

Catholics united by principal, divided by action

'The least of my brothers' includes the one in the womb

By Father Anthony P. Mugavero
Guest contributor

Having spent a number of days in the Monroe County Jail for participating in abortion rescue missions, I want to express the motive behind my actions.

When I was ordained a deacon, a Bible was placed in my hands and I was told to "Believe what you read, teach what you believe, and practice what you teach." As I have read the Scriptures, and lived my life, I have found the most incredible and loving Being, God, creating out of total and unconditional love, with infinite creativity and imagination, in ecstatic joy and incomprehensible risk, to share His Life and Love.

All life is good ... an incredible gift to be enjoyed. Each creature was meant to live in the fullness of its potential and capacities, in harmony with all other creatures. This amazing vision of life as given from the hands of a most loving Father and Creator is what the Scriptures called "Shalom."

According to this interpretation of reality, all life is God's and the respecting of all life is a form of our worship of God. Inherent in this vision is that life is a gift and it is no one's to take.

The Scriptures also communicate how God set in motion His own "rescue mission" to restore His vision and plan of Shalom. This culminated in the death and resurrection of His Son, and in a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Now, each of us as an individual and all of us as a community are called to give ourselves anew in complete love, trust, and affection to God and to the values and the way of life of Shalom.

As we follow Jesus, we are called to go to the places which do not reflect the Father's Shalom. Where people are hurt, suffering, and in pain, we are called to bring His peace. The greater the injustices inflicted, the greater the imperative to respond. As the Peace Prayer of the Franciscan tradition asserts, we are precisely called to be instruments of the Lord's Shalom so that "where there is darkness — light, and sadness — joy."

There are many places where the Shalom of God needs to be and is not. Nevertheless, I feel hard pressed to find a more compelling call to us as a church than to act against the literal dismemberment of human life made in the image and likeness of God. I cannot imagine violence more brutal or victims more innocent.

What is also involved here is the deadening of instinct and loss of goodness in those of us who passively accept such evil in our midst. To be an instrument of Shalom in this setting means to understand clearly that a child is in danger of losing her or his life, a woman is about to be exploited, a doctor is preparing to betray her or his profession of healing.

I believe each one of us, and all of us together, are getting closer to losing our own souls by no longer being faithful to the obligation of God's call of Shalom. By killing the innocent and irreparably hurting others, the action entailed in an abortion destroys the possibility of Shalom. A loving person, filled with this knowledge of what is about to take place, will respond with immediate and effective action.

An abortion rescue mission responds to the presence of a child — an unborn sister or brother of ours. She or he is part of the human family. To us, there is no difference in worth between a child of 12 weeks gestation and a child 12 months old.

In an abortion rescue mission, you are responding in love with your entire being to this child. You are saying to her or him: "I will be with you. You are loved. You are one of us. You are a member of our human family. You are my sister. You are my brother. You are wanted. I will do all I can to protect you."

No amount of patient lobbying for just laws or working to elect sympathetic politicians is going to save the life of the child whose mother is arriving for an abortion. Without direct and immediate intervention, this child will never laugh, never play, never live in this world in her or his unique way.

If this child were drowning in a pool or sleeping in a burning building, we would stop what we were doing immediately and break in and save her or him. This child is as valuable as we are — of infinite worth.



File photo
Father Anthony P. Mugavero awaits his chance to dissuade a woman from having an abortion.

Our response should reflect this worth by what we say as well as by what we do. This means, if all else fails, urgently making a final appeal by putting ourselves between the abortionist — his or her weapon — and the child targeted to be destroyed. With our entire selves and with all of our vulnerability, we are appealing to the consciences of those who are about to carry out the incredibly violent act of aborting the life of a child.

Each rescue usually saves at least one child from death. If we fail to use such power and influence, if we turn our backs on those who are nearest the children being threatened in such a violent, brutal and callous fashion, we share in the guilt of destroying human lives.

Therefore, we have a moral obligation to act. If we do not attempt to halt the terrifying violence done to a fellow human being during the moment an abortion is taking place, then we are abandoning the true meaning of our call to be "peacemakers" and "followers of Jesus" attempting to reestablish the Father's Kingdom of Shalom on earth.

Shalom and love depend on each other. An abortion rescue mission's purpose is to bring Shalom to all by being present not only to the most victimized group of people — the children scheduled to be aborted — but to the other people victimized by this incredible evil — especially the mothers of these children.

Often, these women are vulnerable. Fearing the rejection of boyfriends, parents, family and friends, the pregnant woman may be scared and alone with her true thoughts and feelings.

The abortionist and others exploit this vulnerability by censoring the truth. They offer no explanation of the rapid development of early human life, no explanation of what an abortion does to this new human, no serious examination of alternatives, and no explanation of risks to the mother. She is not told that an abortion may make her more likely to miscarry or deliver prematurely in later pregnancies. Nor is she told that not one, but two deaths could occur — hers, as well as her child's.

An abortion leaves deep psychological scars as well. Bishop Matthew H. Clark has said, "The violence of abortion does not end with the unborn victim. As those of you who work with women who anguish over past decisions to abort a child know well, abortion also perpetrates violence against the mother."

By attempting to protect women, by offering help and support, a rescue mission is an action toward Shalom. One of the definitions of love is willing the

highest good for all. I and others participate in rescue missions because they are simultaneous acts of charity and justice for the women and unborn children. We are there to build bridges to Shalom by providing whatever a pregnant woman might need, whether it be a temporary home for herself, a home for her child, clothes, furniture, help dealing with her family, further counseling, medical assistance or monetary resources.

Those whom I've encountered coming for an abortion are many times ambivalent and undecided. I have met some women, counseled as they were going in for an abortion, who appreciated the information and support they were offered, and who changed their minds. Because of our presence at this critical moment, beautiful children are alive and well, and mothers and fathers are extremely thankful that these children were spared a violent death by abortion.

What of those who are upset by our presence at the site where abortions are taking place? Johnavanaugh-O'Keefe asks, "What causes them to be upset? Is it because of our point of view, or is it rather that our point of view finds an echo in them? ... I am not inclined to apologize for the fact that in some cases our presence does seem to upset people, does cause them to think about what is going on. We are not engaging in any violence ourselves; we are bringing out into the open the violence that is already there. We are removing the facade of po-

liteness and making sure that the underlying is exposed to the light of day, at least a little

Participating in rescue missions on behalf of children scheduled to die and women who feel by pregnancy to me is an act of love — which I am called by the nature of the my celebrate at the altar as a community of faith

As a priest, I am coming to realize there more taking place at Mass than I first und Beneath the words of consecration, each of ing invited to become like Jesus. In a w modeling Him, my own "body and bloo give life to my sisters and brothers. "De memory of Me" goes beyond the ri enactment of the celebration of Mass to li reality of Jesus' life and love in action. ' love has no one than this that he lay down hi his friends."

I have participated in abortion rescue because living faithful to the memory of O der means living and giving ourselves fo wanted, whether they be dispossessed, sicl threatened, oppressed, imprisoned or unbor

Jesus' identification with the least in o and His corresponding conclusions: "You Me;" "You did not do it to Me," call me tion not how we stand on abortion — but stand with the least, the poor and especially One who most greatly identifies with them Lord Jesus.

Nothing can imprison God's Word

By Father Dan O'Shea
Guest contributor

My response to social justice issues has been both deeply personal and deeply spiritual. The journey has taken me from prison cell to monastic cell and back again. In this article I hope to share some aspects of this ongoing adventure with God.

My baptism by fire and blood and ongoing conversion began when, as a teenager, I was confronted with the brutal realities of racism in our country and in my hometown. In 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King was assassinated. His murder turned everything upside down for me. That year I was 18 years old, and that year I lost my naive national and ecclesial "innocence." Life would never be the same and I knew it.

The very week of Dr. King's death, I participated in a civil rights march — the first of many demonstrations, marches, pilgrimages, protests, strikes, boycotts and arrests.

I now consider the confrontation with Martin Luther King's death as the beginning of my deeper conversion. I didn't know it then because I had been taught to expect conversion in well-lit churches, not in dark ghetto streets. The more I learned from my black friends and co-workers in the inner cities, the more I felt disillusioned, hurt, angry, betrayed and rejected by the mainstream church that too often remained silent and complacent in the face of so much blatant injustice. I began to experience myself more and more on the edge of the church, critically questioning what I believed in. I found my home instead in the civil rights and antiwar movements of the late '60s and early '70s.

It's hard to believe that it has been 21 years since the death of Martin Luther King, Jr. Sadly, the majority of blacks are still trapped in poverty and discrimination. The situation has become much worse. I find our culture is increasingly narcissistic, self-centered. The urban underclass has been made economically expendable as violence escalates. I remain challenged by King's prophetic dream and vision.

Today we find ourselves at a serious historical crossroad. The development of nuclear weapons presents us with a basic choice: life or death. More than at any previous time in history, the alternatives are peace or destruction. Nuclear weapons have left us no middle ground.

My own response to this kind of death-dealing has been to consistently engage in nonviolent resistance against the stockpiling of this kind of weaponry stored at the Seneca Army depot and other depots of death. I invite and encourage others to join in this struggle to convert these "swords" into "plow-



shares and pruning hooks."

The life and words of that young rabbi zareth continue to inspire me to announce News that life is stronger than death, tha more powerful than hate. I believe our so vilized culture should be known for c rather than obliterating the life in its midl ized people has no business of disposing — even "almost people," "not quite peoq nously guilty people, distant poor people here to there, from the womb, to Death Vietnam. It needs to be said unequivoc abortion is a horror, as war is a horror, : killing is a horror.

Paradoxically, for the past four years I'v a monastery withdrawn from the mainstr ture in order that I may be more with hum slowly learning that order, peace, and san pend on the contemplative attitude which a noise, violence, hatred and greed attempts

Living close to the earth with both pris monks has deepened my conviction that n imprison God's Word of Life and Peace. A journey continues from prison cell to mo and back again. For the banning of the b the cherishing of the unborn and all living this is the urgent business of ourselves. In of this wondrous web of life, I often sta dered, clumsy, beset — broken even - graced with the burden and glory of the h cation; a steward of life, never of death.

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