

Create an environment that supports life

Happy New Year. I hope 1998 will be a year of growth and blessings for you and those you love. And I pray that all of us will continue to help our local church to embrace with joyful, confident hearts the challenges and opportunities that lie before us. Defending life is one issue that — by Gospel mandate and synod commitment — continues to challenge us. We are committed to support human life at all stages, particularly when it is challenged by abortion, capital punishment, euthanasia, poverty, violence and war. Yet these threats continue to extinguish human life every day.

As we come to the end of this Christmas season, I want to focus on the challenge abortion presents to human life and to our commitment to defend life. I think this focus is especially appropriate now for two reasons: First, our attention has been focused on the child, Jesus, and his message that we would be saved in and through his vulnerable humanity. Jesus shared our human condition. He taught us and showed us how to love. He even showed forgiveness to those who subjected him to capital punishment. Second, this month marks the 25th anniversary of the *Roe vs. Wade* decision, which legalized abortion in our nation and opened the floodgates to the millions of abortions performed here each year.

I want to invite you to be especially mindful of this grave reality in the weeks ahead. An abortion mentality has sunk deep roots in our country. We need to be realistic and honest in acknowledging that it has similar rooting in many Catholics. It will not be easy

along the way



By BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK

to change those facts. But I hope that you are as convinced as I am that we can help turn the tide if we remain rooted in our faith vision and are willing to commit ourselves to patient work over the long haul. We cannot solve it all at once. But each of us in our own way can help to create an environment in which alternatives are clearly more rewarding than abortion. We can educate about life and about what abortion really is. We can advocate for social policy and legislation that support life. We can help women and families through pregnancies that are burdensome for them. We can help those who have experienced abortion and yearn for healing and reconciliation.

Unless we stay rooted in what our faith says about life, we will not succeed. And we must commit ourselves to charity and civility in all we do. If we are guided by such values, we will be much more inclined to respect the humanity of those who disagree with us. Amid such respect, people do not need to shout because all are willing to listen. And when that happens even vigorous opponents are freer to search for common ground

upon which to develop new possibilities that are more attractive to both than are present realities. Amid such respect, we are more able to understand that many individuals who contemplate abortion do so under great pressure and in very complex circumstances. If, as we hear their stories, we can say, "There but for the grace of God go I," then we are much better prepared to help. Then, we do not act as moral superiors to judge and condemn, but as companions who love them and share life's struggles with them.

During the month of January I hope you will pray about the reality of abortion in our life today. I invite you to review your own thinking about the issue. Has it changed in the 25 years since *Roe vs. Wade*? Or since you first began to think about it? How do you think our church can more effectively encourage all to recognize and defend the sanctity of life in the womb? What can we do together to help that happen?

Have you or has anyone close to you ever had an abortion? How might we have helped and did not? What do we need to learn from your experience? If you feel a need for greater peace or reconciliation, can we help you come to that?

During January our local church will offer several activities designed to strengthen us in our commitment to support choices for life. I encourage you to watch for of them in the *Catholic Courier* and your parish bulletin. And I know that our Consistent Life Ethic office would welcome your inquiries at 716-328-3210 or 716-442-4390.

Peace to all.

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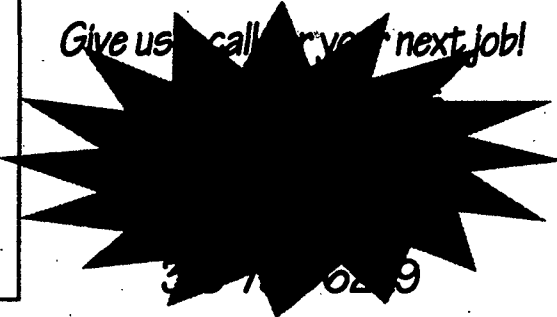
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