

Supreme Court and Abortion

Last of a two-part series
By Liz Schevtchuk
NC News Service

Washington — Abortion. That eight-letter word sparked a bitter 10-year debate which reverberates with arguments over what in society should be considered legal and moral.

Since the Supreme Court decision in 1973, American society has reflected a deep difference of opinion on abortion. To pro-lifers, the issue is clear-cut: Abortion is killing a human being before birth and therefore must be stopped. To pro-choice advocates, the issue is also clear-cut: Abortion is a sometimes unfortunate but necessary option which women as a right must have available in cases of unwanted pregnancy.

After 10 years of argument, pro-lifers can point to legislative victories, including passage of the Hyde Amendment, annually cutting off government funding for most abortions, and the Senate Judiciary Committee's approval in 1982 of the Hatch Amendment, a proposed constitutional amendment stating that nothing in the Constitution guarantees the right to an abortion.

Pro-choice groups vow to keep on fighting; so do pro-lifers.

Meanwhile, pro-lifers say, since the court ruling at least 12 million unborn children have died.

Archbishop John F. Roach of St. Paul-Minneapolis, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, said the court's rulings "ratified the principle that innocent lives can be destroyed in order to 'solve' individual and social problems.

"While I mourn the deaths of millions of unborn children,

I grieve even more for the damage done to our conscience as a nation," he said.

Pro-lifers regard abortion as "human carnage," as a "holocaust," as "wholesale execution of defenseless unborn children." In short, as murder.

"The pro-choice word, such as that is, really means the choice to kill," said Dr. Jack Wilke, president of the national Right to Life Committee, Jan. 12.

"The Right to Life is the pivotal human rights issue today, because once we abandon the basic democratic principle of equality — that all human beings deserve the protection of the law no matter what their size, their age or their degree of dependency — then the rights of all of us are less secure," the national RLC says in a pamphlet.

By contrast, the national Abortion Rights Action League has said that "every woman has the right to choose abortion."

"Women have exercised this right throughout history, often at risk of their own lives and contrary to the law," a NARAL brochure stated.

To what — if any — extent society, from ancient times, has condoned abortion is disputed.

The opposition to abortion demonstrated by many faiths is not shared by all religious denominations. Some, in fact, say that a constitutional ban or other strong restriction on abortion would violate religious freedom.

For example, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, a Reform Jewish organization, stated that an effort to ban abortion by declaring that human life begins at conception "raises threats to our First Amendment religious liberties."

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Rabbi David Saperstein, co-director of the UAHC's Religious Action Center, said that Reform Judaism "supports freedom of choice" although it believes that abortion "is a choice to be avoided if at all possible."

"Mainline Protestant denominations are in general accord with the view that there should be freedom of choice," said the Rev. J. Philip Woganan, a Methodist, dean of the Wesley Theological Seminary, Washington, D.C., and professor of Christian Social Ethics. He said he believes "the full weight of human-ness begins with some form of consciousness" of surrounding environment, which he thinks occurs at five or six months of pregnancy.

Father John Connery, theology professor at Loyola University, Chicago, said that he knows that some women have guilt and regrets about their actions years after having abortions. However, "I haven't had any experience with men that would indicate there's a parallel reaction" on the part of those who have fathered unwanted children or who have urged that their unborn offspring be aborted. He recommended a change in values.

"What is needed most is a return to some kind of healthy norms of chastity," Father Connery said. "People just don't have adequate norms in that area."

Family Life: 'Peer Ministry'

This is the second in a series of three articles examining Pope John Paul II's "Apostolic Exhortation on the Family" ("Familiaris Consortio"). The series also will report on the relationship between this document and the Family Ministry Task Force Report, the result of the local diocesan effort in listening to families. The series was prepared by Sue Staropoli, co-director of the Family Life Office.

As John Paul II affirms the family in its critical mission in the life of society and the Church, the local voice of families, as reflected in the Family Ministry Task Force Report, seemed to be hollering, "Help!"

Not just in childhood — but in an ongoing way throughout life — it is the relationships in the home that must nurture and form individuals — to provide the ongoing acceptance, encouragement and support that all people need.

Yet so often the tensions and difficulties in home situations lead family people to a sense of inadequacy and discouragement. Family members feel isolated in their situations and unable to cope personally or to support each other. Yet privacy keeps the tensions and difficulties hidden as people strive to appear as the acceptable "good Christian family."

John Paul II is aware of such dynamics and realities: "There is no family that does not know how selfishness, discord, tension and conflict violently attack and at times

mortally wound its own communion, hence there arise the many and varied forms of division in family life."

In the face of this reality, John Paul states: "... it must be emphasized once more that the pastoral intervention of the Church in support of the family is a matter of urgency." His challenge then is to Church leadership: "The Church ought to apply herself to understanding the situations within which marriage and the family are lived today, in order to fulfill her task of serving."

In this diocese, we have begun that process of understanding. The Task Force Report itself is the result of a listening effort and the Church leadership is now studying its messages. The regional meetings in February and March are the occasions for a collective commitment to ongoing study and change.

The temptation might be to initiate an array of new programs for families — for "them." But John Paul and the report go beyond this. Although he suggests and encourages programs of education and enrichment for families at all stages of development, he holds forth a more proper understanding of family ministry: The family is not primarily an object of pastoral care but "a subject and active partner."

This clearly reinforces the many references in the Task Force Report to the concept of peer ministry. It is from our life experience that we minister. A person's experience of trial/error/success, of loss, of discouragement, of joy can be a gift and a source of support and hope for others. So alcoholism, teen pregnancy, single parenting, unemployment, terminal illness, difficulties in family communication, etc., become opportunities for one individual or family to minister to another — to touch and be touched.

John Paul II affirms this "peer ministry" as the core of pastoral care: "This assistance from family to family will constitute one of the simplest, most effective and most accessible means for transmitting from one to another those Christian values which are both the starting point and goal of all pastoral care."

When we as Church people can break out of our bonds of pride and privacy, to open the doors and allow ourselves to experience and support each other as fellow pilgrims — with all our imperfections and gifts, difficulties and strengths — then we are on the road to the vision John Paul II offers in this letter:

"The modern Christian family is often tempted to be discouraged and is distressed at the growth of its difficulties; it is an eminent form of love to give it back its reasons for confidence in itself, in the riches that it possesses by nature and grace, and in the mission that God has entrusted to it."

NFP Info Sessions

Two Natural Family Planning information sessions have been scheduled.

Sponsored by NFP Education of Rochester, the first will take place from 7:30 to 9 p.m., Feb. 7, at the Kearney Building, St. Mary's Hospital.

Another meeting has been scheduled from 7:30 to 9 p.m., Feb. 11 at the Main Conference Room, Rochester General Hospital.

The sessions are free and open to the public but pre-registration is required from the NFP office, (716) 464-3705.

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Saint Augustine's and Saint Monica's Catholic Elementary Schools, located on Rochester's southwest side, serve children living in neighborhoods ranging from the city's 19th and 3rd Wards all the way to downtown Rochester.

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These parents desperately want their children to be educated in a Catholic school, to be exposed to high academic standards, a healthy sense of discipline, the values of patriotism, and most of all, to Christian teachings.

We've established a Catholic Education Fund to help pay the costs of educating children who are needy and worthy. So many good people have helped bring Catholic education to Rochester's poor over the past few years.

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Documentary Focuses on Energy Costs

A three-part television documentary on "Energy Costs: Freezing out the Poor?" will be broadcast 6:30 p.m., Saturdays beginning Jan. 22, over Channel 8, WROC-TV.

The programs were co-

produced by Action for a Better Community and Portable Channel, and, according to ABC, explores "the impact of rising energy costs on low-income citizens and the communities in which they live."

"The Crisis Hits Home"

will air Jan. 22 and is described as "an in-depth look at three Rochester families and how the high cost of energy affects their lives." "A Frightening Forecast" will be shown Jan. 29, and considers "Rochester policymakers —

and their critics — discuss the community's current and future energy cost crisis." "A Community Says No," will be shown Feb. 5 and depicts "one hard-hit community's unusual campaign against the high price of heat and light."