

Pro-life officials praise decline in U.S. abortion rate

WASHINGTON - A study showing that abortion rates in the United States have fallen to their lowest level in nearly 30 years is good news for pro-life officials who attribute the decrease to changing attitudes.

"I am not surprised that the number and rate of abortions is falling steadily," said Deirdre McQuade, director of planning and information for the bishops' Office of Pro-Life Activities, who credits the shift in part to recent debates about partial-birth abortion which have increased public awareness about abortions.

She said she was confident abortions would continue to decrease in the United States as more information about abortions was made available to the general public, support networks expanded for expectant parents in crisis, people sought healing from past abortions and adoption was "treated as a courageous choice for birth mothers."

The number of abortions declined to 1.2 million in 2005, a figure that is 25 percent below the 1.6 million abortions in 1990 and is the lowest level reported since 1.179 million in 1976, according to a study released Jan. 17 by the Guttmacher Institute, a Planned Parenthood affiliate based in New York.

The report shows the abortion rate, the number of abortions per every thousand women ages 15-44, was down to 19.4 for 1,000 women - the lowest it has been since 1974.

The study, "Abortion in the United States: Incidence and Access to Services, 2005," is based on the organization's survey of abortion providers in the United States and analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data. The study will appear in the March 2008 issue of the institute's journal, Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health.

Randall O'Bannon, director of education and research for the National Right to Life Committee, said the data indicate that women are rejecting abortions because they are becoming more informed about the procedure.

He said information about abortions has become increasingly available, particularly in the 23 states with informed consent laws ensuring that women seeking abortion are provided with detailed information about abortion and its risks, biological information about the development of their unborn child and financial information about the types of governmental and private assistance available to them.

Although the Guttmacher report did not list reasons for the decreased number of abortions, researchers said it could be a combination of factors, including the possible increased use of contraception, restrictions on abortions and the wider availability of the abortion pill RU-486.

The report also noted a decline in the number of U.S. abortion providers since 2000. The number of abortion providers decreased in 26 states, increased in 15 states and stayed the same in nine states.