



FLORIDA CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

The nonpartisan public policy voice of the Catholic Church in Florida

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Statement of the Catholic Bishops of Florida on the 45th Anniversary of *Roe v. Wade* January 22, 2018

On this sad anniversary, we invite deeper reflection on the outcome of the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Roe v. Wade*. Instead of being a place of safety, the womb has become a place of vulnerability for the developing child. Children are defenseless in the womb often as a result of their mothers' vulnerability to the social ills that persist in our culture.

Three quarters of abortions are performed on women whose incomes are below 200% of the federal poverty level.^{1,2} One's race affects even the unborn, as 60% of abortions are of minority children.³ Fears over the ability to meet the needs of a disabled child lead to more abortions as well; consider that 67% to 85% of pregnancies end in abortion when the child is diagnosed with Down syndrome in the womb.⁴

Abortion is a direct assault on human life; devaluing the poor, minorities and the disabled harms human dignity. This brings to mind the observation articulated with our brother bishops of the United States in *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* that, "All the life issues are interconnected, for erosion of respect for the life of any individual or group in society necessarily diminishes respect for all life." (no. 25)

In 2015, elected officials in Florida attempted to protect women against the predatory practices of those who perform abortions by requiring a 24-hour reflection period. This allows for greater deliberation on an irreversible decision and ensures better informed consent of the patient. Comparable medical procedures are performed after a prior visit with a physician. The practice among abortionists is altogether different as it can take place in a single visit. It preys upon the mother's vulnerability – which becomes the child's vulnerability – by seeking to act before fears are allayed and concerns are addressed. We hope that the courts, which are still reviewing a challenge to the law, will recognize the value of a reflection period before a woman undergoes an abortion and ends a life.

Pope Francis calls us to address the needs of the vulnerable who live at the margins, the peripheries, to be people who accompany, assist and truly encounter the other. In a particular way, we thank those who accompany vulnerable women through their pregnancies. Pregnancy support centers show genuine care for women and their unborn children, and alleviate the vulnerability that otherwise prompts many to consider what should be unthinkable, the aborting of one's child.

Ministries that facilitate healing and reconciliation for those whose vulnerability prompted the abortion of their children perform a praiseworthy service. Oftentimes, solitude and abandonment make women prey to abortion. Men, too, experience profound regret over their roles or experiences in the abortion of their children. In ministries such as Project Rachel, hope is often restored, and deeper wholeness achieved with God's grace.

We renew the call to stand together in solidarity to protect the unborn child, and the child's vulnerable parents, and to address the social concerns that put them at risk.

Most Reverend Thomas G. Wenski
Archdiocese of Miami

Most Reverend Gerald M. Barbarito
Diocese of Palm Beach

Most Reverend Frank J. Dewane
Diocese of Venice

Most Reverend John G. Noonan
Diocese of Orlando

Most Reverend Felipe J. Estévez
Diocese of St. Augustine

Most Reverend Gregory L. Parkes
Diocese of St. Petersburg

Most Reverend William A. Wack, C.S.C.
Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee

Most Reverend Peter Baldacchino
Archdiocese of Miami

Most Reverend Enrique E. Delgado
Archdiocese of Miami

¹ Jerman J, Jones RK and Onda T, Characteristics of U.S. Abortion Patients in 2014 and Changes Since 2008, New York: Guttmacher Institute, 2016, <https://www.guttmacher.org/report/characteristics-us-abortion-patients-2014>.

² The 2017 federal poverty level equals an income of \$12,060 for individuals.

³ Dehlendorf CE and Weitz TA, Access to abortion services: a neglected health disparity, *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved*, 2011, 22(2):415–421.

⁴ Natoli, J. L., Ackerman, D. L., McDermott, S. and Edwards, J. G. (2012), Prenatal diagnosis of Down syndrome: a systematic review of termination rates (1995–2011). *Prenat Diagn*, 32: 142–153.