



ARCHDIOCESE OF AGANA

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Archbishop's Message on abortion and protection of our unborn

Dear brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ,

“When we survey the lives destroyed by abortion over the past five decades, it is easy to become overwhelmed and discouraged. But we are making real progress. This is an incredibly exciting time to be pro-life. If we work together—secular and religious, young and old, from every race and gender—I firmly believe we can end abortion in my lifetime.” – Kelsey Hazzard, Secular Pro-Life

Those uplifting words of hope and encouragement come from a young lady named Kelsey Hazzard, president and founder of a non-religious group called Secular Pro-Life, which, in the group's words, “brings together people of every faith and no faith in defense of preborn children.”

Some may find it odd that a pastoral message from a Catholic archbishop would quote a person who describes herself as an atheist. Indeed, there are major, fundamental differences in what we believe, especially as it pertains to our God and Creator.

However, during a week of anger and sadness for local advocates of our precious unborn children, such a message from a secular pro-lifer can be an encouragement to us in Guam to remain unshaken in our efforts to eradicate abortion in our island – even in the world.

It reminds us that guarding humanity and standing up for the dignity and right to life of all human beings is not exclusively Christian. As baptized children of God, Catholics and Christians most certainly have an absolute duty to protect the lives of our innocent brothers and sisters in the womb. It is not merely a responsibility, it is a command from the Author of Life Himself, whom we must not defy.

We take heart that we are not alone in efforts to protect innocent human beings in the womb. Some convictions are universal. Or at least they should be.

No matter our background or beliefs, each of us knows how it feels to be young and vulnerable. As children, we clung to our parents, grandparents, and perhaps a beloved aunt or uncle or other trusted adults that we knew would keep us safe from any harm that the world might present.

We hang our heads in sadness and pray for children whose environment and circumstances offer no such care. It's an inherent part of who we are as human beings to care and protect the youngest among us. Brought to life by our Creator who is Love himself, it is our nature to love and cherish the children who surround us.

Judge Frances Tydingco-Gatewood's decision in the District Court of Guam on Friday, Sept. 3 was another blow to opponents of abortion. The judge's decision opens the door to so-called "tele-medicine" which would assist women and girls locally in procuring abortions guided remotely by doctors from afar. The judge's ruling grants a preliminary injunction on local laws that had made it more difficult for women to seek abortions.

It won't be the last setback for all in Guam who recognize the urgent need to stand up for our helpless brothers and sisters in the womb. I commend those locally who fight for the lives of our unborn children, including members of the Guam Catholic Pro-Life Committee, the Esperansa Project, Knights of Columbus and those from other religious denominations. The Safe Haven organization also provides invaluable assistance to pregnant women and girls in Guam. As well, Ohala' Adoptions offers a compassionate option through adoption while "bringing peace, hope, and stability to the women and children of Guam."

We are naturally disappointed and upset about this latest legal effort that impedes the work to protect the unborn. However, especially for we baptized children of God, remember that our hope is forever in our Lord. As now Saint John Paul II, urged, *"Do not abandon yourselves to despair. We are the Easter people and hallelujah is our song."*

We must persist in defending the lives of our unborn. Pray fervently, speak up, push for pro-life legislation and join voices and efforts together. I recognize that we, the Church must do much more to bring light to this atrocity of abortion. I urge our priests to more vigorously and frequently speak about the grave evil of abortion at their Masses,

gatherings and CCD classes. Teachers in our schools and parishes, make the teachings about the grave sin of abortion a regular activity with your students. Families and friends, the call to protect the sanctity of life is yours as well. Speak to one another, counsel the wayward.

Though it may not be pleasant for some to hear, Catholics young and old, need to be reminded about the basic teachings of Christ regarding life. This is one excerpt from the Catechism of the Catholic Church:

Abortion

2270 Human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception. From the first moment of his existence, a human being must be recognized as having the rights of a person - among which is the inviolable right of every innocent being to life.⁷²

*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you.*⁷³

*My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately wrought in the depths of the earth.*⁷⁴

2271 Since the first century the Church has affirmed the moral evil of every procured abortion. This teaching has not changed and remains unchangeable. Direct abortion, that is to say, abortion willed either as an end or a means, is gravely contrary to the moral law:

You shall not kill the embryo by abortion and shall not cause the newborn to perish.⁷⁵

God, the Lord of life, has entrusted to men the noble mission of safeguarding life, and men must carry it out in a manner worthy of themselves. Life must be protected with the utmost care from the moment of conception: abortion and infanticide are abominable crimes.⁷⁶

2272 Formal cooperation in an abortion constitutes a grave offense. The Church attaches the canonical penalty of excommunication to this crime against human life. "A person who procures a completed abortion incurs excommunication *latae sententiae*,"⁷⁷ "by the very commission of the offense,"⁷⁸ and subject to the conditions provided by Canon Law.⁷⁹ The Church does not thereby intend to restrict the scope of

mercy. Rather, she makes clear the gravity of the crime committed, the irreparable harm done to the innocent who is put to death, as well as to the parents and the whole of society.

Pope John Paul II said this in *Evangelium Vitae*, his “Gospel of Life” encyclical of 1995: *“Life, especially human life, belongs to God; whoever attacks human life attacks God’s very self.”*

As we defend the lives of the unborn, in all our words and actions, we must be firm in our convictions and communication that abortion is an absolute evil. However, in our heightened emotions, please do not project hatred to our brothers and sisters who support abortion. In fact, more than ever, they need our love. Recognize that each person has their own wounds, experiences and circumstances that have helped to shape their views about abortion. Just as we pray that they treat us with dignity, so must we uphold the respect and dignity that is due to each of them as our brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ.

Finally, as our Archdiocese of Agaña celebrates the feast of Dulce Nombre de Maria – the Sweet Name of Mary -- this weekend, we also have great comfort knowing that we have our beloved Blessed Mother in Heaven watching over us. She who is full of grace, intercedes for us, prays for us, and comforts us as she bids us to her Son.

With all those graces that Our Father gives to us, we remain full of faith amid these troubling times. Embrace that love then and share it with others.

Yours in Jesus Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Michael J. Byrnes". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Rev. Michael J. Byrnes, S.T.D.
Archbishop of Agaña