



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

EYE ON THE CAPITOL

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PREVENTING ABORTIONS

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For Catholics, being pro-life involves more than opposition to abortion. Being pro-life also involves understanding the social, economic, and psychological forces that often impel women to make such a tragic choice and then helping women to overcome these challenges.

In his 1995 encyclical, *Evangelium Vitae*, Pope John Paul II underscored how “tragic and painful” the abortion decision is for many women. Often, he noted, a woman chooses abortion “out of a desire to protect certain important values such as her own health or a decent standard of living for the other members of the family. Sometimes it is feared that the child to be born would live in such conditions that it would be better if the birth did not take place. Nevertheless,” he added, “these reasons and others like them, however serious and tragic, can never justify the deliberate killing of an innocent human being.” (EV, 58)

But the Pope did not stop there, for in the next paragraph he went on to identify others who share moral responsibility for the woman’s abortion.

As well as the mother, there are often other people too who decide upon the death of the child in the womb. In the first place, the father of the child may be to blame, not only when he directly pressures the woman to have an abortion, but also when he indirectly encourages such a decision on her part by leaving her alone to face the problems of pregnancy.... Nor can one overlook the pressures which sometimes come from the wider family circle and from friends. Sometimes the woman is subjected to such strong pressure that she feels psychologically forced to have an abortion: certainly in this case moral responsibility lies particularly with those who have directly or indirectly obliged her to have an abortion. (EV, 59)

A bill currently under consideration in the Assembly (AB 427) is designed to give pregnant women facing a coerced abortion perhaps their first glimmer of hope that they do not have to abort against their will. The bill would require that a physician who performs abortions determine whether or not a woman is truly consenting to an abortion or is instead being coerced. And if she is being coerced, the physician must provide her with a private telephone so that she may call for assistance.

While the Wisconsin Catholic Conference urges all Catholics to contact their representatives and ask them to support this bi-partisan bill, the WCC also recognizes that much more will have to be done to help pregnant women who feel that abortion is their only option.

“I do not close my eyes,” Pope Benedict XVI said recently, “to the difficulties and the conflicts which many women are experiencing, and I realize that the credibility of what we say also depends on what the Church herself is doing to help women in trouble.”

In the public realm, we as Catholics can help by addressing the many challenges expectant mothers face when trying to find affordable housing, healthcare, and childcare; when trying to earn living wages and pursue further education and training.

In the private realm, we can help by supporting the women we know personally, as well as by supporting the pregnancy help centers, food pantries, and homeless shelters who serve the many women we will never know.

None of us alone can do all of these things, but all of us together can do many of these things and so replace a mother's despair with hope.