



Franciscan Statement at the Anniversary of Roe v. Wade

January 19, 2018

As Franciscans, our approach to social issues is always to seek deep solidarity with those who are vulnerable or on the margins of society. This stance was embodied by our founder, St. Francis of Assisi, who ignored the norms of his society and made direct encounter with the most despised and vulnerable of his time a priority. When we embrace our world, we seek to repair broken relations that lead to a variety of social issues and maladies: turning away the stranger/the immigrant; the challenge of climate change; lack of care for the elderly and disabled - both physically and mentally; a dis-ease with the dying process; the death penalty; and, as we mark the anniversary of the *Roe v. Wade* decision, a particularly tragic one, abortion. Our approach is in line with the leadership of the Catholic church in that we utilize the rubric of the consistent ethic of life.

Some criticize this approach, claiming that the consistent ethic of life “waters down abortion” so that it becomes just one of many issues, or that its use does not pointedly challenge persons who might be called “pro-choice.” These criticisms may be fair in some circumstances where the consistent ethic of life is not held in its entirety and, therefore, does not see and respond to attacks on life at all its stages. Nonetheless, the consistent ethic of life teaching is central to the way our Church leadership engages with the world.

The consistent ethic of life is the methodology utilized by the U.S. Catholic Bishops in their “Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities.” In the plan, they quote Pope St. John Paul II and insist, “*Where life is involved, the service of charity must be profoundly consistent. It cannot tolerate bias and discrimination, for human life is sacred and inviolable at every stage and in every situation; it is an indivisible good. We need then to ‘show care’ for all life and for the life of everyone.*”

Our Holy Father, Pope Francis also uses the consistent ethic of life in his teaching as reflected in *Laudato Si*. He writes:

*The culture of relativism is the same disorder which drives one person to take advantage of another, to treat others as mere objects, imposing forced labor on them or enslaving them to pay their debts. The same kind of thinking leads to the sexual exploitation of children and abandonment of the elderly who no longer serve our interests. It is also the mindset of those who say: Let us allow the invisible forces of the market to regulate the economy, and consider their impact on society and nature as collateral damage. In the absence of objective truths or sound principles other than the satisfaction of our own desires and immediate needs, what limits can be placed on human trafficking, organized crime, the drug trade, commerce in blood diamonds and the fur of endangered species? Is it not the same relativistic logic which justifies buying the organs of the poor for resale or use in experimentation, or **eliminating children because they are not what their parents wanted?** This same “use and throw away” logic generates so much waste, because of the disordered desire to consume more than what is really necessary. (emphasis added by provincials)*

Our own “Franciscan stance” also reflects the consistent ethic of life in that we ground all our action in the radical interconnectedness of all creation. In authentically following Francis of Assisi’s embrace of the most vulnerable, we must view all the various “issues” we face in the context of this

connectedness. When we address abortion, the death penalty, euthanasia, immigration or climate change, we are first speaking out against harmful and sinful activity and, from this stance of naming the injustice, we move to work for social change and transformation. A transformation that seeks to repair broken relationships and move a world to embrace our interconnectedness and interdependence rather than living the fiction of radical individualism.

At this anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, we, like many people, pay particular attention to the challenge of abortion in this world. Abortion like so many other life issues is a complex one. However, we share our Holy Father's contention that it stems, to a great degree, from a culture that ignores our interconnectedness and focuses on the individual. This "cultural norm" leaves women with unplanned or unexpected pregnancies isolated and feeling that they have few options. We must resist the culture's overemphasis on the individual and embrace the other. This stance must be held with all issues of life: abortion, euthanasia, health care, war, immigration, racism, climate change, etc. If we consistently take a stance of radical encounter and embrace, we can bring some order to our society; overcoming the culture's tendency to ignore our dependence upon one another and all of creation. In addition, when we embrace the most vulnerable, we discover—much like Francis of Assisi in his time—that the "other" has always been our sister or brother, and that our fears and/or rejection were terribly misguided.

In our Franciscan ministries we call upon our communities to:

- Speak out boldly about and not shy away from the complexity of the consistent ethic of life.
- Care for those who have felt no choice but to seek an abortion, through programs like Project Rachel.
- Address attacks on life across the entire spectrum and all stages of life through direct care for the individual and the local community, and through public advocacy.
- Approach the issue of abortion and all social issues in a way that clearly speaks out against the sin and injustice, but does not add to the polarization so rampant in our society.

Our world is hungering for connection. We pray that all can embrace the stance of a consistent ethic of life and, in doing so, answer God's invitation to relationship with God, one another, and all creation.

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