

# How Insensitive

## The Catholic Review

October is the month each year when the Catholic Church throughout the United States observes Respect Life Month. It is a 40-year-old tradition and a time when we raise awareness of the Church's belief in the inherent equality and transcendent value of every human being, a belief that serves as the foundation of the Church's teaching on issues ranging from capital punishment and end-of-life care to Catholic social teaching, immigration and racism.

While it is important to remember that the Church's pro-life positions encompass a broad range of issues, there is good reason why many often immediately shift their attention to the national scourge of abortion whenever we speak about respect for life. Unfortunately, it would appear from the horrific data that follows that an overall insensitivity exists in our society toward the value of human life.

Consider that in the United States alone, there have been nearly 50 million legal abortions from 1973 to 2008, according to the most recent data provided by the Guttmacher Institute. Of course, these numbers are incomplete because they only include "legal" abortions and four states, including Maryland, do not compile and/or provide such data.

While the number of abortions declined from 1.31 million in 2000 to 1.21 in 2008, the most recent year for which we have national data, the picture remains grim.

- Nearly half of pregnancies among American women are unintended, and about four in 10 of these are terminated by abortion. Twenty-two percent of all pregnancies (excluding miscarriages) end in abortion. Up to 58 percent of women reported using contraception the month they become pregnant.
- Forty percent of pregnancies among white women, 67 percent among blacks and 53 percent among Hispanics are unintended.
- Each year, two percent of women aged 15-44 have an abortion. Half have had at least one previous abortion.

- At least half of American women will experience an unintended pregnancy by age 45, and, at current rates, one in 10 women will have an abortion by age 20, one in four by age 30 and three in 10 by age 45.

And the situation here in Maryland is worse.

- With 29 abortions per 1000 women of reproductive age, the state's abortion rate is 48 percent higher than the national average.
- More than 34,000 abortions were performed in 2008.
- Maryland is one of only four states that voluntarily use state Medicaid funds to pay for some abortions.
- Each year, 99.9 percent of these abortions are on healthy babies.
- In 2009, Marylanders paid \$3.4 million in Medicaid dollars to abort 4,855 healthy babies.
- Maryland allows abortion through all nine months of pregnancy and does not require parental consent before an abortion is performed on a minor.

The causes behind these disturbing numbers are numerous, with plenty of responsibility to go around.

We live in a society that seeks to marginalize God and religion at every turn (read George Matysek's article on Page 3 about the exclusion of "religious groups" from this year's Hampdenfest while Planned Parenthood was welcomed). "Advertising and entertainment media promote a selfish and demeaning view of human sexuality by extolling the alleged good of sexual activity without love or commitment. This view of sex as 'free' of consequences has no place for openness to new life," Cardinal Daniel DiNardo of our national Bishops' Conference wrote.

Many of our government leaders are of the same mind. Some now even seek to infringe on the ability of religiously motivated people and organizations to participate in public programs, by forcing them to comply with requirements that violate their moral and religious convictions in order to continue serving the needy.

Both views are on clear display in the United States Department of Health and Human Services' recent decision on the "preventive services" to be mandated in

virtually all private health plans under the new health care law. The department ruled that such mandated practices will include surgical sterilization and all FDA-approved contraceptive drugs and devices – including the abortifacient drug “Ella,” a close analogue to the abortion pill RU-486.

If unchanged, this decision “could force Catholic institutions providing health care and other services to the needy to fire their non-Catholic employees and cease serving the poor and vulnerable of other faiths – or stop providing health coverage at all,” Cardinal DiNardo wrote.

We must never become complacent or indifferent to the societal insensitivity toward the value of human life, which is all too commonplace today.

Here in our Archdiocese, we continue to pledge that no woman need have an abortion. The Church, in telling women in crisis pregnancies to seek other alternatives, is prepared and eager to walk alongside any such expecting mother until a life-affirming solution can be found. Linda Brenegan and Johanna Coughlin lead the efforts of our Respect Life Office and coordinate events throughout the Archdiocese. But they are also prepared and eager to help every woman they can in this Archdiocese so that one by one they can decrease these shocking numbers. On the other hand, many mistakenly think abortion is the answer to a problem until it is too late, afterwards living with reality of its devastating and heartbreaking effects. Denise Douglas, coordinator for Rachel’s Vineyard-Baltimore/Project Rachel, helps those women and men experience the mercy of God in repairing their broken relationship with Him, their child, each other and others.

Crisis pregnancy centers throughout the Archdiocese, including in Catholic parishes, offer such free resources as confidential counseling, parenting classes, prenatal vitamins and sonograms, as well as cribs, baby formula and transportation.

Our partners at the Gabriel Network provide housing and other support to women through their pregnancies and beyond. The Network operates Sparrow House, located in the former convent at St. Benedict Church in southwest Baltimore, with a goal of helping women choose parenting or adoption.

These teachings may not fit neatly into the politically compartmentalized lens

through which many in society today view such important issues. However, as Catholics and disciples of Jesus, we are bound by our Baptismal promise to affirm God's great gift of life. This Respect Life Month, let us pray upon how we might advance the cause of life, and promote dignity and respect for others in all that we say and do.