

'Our Common Humanity' – statement on the second day of the Spring 2018 General Meeting of the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference

As pastors we are aware that the conversation about unborn life is sensitive, delicate and, indeed, painful for many. We offer our reflections with the greatest of respect for everyone while wishing to make some points clearly and unambiguously.

Fundamental right

Every one of us has a right to our life. It is not given to us by the *Constitution of Ireland* or by any law. We have it 'as of right', whether we are wealthy or poor, healthy or sick. All human beings have it. For us as a society to now declare that any category of human being should have that right taken from them would be a shocking step. It effectively says that unborn children do not exist or, if they do, they do not count. That is a manifest injustice.

Life begins at conception

At every point, from conception on, the baby has the potential to realise the fullness of life that God intended. All that is needed is time and nurturing. Today we see more clearly that human life begins at conception. There is no later stage in a baby's development where we can say; 'up until now the foetus was not a person and now it has become a baby'.

Are we allowing ourselves to be desensitised?

Making abortion freely available desensitises people to the value of every human life. The scientific evidence about the beginning of human life has never been clearer. It is, therefore, a great irony that we in Ireland are for the first time in our history losing our clarity about the right to life of the unborn. Knowledge about the mysterious workings of DNA and the stunningly vivid evidence of ultrasound images of little persons in the earliest weeks in the womb should be making us more committed than ever to the protection of unborn life.

Choose life

The child in the womb has life and potential. However, like all babies, before birth or in the early years, she or he has no choice. Powerless to defend themselves they rely on the rest of us to protect their lives and vindicate their rights. By using the word 'choice' we need to remember that, for the baby waiting to be born, the choice we make can be a matter of life or death.

Two lives, one love

An expectant mother needs and deserves the care and support of everyone around her, particularly if her pregnancy poses a serious crisis for her and her family. A mother may be informed that her baby faces serious challenges or is perhaps terminally ill. She might be pregnant as a result of rape. Especially in those tragic cases both the mother and her unborn child can – and must – be loved and cherished.

A compassionate society will do all in its power to support and love the mother and baby, and encourage responsible support from fathers. This vision of life makes sense

to people of all faiths and none. While it is enriched by our Catholic faith, it is our common humanity that convinces us of the right to life of every human being.

A declaration of equality

Article 40.3.3 is a declaration of equality and respect for human life. It represents, at the very foundations and substructure of our laws, a conviction that all human life is worth cherishing equally. To repeal this Article would leave unborn children at the mercy of whatever permissive abortion laws might be introduced in Ireland in the future.

We invite people of faith to pray earnestly that Ireland will “choose life” and that the lives of all women and their unborn children will always be loved, valued, welcomed and respected in this country.

ENDS

- **Bishops are available for interview on this statement. Please contact the Catholic Communications Office in Maynooth.**

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