

Abortion leading to less respect for lives of disabled, archbishop says

PHILADELPHIA - A Philadelphia hospital's alleged refusal to provide a kidney transplant to a mentally disabled 3-year-old is yet another example of the harm caused in the United States by the Roe v. Wade court decision legalizing abortion, according to Philadelphia Archbishop Charles J. Chaput.

"The habit of treating genetically disabled children as somehow less worthy of life is growing across the country," the archbishop said in a column posted Jan. 19 on the website of his archdiocesan newspaper, The Catholic Standard & Times.

He was commenting on the case of Amelia Rivera, whose parents say she was denied a kidney transplant at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia because she has Wolf-Hirschhorn syndrome, a chromosomal disorder that results in severe developmental retardation.

The child's parents say a doctor at the hospital told them that a kidney transplant would not be performed on Amelia at the hospital using a donated kidney because she was "mentally retarded." The hospital has declined to comment on the specifics of the case, citing patient confidentiality, but said that transplant eligibility decisions were "based on widely accepted, medically valid methods, with many factors considered."

Archbishop Chaput said it is "unwise to assume that news media get all the details of a story like this right, or that the motives of an entire hospital's leadership and staff are as unfeeling as an individual doctor might seem."

But he added, "We need to understand that if some lives are regarded as unworthy, respect for all life is at risk. We should pray that Amelia Rivera gets the help she needs, and that God surrounds her parents with the support they need."

Anticipating the 39th anniversary of the Supreme Court's decision in Roe v. Wade on Jan. 22, Archbishop Chaput said, "More than 45 million abortions later, the damage of that decision continues to grow - undermining our reverence for the life not just

of unborn children but of the mentally and physically disabled as well.”

The archbishop said some of his friends are the parents of children with special needs, whose doctors or genetic counselors might have warned before the child’s birth of possible genetic anomalies.

“Some doctors deliver this information with sensitivity and great support for the woman,” he said. “But, as my friends know from experience, too many others seem more concerned about avoiding lawsuits, or managing costs, or even, in a few ugly cases, cleaning up the gene pool.”

Archbishop Chaput said the parents of children with potential disabilities should not be denied “vital information” nor given “an implausibly upbeat picture of life with a child who has a disability.”

But he recommended that those parents also hear from other parents of special-needs children, special education teachers and therapists, and pediatricians who have treated children with disabilities, who “often have a hugely life-affirming perspective.”

“The real choice in accepting or rejecting a child with special needs is never between some imaginary perfection or imperfection,” the archbishop said. “None of us is perfect. No child is perfect. The real choice in accepting or rejecting a child with special needs is between love and unlove; between courage and cowardice; between trust and fear.”

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