



Secretariat of Pro-Life Activities

3211 FOURTH STREET NE • WASHINGTON DC 20017-1194

202-541-3070 • FAX 202-541-3054 • EMAIL PROLIFE@USCCB.ORG • WEB WWW.USCCB.ORG/PROLIFE

Statement by Archbishop William E. Lori Chairman, USCCB Committee on Pro-Life Activities

Building a Culture of Life in a Post-*Roe* World

An Answer to Prayer

The Supreme Court's reversal of *Roe v. Wade* is, without question, an answer to prayer. In its opinion in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, the Justices ended the Court's nearly fifty-year nationwide regime of abortion on demand; a regime that was based on the indefensible view that the U.S. Constitution implicitly forbids government from protecting the preborn child in the womb from the violence of abortion. The Supreme Court in *Dobbs* concluded that there is nothing in the Constitution's text, history, American legal tradition, or the Court's precedents that justified the extreme holding of *Roe*. Therefore, it returned the issue of abortion to be decided by the people's elected representatives, who had exercised such authority from our nation's founding until the *Roe* decision in 1973. In so doing, the Supreme Court in *Dobbs* cleared the way for a paradigm shift in American law, allowing it to enlarge its boundaries to again welcome a segment of the human family that had been outside of its protections for close to half a century.

Dobbs, then, is a victory for justice, the rule of law, and self-governance. But for those of us who have prayed for this moment to arrive, it is the time for a renewal and rededication of our efforts to build a culture of life and civilization of love. Justice is, of course, essential to this end. But it is not sufficient. To build a world in which all are welcome requires not only justice, but compassion, healing, and above all, unconditional love.

Shifting the Paradigm to "Radical Solidarity"

In a post-*Roe* world, Catholics must now work together for another, even deeper paradigm shift. We must move beyond a paradigm shift in the law in order to help the people of our nation better see *who we can be as a nation* by truly understanding *what we owe to one another as members of the same human family*. To build a world in which all are welcome, we must heed the words of St. Teresa of Calcutta and remember "that we belong to one another."

Abortion is a gruesome sign of how we have forgotten our mutual belonging. The logic of *Roe v. Wade* has framed our national discourse on the issue of abortion as a zero-sum conflict among individual strangers. But the truth of the matter is that mother and child are not strangers; they are already bound together by flesh and kinship. The new life that is developing under the heart of the mother is already situated in a network of relations including family, neighbors, and fellow citizens. The logic of *Roe*, in the name of autonomy, offers the woman only the right to see lethal force used against her child, but it otherwise abandons her.

To the contrary, the logic of the culture of life recognizes that the pregnant woman and her child are not alone—they are fellow members of our larger human family whose interwoven vulnerability is a summons to all of us, but especially Catholics because of the teaching of Jesus and his proclamation of the Gospel of Life. Indeed, Catholics see in the life of the Holy Family a lesson for all society:

Mary, who not only said “yes” to life but who accompanied and cared for her child throughout his life; Joseph, who met the unexpected challenges and threats to the child with fortitude and compassion; and Jesus himself, who came into the world not with power and majesty but with the vulnerability, dependence, and humility of a child.

In a post-*Roe* world, then, we must shift the paradigm to what Saint Pope John Paul II described as “radical solidarity,” making the good of others our own good, including especially mothers, babies (born and preborn), and families throughout the entire human lifespan. It is a call to friendship and compassion rooted in the truth that we are made to love our neighbor as ourselves.

Speaking and Living the Truth with Compassion

What does this mean concretely? How do we practice radical solidarity and unconditional love in a post-*Roe* world? First, by speaking the truth that abortion not only unjustly kills a preborn child, but also gravely wounds women, men, families, and the nation as a whole. It degrades the practice of medicine and corrupts the law. We must *speak* these truths with compassion, and we must *live* these truths with compassion. We must extend the hand of compassion to all who suffer or are in need in the aftermath of abortion, including those who do not yet see the truth in its fullness. Moreover, the call to love compels us to practice civility and charity when we speak to and about those with whom we disagree.

Words alone are not nearly enough to bring about the revolution of love necessary to create a world where all mothers, children, and families are welcomed and protected. For this we must have the courage to love—to *act* and *bear witness* by caring for the least among us, without condition or expectation of recompense. It is only through such radical witness that hearts will be softened such that they can receive the truth of the Gospel of Life.

Concretely, as Saint Pope John Paul II wrote in his letter to the Fourth World Conference on Women of the United Nations, “a radical solidarity with women requires that the underlying causes which make a child unwanted be addressed.” Twenty-five years later, Pope Francis echoed the same sentiment in his 2020 address to the United Nations. Abortion is a brutal result of our failure to care for one another. Building a world in which women are esteemed, children are loved and protected, and men are called to their responsibilities as fathers, requires us to understand and address the complex and tragic tangle of affliction and strife that culminates in the violence of abortion. This is a massive and daunting undertaking.

Fortunately, Catholics already have a strong foundation in the Church’s centuries-long encouragement of parental and societal duties. Millions of individual Catholics from all walks of life are already personally endeavoring to build the bonds of solidarity and compassion throughout our society. Many are engaged in parish and community initiatives such as pregnancy resource centers, post-abortion counseling, and more recently *Walking with Moms in Need*.

The Catholic Church is the largest charitable provider of social services to women, children, and families in the United States. Only the federal government through tax dollars does more. Catholics have already done much at both the institutional and personal level to help address the problems of poverty, healthcare, education, housing, employment, addiction, criminal justice, domestic violence, and the like that push women towards abortion. Our Church understands that parents, children, and families need help not just during pregnancy, but throughout the whole of life’s journey because

millions of Catholics already accompany their neighbors in such circumstances. Additionally, such help involves accompanying parents as they make the courageous choice to make an adoption plan for their child that will provide a place of genuine belonging, grafting them as a son or daughter onto a new family tree. And the Church also extends healing and mercy to those women and men who suffer because of a past abortion. But we must now do even more.

A New Politics

Our nation is in desperate need of healing from the toxic polarization and anger that has poisoned so much of our politics in recent years. A paradigm shift from an abandonment of women masquerading as freedom to radical solidarity can open the way to a new politics. Those who disagree on the morality or justice of abortion should nonetheless come together to pursue common-ground solutions to provide care and support to mothers, children, and families in need. Public officials can stake out new ground, to move beyond the political divisions of Left and Right and build a new coalition of people of good will that will focus on the best outcomes for those in need by whatever means—public or private—that prove to be most effective.

Conclusion

Almost fifty years after *Roe v. Wade*, the Supreme Court has finally returned to the American people the authority to govern ourselves on the matter of abortion. Of course, justice requires that the basic protections of the law against violence be extended to the preborn child. But justice alone is not enough. The opportunity which the Supreme Court has given us is not an opportunity to look backward and return to the past. Instead, it is a calling to Catholics at every level to look forward and build a better future—a future in which the new hallmarks of our society will be solidarity, compassion, reconciliation, and a new unity as a nation. We are not atomized individuals seeking to impose our wills in a world of strife. To the contrary, we belong to each other, and each of us was made for love and friendship. Accordingly, we must live and act in radical solidarity with mothers, children, and families in need. That means doing whatever we can through law, policy, politics, and culture to provide them with the care and support necessary for their flourishing throughout the entire arc of life's journey. Through our collective and individual actions, we can build a culture of life and civilization of love in America. Let us begin.