

**T**ragedically, abortion pervades every part of our society. It affects women, men, families, relationships, politics, religion and the list goes on. Sadly some equate abortion with women's rights, while others know it as a moral injustice and the taking of innocent human life. Still, others may be undecided or apathetic towards the issue. But why is abortion such an important issue in America? Because what is at stake is life itself.

The medical community defines abortion as the induced termination of a pregnancy. This includes both surgical and chemical abortions. In the US, the most often cited reasons that women abort their unborn children are lack of financial resources and/or lack of emotional support from partners, spouses, parents.<sup>1</sup>

The Catholic Church affirms that all human beings are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). Every human being has inherent worth simply because they are human, regardless of their characteristics. The Church also affirms that human life begins at conception. At conception, a human receives two sets of DNA, one from our father and one from our mother. These two sets come together to form a new and unique life. From the moment of conception, each new life has its own DNA, a unique set of instructions about growth and development. The embryo, from the moment of conception, must therefore be recognized as a human being who possesses the rights and inherent dignity of a person. Most importantly, this developing human possesses the right to life. The Church has opposed abortion since the first century. This position has not changed throughout the Church's history.

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### **Truly children are a gift from the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward. Psalm 127:3**

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Pennsylvania has one of the toughest pro-life laws in the country. In 1992, Pennsylvania's Abortion Control Act was challenged in the U.S. Supreme Court case *Planned Parenthood vs. Casey*. The provisions in question were informed consent, parental consent for minors, spousal notification, a 24 hour waiting period, and reporting requirements for abortion providers. The Supreme Court decision upheld all of these regulations as constitutional except for the requirement of spousal notification. Despite the state's strong abortion statute, the state Department of Health reports 37,284 abortions were performed in Pennsylvania in 2009.

One of the chilling realities about abortion is its relationship to race. In the United States, "the abortion rate (number of abortions per 1,000 women of child-bearing age) for black women is almost five times that of white women," and "the abortion rate among Hispanic women ...



## **Abortion, Society and the Catholic Church**

is double the rate among whites."<sup>2</sup> In 2009, nearly 42% of all abortions in Pennsylvania were performed on black women and 8% on Latinas.<sup>3</sup> But Blacks and Hispanics make up about 10% and 3% of the population respectively.<sup>4</sup> These drastic statistics show that abortion affects racial minorities to a greater extent than it does Caucasians. This sad fact demonstrates just one of the ways in which abortion is a scourge that affects all of society.

Jesus teaches us that we must protect and serve the least of our brothers and sisters. What human is more innocent and vulnerable than an unborn child? Procured abortion goes against the ethic of love that Jesus Christ proclaimed.

### **What can we do about abortion on a practical level?**

First and foremost, we can pray for the unborn. Take a few minutes each day to remember unborn children and their mothers in your prayers. As well as protecting the rights of the unborn child, we are also called to love the women and men who have been affected by abortion. We can support expectant mothers by volunteering or financially contributing to crisis pregnancy and parenting ministries. But another important thing we can do is speak out in the public debate. Take a stand on public policy issues that concern abortion. Voice your concern for the unborn. Contact elected officials and hold them accountable when it comes to legislation concerning abortion. Stay informed about current affairs surrounding the abortion debate.

The Pennsylvania Catholic Advocacy Network provides news and legislative action alerts on pro-life and other key issues to its members. By joining together, the Network presents a collective voice of concerned citizens to state lawmakers. Sign up at [www.pacatholic.org](http://www.pacatholic.org).

### **RESOURCES FOR HELP & SUPPORT**

Rachel's Vineyard provides help to those seeking healing after an abortion. Log onto [www.rachelsvineyard.org](http://www.rachelsvineyard.org) to find post-abortion healing in your area.

Women considering abortion or looking for an alternative, please call Real Alternatives 1-888-LIFE AID.

NOTES: <sup>1</sup>*Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, Alan Guttmacher Institute, Sept. 2005; <sup>2</sup>*Guttmacher Policy Review*, Summer 2008; <sup>3</sup>2009 Abortion Statistics, PA Dept. of Health; <sup>4</sup>Census 2000, Penn State Data Center



January 2011

Published by the Pennsylvania Catholic Conference Institute for Public Policy. For more information, contact PCC at PO Box 2835, Harrisburg, PA 17105 717-238-9613, [info@pacatholic.org](mailto:info@pacatholic.org), or log on to [www.pacatholic.org](http://www.pacatholic.org). Graphic from Americans United for Life. Used with permission.