

DIOCESE OF FRESNO
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**AN OPEN LETTER TO MY PRIESTS, DEACONS, SEMINARIANS,
THE CITY OF FRESNO AND ALL OF FAITHFUL OF THE DIOCESE OF FRESNO**

PUBLISHED ON SEPTEMBER 2, 2022

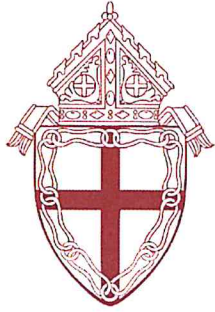
Last Thursday, the Fresno City Council decided to override Mayor Dyer's veto and passed along \$1 million from the state of California to the Planned Parenthood clinic on Fulton Street. Only Council Member Garry Bredefeld opposed the measure.

The funding is expressly allocated to help Planned Parenthood as they expand their abortion services locally. When the measure was originally voted on back in mid-August, I feared it would set a dangerous precedent of direct city involvement in abortion funding. At that August meeting Council President Nelson Esparza declared as much at the end of the Council debate, expressing his hope that this vote will be the first of several such efforts by the city. That fear was solidified this past Thursday when Council Member Miguel Arias declared the City of Fresno as a Pro-Choice city. This is the same council member who declared himself as a devout Catholic back in August.

After the first vote on the measure, Councilmember Miguel Arias mentioned his Catholic faith and his displeasure at Christian leaders in Fresno who are vocal on issues like abortion, but who fail, in his estimation, to do their part to help the homeless and poor. Many comments in the meeting pushed the contention that personal religious views have no part in this public policy discussion, that the First Amendment and the principle of "separation of Church and state" put faith-based opposition to abortion out-of-bounds.

Respectfully, I think both contentions are false. I feel it is my responsibility to stand up for the record of Catholics and other Christians in the Valley in serving the poor, and to stand up for the rights of religious people to express their views in public debate.

Last year, Catholic Charities in the Diocese of Fresno distributed 3.2 million pounds of food to those in need. Their services directly impacted 250,000 persons in 40 different communities throughout the region. Our individual parishes throughout the San Joaquin Valley run food collection drives, clothing drives, and so much more. Catholics have provided enormous resources to the Poverello House and other ministries that have done heroic work to help the homeless and those in need.



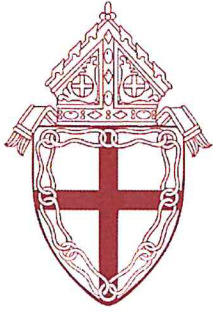
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Beyond my Catholic setting, other Christian churches and life-affirming organizations do tremendous work to help the needy. The Fresno Mission provides meals, shelter, rehab, and employment assistance to thousands. Obria Medical Clinics of Central California provides prenatal care for lower income women in Fresno, a desperately-needed service that Planned Parenthood's Fulton Street clinic does not offer. Pregnancy Care Center in Fresno provides baby supplies, ultrasounds, pregnancy tests, parenting classes, mentorship, and abortion alternatives to women and couples facing challenging pregnancies. So many of the Evangelical churches whom Mr. Arias criticized for not helping the poor—for example, Pastor Jim Franklin's Cornerstone Church—do in fact have massive food, clothing, shelter, and other outreaches. Local Christians are and should be proud of their incredible efforts to help those in need.

To defend the role of religious viewpoints in public life, it is helpful to explain not just what we Christians believe on questions of morality, but how we believe. I do not think killing is wrong merely because the Bible says so—rather, I think the Bible condemns killing because it is wrong *per se*. The inviolability of human life is a universal truth that everyone, Christian or otherwise, can discern from observing our shared human nature. We Christians find the Bible to be a divinely inspired guide to confirm those ethical norms, but such principles are embedded in our very being.

This concept of a “natural law” is not exclusive to Christianity, and has been endorsed in various contexts by figures as diverse as Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, St. Paul, St. Thomas Aquinas, and thinkers from the Jewish and Muslim traditions. These ethical beliefs are not mere ceremonial rules or acts of positive law analogous to Kosher laws or meatless Fridays in Lent. Rather, they are universal truths orienting man towards his best and ultimate ends of authentic happiness and fulfillment.

Dr. Martin Luther King's advocacy of racial equality was not illegitimate because of his Christian faith. His beliefs inspired him to protect the universally knowable truths of fundamental human equality and fraternity. In this same spirit, my brother Christians and I advocate for the lives of unborn children to have equal protection in our society. To deny the legitimacy of these “personal religious views” in public debate would morally impoverish our nation's history, which has benefited so greatly from the ethical advocacy of its churches and faith-filled citizens.



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For these reasons, I stand for life. I stand for public funding to help those in need, particularly mothers in need of prenatal care and support. I stand for women, children and families in need. I do so not because of a narrow sectarian bigotry, but in support of fundamental human equality.

This past week, I sent Mr. Arias an invitation to join me in his district, at the Catholic Charities Fresno Office, to see a small glimpse of what his church is doing to support women, children and families in need. I sincerely hope that he accepts the invitation and I am committed to accommodating him on a time and date.

In Christ,

Most Rev. Joseph V. Brennan, D.D.
Bishop, Diocese of Fresno