almost any reason throughout the nine months of pregnancy. Approximately 48 million defenseless lives have been lost. Countless women regret their abortions, many men grieve lost fatherhood, and others involved often suffer in silence.

The U.S. Catholic bishops are unequivocal in their defense of human life from its earliest stages to natural death. In *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, they state that abortion is intrinsically evil, which means that abortion is "always opposed to the authentic good of persons" and is *never* justified by circumstances. Abortion "must always be rejected and opposed and must never be supported or condoned" (*Faithful Citizenship*, no. 22).

The bishops advocate for constructive policies to help make abortion unthinkable in our society:

> We also promote a culture of life by supporting laws and programs that encourage childbirth and adoption over abortion and by addressing poverty, providing health care, and offering other assistance to pregnant women, children, and families (*Faithful Citizenship*, no. 65).

Catholics are not alone in opposing abortion. The *New York Times*, MTV, and CBS News co-sponsored a poll in the summer of 2007, and found that 62 percent of young adults reject abortion on demand. In June 2008, a survey of likely voters by the polling company, inc. found that 54 percent would prohibit abortion in all circumstances, or allow it only in cases of rape, incest, and to save the life of the mother.

There are signs that the Supreme Court is beginning to acknowledge the harm abortion causes. In *Gonzales v. Carhart*, the 2007 decision upholding the federal partial-birth abortion ban, the Court candidly recognizes abortion as a form of killing and cites the grief, sorrow and depression reported by women involved in it.

Government officials, regardless of party affiliation, should take the courageous stand to protect the unborn and their mothers from abortion. When they fail to honor the basic right to life – and even abandon it in the name of "choice" – they undermine the foundation for all other human rights.

Citizens deserve to know candidates' positions on abortion so they can vote with fully informed consciences. The bishops say that a well-formed conscience will recognize "that all issues do not carry the same moral weight and that the moral obligation to oppose intrinsically evil acts has a special claim on our consciences and our actions" (*Faithful Citizenship*, no. 37).

Abortion is a pivotal issue as we approach the upcoming state and federal elections. Longer-range, we await the day when U.S. law protects human life from conception to natural death, parents welcome children whether "planned" or "unplanned," and the wounds of abortion have healed. A culture in which abortion is unthinkable is one in which all lives will be honored.

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