



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

DIOCESE OF WHEELING-CHARLESTON

1311 BYRON STREET
POST OFFICE BOX 230
WHEELING, WEST VIRGINIA 26003

Letter on Respect for the Lives of Mothers and Children +Mark E. Brennan Bishop of Wheeling-Charleston

September 29, 2022

My brothers and sisters in Christ, as you likely know, the West Virginia legislature recently passed a bill regulating the practice of abortion in the State and the Governor signed it into law. The new law offers much greater protection to preborn human beings than was formerly afforded in West Virginia. It treats women who seek an abortion with commendable restraint while holding medical practitioners accountable for their actions, should they violate the law.

As Governor Justice said, neither those who support abortion nor those who oppose it got everything they wanted from the new law. Some on one side wanted no restrictions or very few on abortion and no consequences for those who practice the procedure. Some on the other side did not want the exceptions allowed by the law for cases of rape, incest and a serious threat to the mother's life. While acknowledging the genuine hardship of women in such situations, they saw a greater injustice in taking the life away from a baby conceived in those circumstances or caught in a tragic crisis the child could not avoid.

All in all, however, the new law makes life in the womb much safer for preborn children in West Virginia. We must remember that God Himself gave us the commandment, "You shall not kill," and that Jesus has taught us to feed the hungry and clothe the naked, which is irrelevant if we stand by and let the smallest, most vulnerable human beings be killed. I applaud the national Knights of Columbus and our local Knights Councils for providing sonogram machines to pregnancy centers. Seeing their tiny child alive, many women have changed their mind about getting an abortion.

Be clear about this: abortion is a gruesome matter. While there are a number of ways in which a preborn child is killed, two are most common: either a painful surgical procedure, in which the child is dismembered within the womb, or a similarly painful, chemically induced expulsion of the preborn child from the mother's womb. What humane person, especially a God-fearing one, could approve of such a brutal act? My personal experience counseling women who have had abortions has also taught me how scarred their abortions often leave them, once they recognize that they have done the most unnatural thing for a woman to do: allow her child to be killed. We should spare women that trauma.

My brothers and sisters, our Church is both pro-child and pro-woman. As the prolife movement long ago realized, seeking only to limit or eliminate abortions is not enough. We

must also provide support to mothers before and after they give birth and to their families. Pregnancy centers around the nation have been doing that for decades, often helped by volunteers and money from Catholic parishes. The American bishops' program, "Walking with Moms in Need," will strengthen the connection between Catholic parishes and local pregnancy centers. Stay alert for more information about this initiative.

We must work as well to ensure that hospitals in our State provide quality prenatal and postpartum care, especially to those women who lack health insurance and other financial resources. Having checked with the administrators of Catholic hospitals in West Virginia, I can assure you that, as a matter of faith and respect for the dignity of the person, they will not turn away women who lack health insurance but need quality prenatal and postpartum care.

An inspiring example of what we can do together comes from St. Joseph's Parish in Martinsburg. Assisted by other Catholic parishes and other churches in the Eastern Panhandle, St. Joseph's is renovating a former convent to provide a place for pregnant women to live who have nowhere else to go. "Mary's Refuge" will be able to accommodate nine pregnant women, who can live there for up to a year while they work and receive counseling on healthy lifestyle choices and how to raise a child. Could not such a project go forward in other parts of our State?

The State, too, has a role to play. Our legislature and Governor have created a law that will shield many preborn children from an untimely and atrocious death, but the State can and should do more. Especially now, with large budget surpluses, but even in difficult times, the State should prioritize funding programs directed toward helping young families pay for quality childcare when both parents or a child's only parent must work outside the home. Paid maternity leave would help mothers in postpartum recovery and give them time to bond with their newborn children. Giving more support to adoption services, promoting adoption and reducing financial obstacles in the adoption process would benefit adopted children and their new family. More must be done to support women subjected to domestic violence, which often harms their children as well. Government cannot do everything, but these are some of the things it could do.

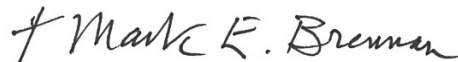
Pope St. John Paul II often spoke of "building a culture of life." That is the larger goal to which we Catholics must be committed. Building that culture includes all of the positive steps that the Church, other private groups and our governments can take to uphold the right to life and promote the welfare of families. But building a culture that respects all human life also means resisting evil, the "culture of death" that has gained a strong foothold in our country.

We see the culture of death at work now in attempts to discredit and damage pregnancy centers. We see it in attacks on Catholic churches that have occurred across the nation and in the vilification of Catholic Supreme Court justices for supposedly imposing their religion on the country by overthrowing the *Roe-Casey* abortion regime. We see it in programs advanced by major corporations that will provide funds for their pregnant employees to travel to states that make abortion readily available. We must defend and support pregnancy centers, speak out against attacks on churches, Catholic groups and individuals and others who support both child and mother, and challenge big companies who facilitate abortions but are less generous in supporting their pregnant employees who want to give birth to their children. In the latter case,

look up on the internet the names of those corporations. Do they deserve our patronage? We have to resist evil as well as do good.

These are tumultuous times. We cannot be certain of what may come from our efforts to build a culture of life. We can only entrust ourselves and our cause to the Lord and do our best. St. Teresa of Kolkata said that God has called us not to be successful but to be faithful. Yet we must trust that, in seeking to be faithful to the God who has given us life, we will be able to stem some of the evil that threatens human beings and accomplish some substantial good for them. St. Paul said, “Bear one another’s burdens and so you will fulfill the law of Christ” [*Galatians 6:2*]. Let us bear the burden of standing up for life and promoting the good of our brothers and sisters, the little ones and the bigger ones. As a contemporary song says, “Go make a difference. You can make a difference. Go make a difference in the world.” Let us not shrink from the struggle but engage in it with confidence in the God who has made the ultimate difference in the world by sending His Son as our Savior. United to him, we can make a difference in today’s world for women, children and families. May God bless and guide us.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mark E. Brennan".

+Mark E. Brennan
Bishop of Wheeling-Charleston