



## PROTECTING HUMAN LIFE

### INTRODUCTION

As Catholics, we believe that every human being has intrinsic value, and that the foundation of all of our individual actions and collective laws must be the protection of the human person—from conception to natural death. This is why we have a consistent moral vision that calls us not only to oppose all direct threats to human life, but also to support all things that allow human beings to flourish as free and responsible persons.

The following is a list of some legislation that most directly threatens human life in our state, followed by suggested alternatives to abortion.

### THREATS TO HUMAN LIFE

**Legal Abortion.** Abortion-rights supporters have sought in the past to eliminate Wisconsin's pre-*Roe v. Wade* abortion ban (s. 940.04). The WCC strongly opposes doing so. Laws do not just serve to restrain human actions, they also serve to uphold human values, even if they cannot be fully enforced. Retaining Wisconsin's pre-*Roe v. Wade* abortion ban is not intended to punish women, for even if it could be enforced, a second law (s. 940.13) would protect any woman who obtains an abortion from being fined, imprisoned, or prosecuted. The WCC fully supports retaining both laws, so as to protect both unborn children and their mothers.

**Physician-Assisted Suicide.** Supporters of physician-assisted suicide argued last session that mentally competent adults with terminal illnesses should have the right to obtain life-ending medication from doctors in order to die with dignity. In addition, their right to die should prevail over a doctor's conscientious objection to transfer the patient. The WCC strongly opposes this proposal. Human freedom and personal choice are not absolute values or rights. We limit individual action when one person's unfettered choice leads to the degradation or destruction of his or her life, or that of others. We can never eliminate all suffering without diminishing our respect for human life, but we can ease most suffering. The WCC supports proposals to assist those with terminal or other debilitating illnesses, but it forcefully opposes any legislation to legalize suicide and euthanasia.

**Embryonic Stem Cell Research.** Supporters of embryonic stem cell research believe that human embryonic stem cells hold the greatest potential to cure such debilitating and potentially fatal diseases as juvenile diabetes and Parkinson's disease. They consider this research to be ethical since they regard the blastocyst as simply a mass of cells that only possesses the *potential* to become human. They also maintain that our state's economy stands to gain if this research is allowed to prosper at the University of Wisconsin and at private biotech firms around the state. The WCC strongly opposes human embryonic stem cell research because the blastocyst is a *developing* human being with an intrinsic sacredness and human dignity, fully deserving of protection from willful destruction or harmful experimentation. At the very least, tax dollars should not be used to fund this kind of research. The WCC, however, fully supports adult stem cell research, since it does not require the destruction of a developing human being and it has proven to be extremely effective in curing a number of serious diseases.

**Death Penalty.** Supporters of reinstating the death penalty in Wisconsin contend that it will improve public safety, provide comfort and closure to victims' families, and ensure proportionate justice (i.e., the ultimate punishment for the ultimate crime). As the consistent ethic of life teaches, however, human life has dignity,

no matter how broken or culpable. Moreover, the three reasons just cited are not persuasive. Wisconsin has a lower homicide rate than many other states that have the death penalty. Comfort and closure can be obtained without causing additional deaths. Finally, proportionate justice cannot exist in a judicial system that is so fraught with bias and error. The WCC will strongly oppose any efforts to restore the death penalty.

## **ALTERNATIVES TO ABORTION**

As Catholics, we must not only work to end abortion on demand, but also to end the conditions that make it seem like the only available choice. Too often, women choose abortion because they are impoverished, are being coerced, or lack adequate social and emotional support. The ethical response to these situations can never be violence and death, but only love, justice, and solidarity. Already our state has made some important strides in enabling women to choose birth over abortion. Many low-income women and their children have access to health care, child care, and a limited array of material benefits. Much more, however, needs to be done to give women real alternatives to abortion. The WCC supports three areas of improvement:

**State Adoption Tax Credit.** Many families are open to adopting children, but they do not have the financial means to pay all the adoption fees. The WCC supports providing more assistance to adoptive families and their new children. Under current state law, parents can claim a maximum state income tax *deduction* of \$325 for adoption expenses. The WCC recommends that this deduction be replaced by a nonrefundable state adoption tax *credit*, so that parents can reduce their state taxes by a more significant amount.

**Life-affirming Support for Pregnant Women.** Women who are experiencing an unplanned pregnancy and who are feeling pressured to abort need more than information about available programs and services. They need non-judgmental, effective, and life-affirming support. They need dedicated counselors and mentors to help them obtain material assistance, education, job training, adoption options, and healthy living and parenting skills. The WCC recommends that the state foster public and private partnerships to give women effective life-affirming alternatives to abortion.

**Mentoring Teen Mothers.** Pregnant teenagers are especially vulnerable to abortion and poverty. The WCC supports programs to mentor and support teen mothers so that they and their children can have healthier futures. In Brown County, for example, Catholic Charities is collaborating with Big Brothers Big Sisters in order to mentor young mothers one-on-one. The WCC recommends that this mentoring model be replicated throughout the state.

## **ACTION REQUESTED**

Write or call your legislator and make the following points:

1. Retain Wisconsin's pre-*Roe v. Wade* abortion ban.
2. Oppose legalizing physician-assisted suicide.
3. Oppose public funding of human embryonic stem cell research.
4. Oppose reinstating the death penalty.
5. Support a state adoption tax credit.
6. Provide life-affirming support for pregnant women and teen mothers.

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