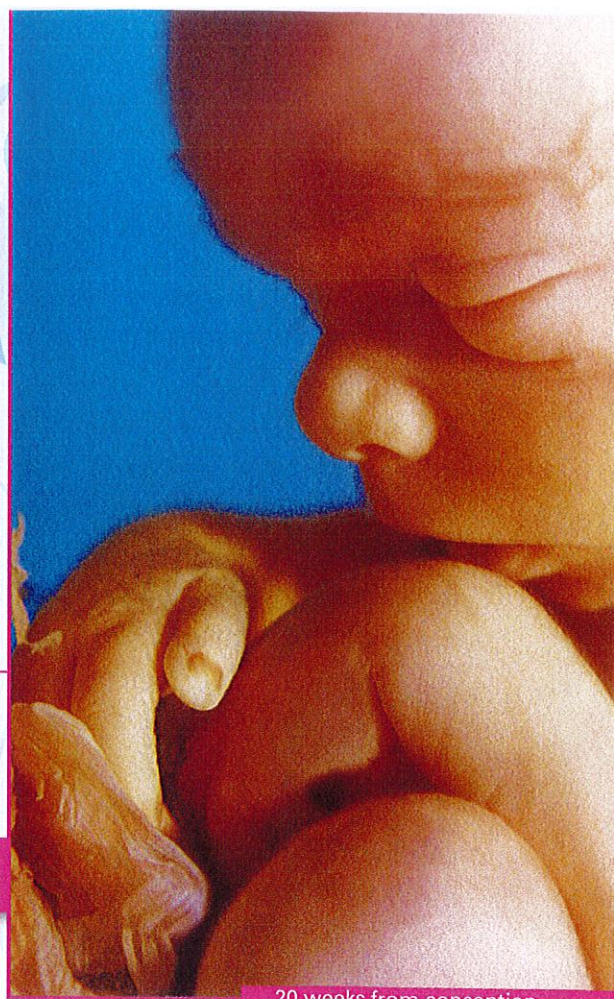


The unborn child

a gift, a treasure and
a promise

A reflection on abortion



20 weeks from conception

Life! A miracle of creation.

Life! The greatest of all gifts.

Life! The first of all rights.

Respect for life, especially of the weakest among us, is the gauge of a civilization.

Where human life exists, its inherent dignity and worth demand unconditional respect.

Where the right to life is not fully protected, other rights are sooner or later mocked.

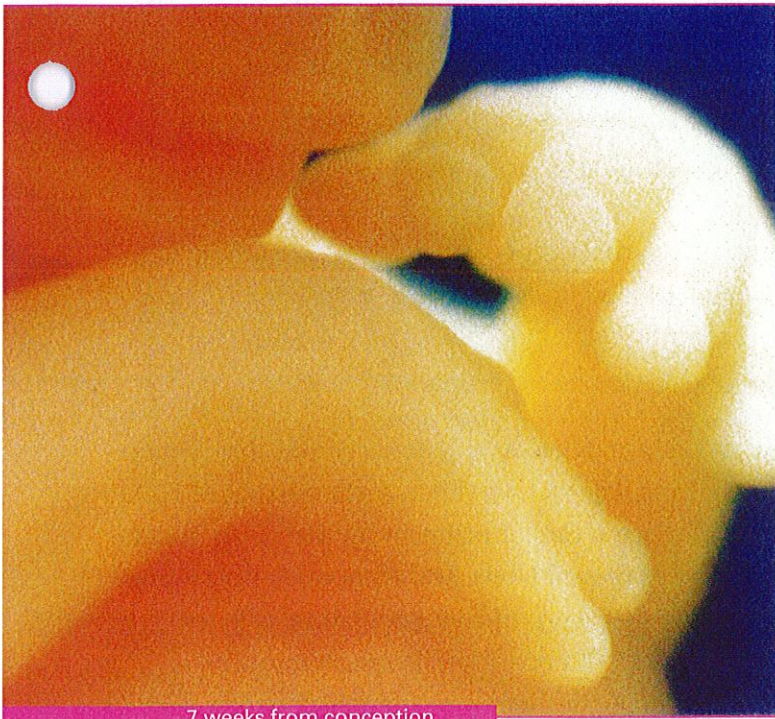
And yet, in Canada – a country which takes pride in its human rights record – this primary right is ignored. Every year Canadians abort one embryonic human being for every three live births – one quarter of all children conceived. Every year 100,000 unborn Canadian children are extinguished before they have the opportunity to look into their mother's eyes, to cut their first tooth, to take their first step, or to contribute to the world which was their inheritance. Each child was unique and irreplaceable. Among them, we might have counted a ground-breaking scientist, a composer of international repute, a future prime minister, a playmate for our children, or our future son or daughter-in-law; someone to love and be loved by.

Demographers have repeatedly said that our current birth rate – 1.68 children per woman of child-bearing age – cannot maintain the Canadian population at its present levels. And economists have warned us that the aging of our population will result in serious socio-economic problems.

All these realities are symptoms of the culture of death that surrounds us. But signs of hope are multiplying. Nearly 72% of Canadians believe that human life should be protected before birth.¹ A new culture of life is slowly appearing in our midst, especially among the young. This culture is founded on the conviction that each person is a sacred story.

1 When does life begin?

Children are often amazed when it first dawns on them that their parents were once tiny babies. Reason tells us that there was a time when we did not exist at all and, more to the point, a precise moment when we *began* to exist. When did *your* life begin? The story of each person's life begins with the coming together of an egg and a sperm: that is, at conception also known as fertilization. As a matter of scientific fact, a new human life begins at conception.² This "moment of conception" results in the formation of a *zygote*; this very first cell possesses all the genetic information, the genetic code, of a new human being who will be called an embryo (during the first sixty days of gestation), then a fetus (from the ninth week until birth).



7 weeks from conception

Today, abundant scientific evidence and the technological advances of ultrasound and intra-uterine photography, confirm the humanity of the unborn. Only three weeks after conception, the

... From the moment of fertilization, that is from the earliest moment of biologic existence, the developing human being is alive, and entirely distinct from the mother who provides nourishment and protection. From fertilization to old age, it is the same living human being who grows, develops, matures and eventually dies. This particular human being, with his or her characteristics, is unique and therefore irreplaceable.

*Dr. Jérôme Lejeune
Father of modern genetics*

heart of the developing child is already beating and, at the end of two months, all of his or her organs are formed. At twelve to sixteen weeks, the fetus can yawn, swallow, suck its thumb, and hiccup. It can make a fist, kick and do somersaults that are not yet felt by its mother. Modern medicine has enabled fetuses as young as 22 weeks to survive a premature birth. These babies have shown us that they can already feel pain.

In 1974, during his pro-abortion days, Dr. Bernard Nathanson, co-founder of one of the most influential abortion *advocacy* groups in the world (NARAL) and later an apostle of the pro-life cause wrote: "There is no longer serious doubt in my mind that human life exists within the womb from the very onset of pregnancy..."³ A standard medical school text states: "[The zygote], formed by the union of an oocyte and a sperm, is the beginning of a new human being." Nevertheless, the question remains: is the unborn child endowed with the same innate human dignity that we recognize and defend in men, women and children throughout the world? "YES!" Human life is of inestimable value at every stage of development.

2 What is an abortion?

An abortion is any event which disrupts the natural development of an unborn human being within his or her mother's womb. *Spontaneous* abortions, or miscarriages, often occur as the result of genetic anomalies or hormonal imbalances. In contrast, an *intentional* or *elective* abortion kills a developing human being.

Any measure, either chemical or surgical, taken against a new life constitutes an abortion, even if some attempt to hide this truth by manipulating language and speaking of "voluntary interruption of pregnancy," "medical interruption of pregnancy" or "elimination of the products of conception".

Chemical methods ordinarily involve the administration of a drug or series of drugs which inevitably provoke an abortion. Similarly, the "morning after pill" – promoted as emergency contraception – frequently "works" by preventing the implantation in the womb of a developing human being, thus provoking an abortion. What is less well known is the fact that birth control pills and IUDs can work the same way.

There are a number of methods of surgical abortion all of which involve the destruction and removal of the fetus. Included among these methods are:

Suction Aspiration: This is the method most commonly used during the first twelve weeks of pregnancy. In this method, the cervix is dilated and a hollow tube is inserted into the womb and then connected to a vacuum machine which tears the fetus and placenta into small pieces.

Dilation and Evacuation: "D & E" is the most common form of late-term abortion. This method involves dilating the cervix and then cutting the fetus into pieces which are removed one at a time. Finally, vacuum aspiration is used to ensure that no tissue remains in the uterus.



8 weeks from conception

Intact Dilation and Evacuation (Partial Birth Abortion): This method is used when a pregnancy is too far along to do a "traditional" abortion. During a partial birth abortion the attending physician uses forceps to turn the baby into breech position. The baby is then pulled out of the birth canal, leaving the head inside the canal. An incision is then made at the base of the fetus's skull and the brain tissue is removed, causing the skull to collapse. The entire baby is then removed.

"... Despite their differences of nature and moral gravity, contraception and abortion are often closely connected, as fruits of the same tree...they imply a self-centered concept of freedom, which regards procreation as an obstacle to personal fulfillment. The life which could result from a sexual encounter thus becomes an enemy to be avoided at all costs, and abortion becomes the only possible decisive response to failed contraception."

*Blessed John Paul II
Evangelium Vitæ, 13*

3 Is abortion legal in Canada?

Many people are shocked to discover that there are absolutely no legal restrictions on abortion in Canada. A Canadian woman can choose to abort at any stage of pregnancy up to delivery and for any reason.

According to section 223 of the Canadian Criminal Code, "a child becomes a human being ... when it has completely proceeded, in a living state, from the body of its mother..." Operating on this false premise, a succession of Canadian governments has failed to provide legal protections for the

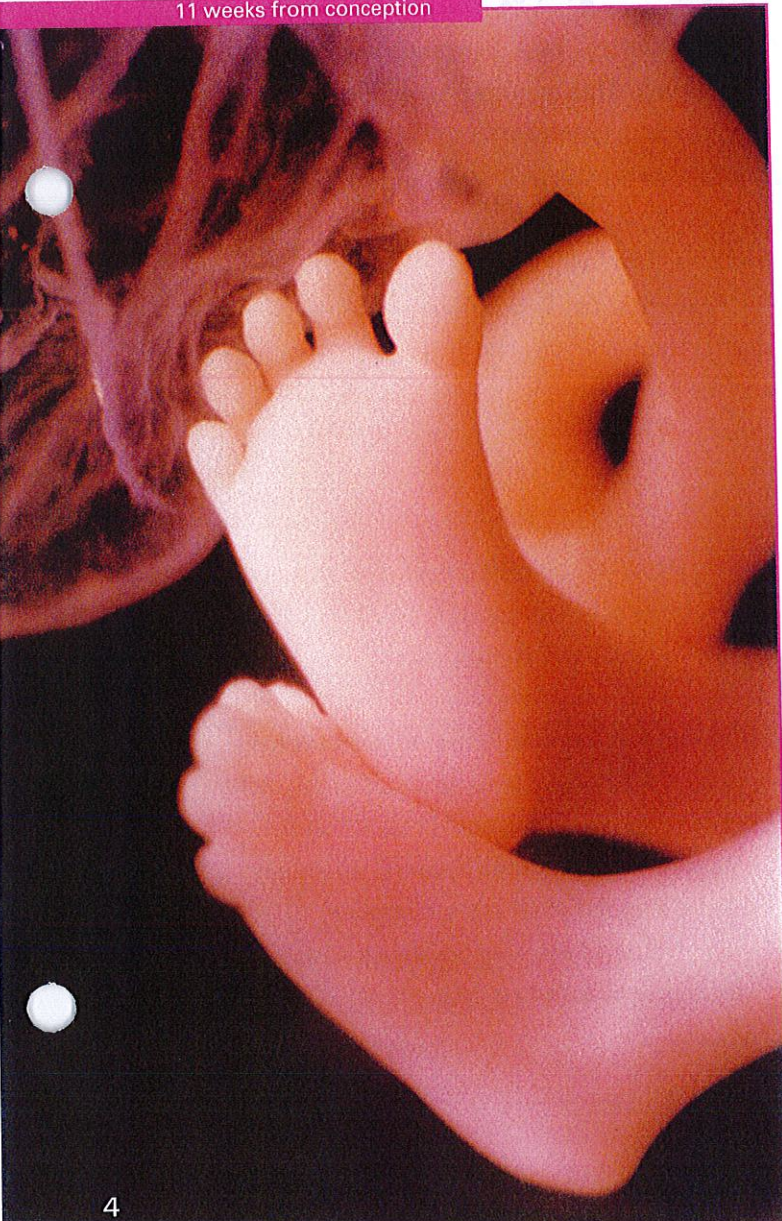
unborn. In 1988, the Supreme Court of Canada – prompted by abortionist Henry Morgentaler – ruled the section of the Canadian Criminal Code treating abortion unconstitutional, because it did not *insure* equal access to abortion in all regions and provinces. Contrary to popular belief, this decision did not establish a "right to abortion" in Canada. Instead, it created a legal vacuum, leaving it to future parliamentarians to create a new law recognizing the humanity of the unborn and protecting their right to life.⁵ Unfortunately, the Criminal Code has not yet been amended to reflect these rights.

Because of the widespread availability of the "morning after pill", there is no way of accurately determining how many unborn children are being aborted in Canada annually. What is known for sure is that since 1988, more than two million surgical abortions have been performed in Canada – an average of approximately 100,000 per year.⁶ Each year we eliminate a population comparable to that of St. John's, Newfoundland or Waterloo, Ontario.

4 Why do women have abortions?

For many of our contemporaries, the links between marriage and parenthood, between sexual intimacy and procreation are no longer obvious. Sexual intercourse is regarded as little more than a recreational activity that has little or nothing to do with babies! In such a climate, an unplanned pregnancy tends to be treated by a woman and by couples like a "mistake" or an illness. When contraception fails, abortion is the logical antidote – an antidote promoted across the world by the very influential *International Planned Parenthood Federation* and its affiliate national members.

11 weeks from conception



Women often feel trapped by an unplanned pregnancy because they believe they are too young – or too old – because they feel alone and worry about providing for a child or because they think a child will interfere with their career plans. In some cases, they have been misinformed and told that an abortion is similar to removing a tumor or a clump of cells. Many women lack the support of their partners, parents or friends and begin to believe that abortion is their only option.

It has also become more common for people to justify abortion for eugenic reasons, as if a human person is of less value if he or she has a physical or mental disability or suffers from a genetic disease.⁷ Currently, in Canada, 90% of pregnant women who discover that their baby has Down's syndrome choose to abort.⁸ In many countries abortion is being used for sex selection; the result is a world where millions of women are missing – killed before they could be born⁹ – together with all the associated social problems which inevitably follow.

Whatever motivates a woman to seek an abortion, her decision is almost always, at least in part, a response to some form of injustice. In a culture of death, which separates sex from parenthood, men are encouraged to blame their fatherhood on their partner's choice, rather than on their own actions. At the same time, with the acceptance of abortion, responsibility for parenting has been shifted disproportionately onto women. When and where abortion is legally available, women alone can deliberately accept responsibility for the continuance of their pregnancies and, by logical extension, for the care and upbringing of their children.

5 But isn't abortion a woman's right and a private choice?

Despite propaganda to the contrary, access to abortion is not synonymous with the advancement of women's rights. The founding mothers of feminism were categorically opposed to abortion because they saw it as "the ultimate exploitation

In *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, Blessed John Paul II writes:

...we are witnessing true human tragedies. Often the woman is the victim of male selfishness, in the sense that the man, who has contributed to the conception of the new life, does not want to be burdened with it and leaves the responsibility to the woman, as if it were "her fault" alone. So, precisely when the woman most needs the man's support, he proves to be a cynical egotist, capable of exploiting her affection or weakness, yet stubbornly resistant to any sense of responsibility for his own action ...

...[In] firmly rejecting "pro-choice" it is necessary to become courageously "pro-woman," promoting a choice that is truly in favor of women. It is precisely the woman, in fact, who pays the highest price, not only for her motherhood, but even more for its destruction, for the suppression of the life of the child who has been conceived. The only honest stance, in these cases, is that of radical solidarity with the woman. It is not right to leave her alone. The experiences of many counseling centers show that the woman does not want to suppress the life of the child she carries within her. If she is supported in this attitude, and if at the same time she is freed from the intimidation of those around her, then she is even capable of heroism. As I have said, numerous counseling centers are witness to this ...

(John Paul II, Crossing The Threshold of Hope, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1994, pp. 206-207)

of women."¹⁰ Today, pro-life feminists reject abortion as a form of violence against women and children and make it their mission to demonstrate that abortion is seldom if ever *freely* chosen.

Abortion is often touted as the responsible "choice" for a woman confronted with the reality of an unplanned pregnancy – "*my body, my choice*". The abortion debate has often pitted the "rights" of women against those of their unborn children. But this either/or approach overlooks one crucial fact: abortion benefits no one; both the child who is aborted and the mother who aborts become victims.

The foundation of feminism is built on the basic tenets of nonviolence, nondiscrimination, and justice for all. Abortion is discrimination based on age, size, location, and sometimes gender, disability, or parentage. And it is often the result of a more insidious form of discrimination: the lack of resources and support that pregnant women need and deserve.

*Serrin Foster,
President, Feminists for Life*

Even for those fundamentally opposed to abortion, at first glance it may seem that the decision to abort is a choice which affects only the woman and her unborn child. The reality is much more complicated. Abortion has destroyed countless innocent lives and deeply scarred women, men and children from all walks of life, leaving our society deeply wounded. "For men and women alike, the feeling of emptiness may last a lifetime, for parents are parents forever, even of a dead child."¹¹

6 How does abortion impact a woman's life?

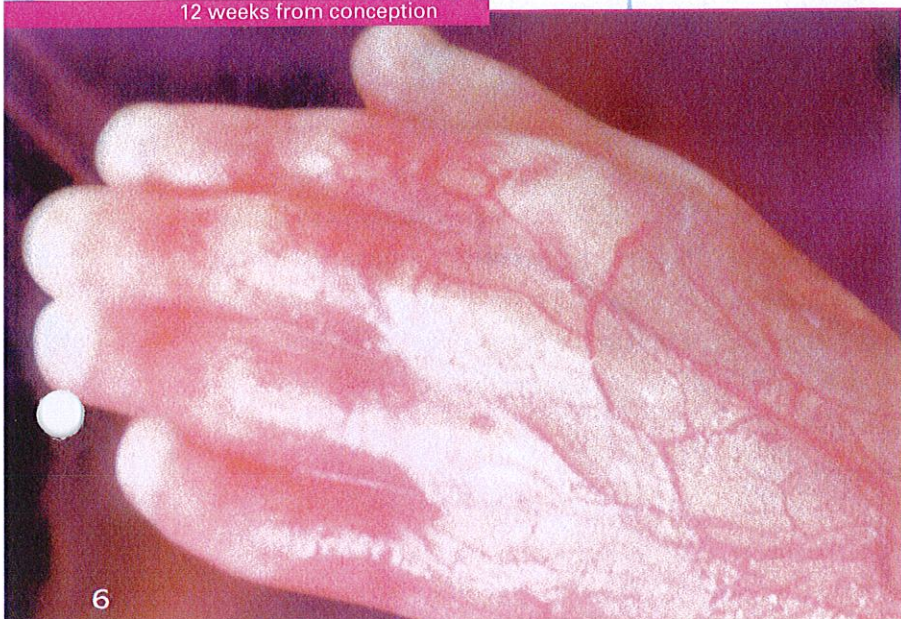
The most appalling consequence of abortion is the squandering of innocent human life. But for the woman who submits to abortion – the supposed guarantor of her freedom – there are also nearly always profoundly negative long-term consequences and deep emotional stress. Every year, more and more cases of "post-abortion syndrome" emerge.

Among the consequences of abortion, the physical side-effects are the easiest to document. A 2009 study conducted by researchers at the University of Toronto found children born alive to women who had had an abortion at some point in the past are at an increased risk of premature birth and below average birth weight.¹²

Other studies have shown that women who have had one or more abortions exhibit lower fertility rates – in some cases complete infertility – higher rates of miscarriage, pelvic inflammatory disease, placenta praevia and ectopic pregnancy.¹³ In addition to these serious fertility risks, abortion also significantly increases a woman's chance of developing breast cancer.¹⁴

Women need to know that choosing abortion also means putting themselves at increased risk for developing a

12 weeks from conception



mental disorder such as depression or anxiety. A 2008 New Zealand study reported that the rate of mental disorders was 30% higher among women who had had an abortion, or abortions, than in the average population. Interestingly, the same study found that women who gave birth, suffered miscarriages or completed a pregnancy to which they initially had an adverse response showed no such increase.¹⁵

For the post-abortive woman, the long-term negative consequences of abortion are not limited to health risks. The physical and emotional stresses of abortion often lead to serious relationship problems: estrangement from one's partner, difficulties between teenagers and their parents who, in many instances have facilitated the decision to abort but failed to address the consequences, and difficulties bonding with future or already living children.¹⁶

The pro-abortion lobby pays lip service to the concept of freedom of choice. But what does *freedom* of choice mean for the woman confronted with an unplanned or undesired pregnancy who has no real alternatives, who does not know where her child is in its development or how her decision may impact her future health and well being? Freedom of choice is a myth where informed consent is not insured.

7 What is "post-abortion survivor syndrome"?

Abortion affects us all! Not enough is said about the fathers of aborted children who often experience intense feelings of isolation and loss, especially when they have not been consulted by their partners about the decision to abort. The surviving siblings of aborted children often feel guilty simply for existing, suffer from chronic depression and overwhelming sadness. In some instances, the grandparents of aborted children are profoundly affected by feelings of loss and betrayal. This constellation of symptoms – arising from "the pain

"If there is a conflict between a physician and patient as a result of a refusal to facilitate ... a procedure for reasons of conscience, the conflict originates not in discrimination but in a disagreement between the physician and the patient about what constitutes a good thing."

*Dr. Will Johnson
on behalf of Canadian Physicians for Life,
in a letter to the Members of the
Policy Department Council of the College of
Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario*

... suffering and turmoil suffered by those whose lives have been impacted by abortion" – is known as "post-abortion survivor syndrome".¹⁷

Abortion also impacts health care providers. As abortion and "emergency contraception" have become part of main stream medical practice in Canada, their freedom of conscience has increasingly come under attack. The doctor who believes that an abortion is harmful and communicates this to a patient has in no way diminished that patient's capacity to make choices and should not feel pressured to refer for an abortion based on the patient's desires. No one should be treated as a mere means to another person's end.

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

Jeremiah 1:5

8 What is the Church's position on abortion?

The Catholic Church believes and teaches that each and every one of us is a child of God, made in His image and likeness, and must be respected at every stage of development. "The human being must be respected – as a person – from the very first instant of his existence."¹⁸ Intentional abortion is, therefore, always a grave moral evil. The Church reminds us all that every child – even the child conceived in rape or incest – is loved by God and deserving of *our* love and support. When considering these "difficult cases", many fail to remember that the child conceived is a victim along with his or her mother. "In the Christian view, a child's first right is not to be desired, but to be welcomed."¹⁹ The Church knows very well that the woman confronted with an unplanned or unwanted pregnancy faces very real challenges. In response, Christ calls and empowers us to create a world where these challenges can be met and where no woman will feel compelled by necessity to end the precious life of her unborn child. To those who have chosen abortion and have come to regret their decision, the Church extends Christ's mercy, forgiveness and healing.²⁰

9 Are there alternatives to abortion?

While abortion continues to be tolerated in Canada, larger and larger numbers of couples desperate to become parents struggle with infertility. As a society, and as individuals, we have an obligation to do whatever we can to provide women with the resources and emotional support they need to carry their children to term and to ensure a healthy environment for both of them after delivery. Some women will choose to raise their children themselves, while others will opt for adoption.

It is important to realize that a woman becomes a mother the moment her child is conceived, and that the measure of motherhood is found in her ability to act selflessly in the best interest of her child. It requires a great deal of courage and love for a woman to give her child up for adoption.

Our communities must be more creative in supporting women and couples confronted with an unexpected pregnancy. Much is being accomplished by crisis pregnancy centers and adoption agencies: helping women to find housing, employment and educational opportunities. Some compassionate individuals, intent on doing what they can to preserve the lives of the unborn, open

I would now like to say a special word to women who have had an abortion. The Church is aware of the many factors which may have influenced your decision, and she does not doubt that in many cases it was a painful and even shattering decision. The wound in your heart may not yet have healed. Certainly what happened was and remains terribly wrong. But do not give in to discouragement and do not lose hope... If you have not already done so, give yourselves over with humility and trust to repentance. The Father of mercies is ready to give you his forgiveness and his peace in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. To the same Father and his mercy you can with sure hope entrust your child. With the friendly and expert help and advice of other people, and as a result of your own painful experience, you can be among the most eloquent defenders of everyone's right to life ...

Blessed John Paul II, Evangelium Vitæ, 99

their own homes to young women who find themselves confronted with an unplanned pregnancy and are unable to provide for themselves. Others make an active commitment to providing ongoing financial and emotional support to new mothers before and after delivery.

Provincial governments have adapted their adoption policies in order to encourage contact between birth parents and children, recognizing that biological ties continue to be an important part of a child's identity. This in no way demeans the importance of the relationship between the child and his or her adoptive parents; it simply recognizes that there are many components which combine to provide a child with a positive self-image.

10 As citizens, what can we do to promote a culture of life?

The *status quo* is intolerable. As a civilized country, Canada is in need of legislative reform and of great cultural renewal. To begin with, we need to reopen the public debate in Parliament, in the media, and in our own communities.²¹ We need publicly funded services that offer real alternatives to abortion. We need informed consent and parental notification laws. A radical transformation of many social and corporate attitudes is necessary so that women can have the chance to be fulfilled professionally without giving up their role as mothers.

Many people of good will feel powerless before this huge challenge. But we can all contribute to the solution, first of all by praying and fasting. We can also ask ourselves if our own attitudes and way of life help to create a culture of life, remembering that permissive attitudes toward abortion are inevitable where and when human sexuality is trivialized.



14 weeks from conception

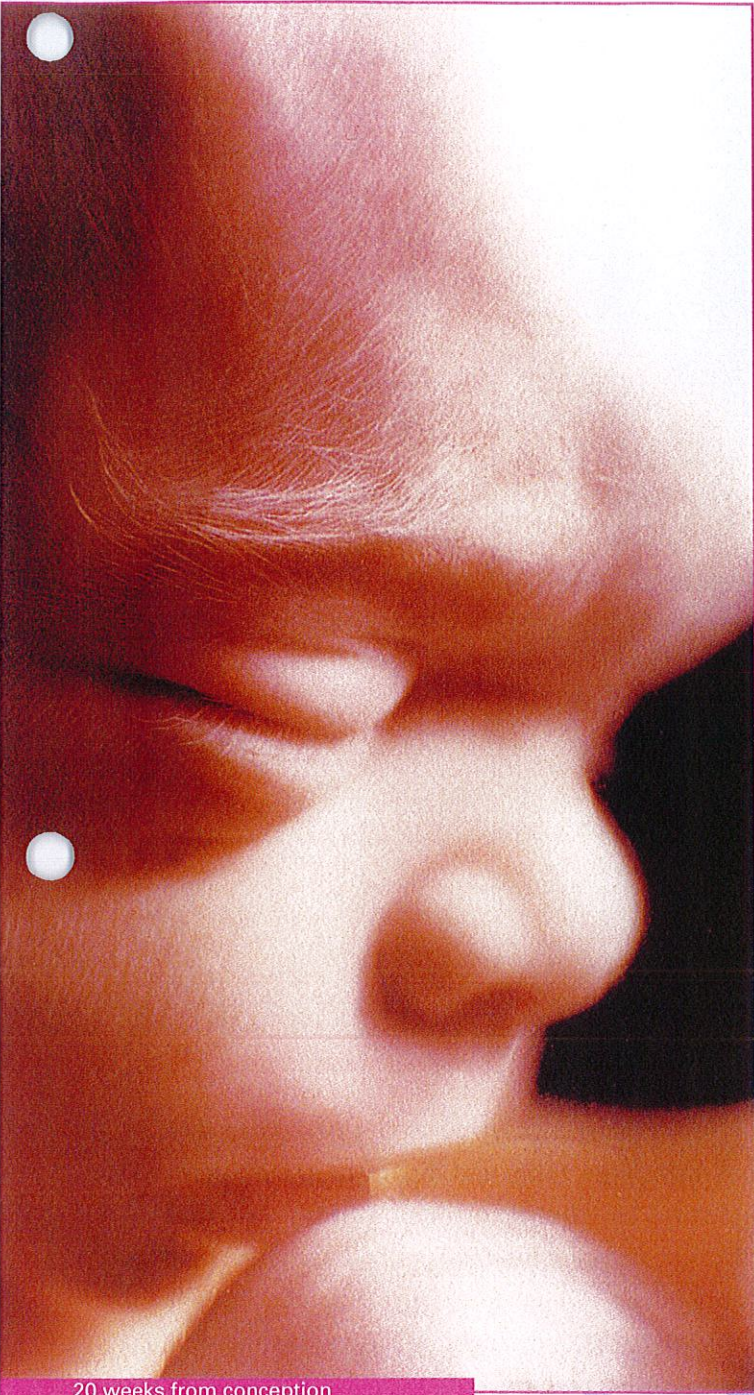
It is crucial that we develop a new awareness not only of the worth and dignity of every human life from conception to natural death, but also of God's plan for human love and sexuality. Our youth have a right to know that they were created for love that is permanent, exclusive, faithful and fruitful, a love whose fullest expression can only occur in marriage between a man and a woman. As a society, we urgently need to rediscover the greatness of the vocation to parenthood. Young women need to hear that motherhood is an immensely important calling. Young men, too, need to be encouraged to embrace fatherhood as an incredibly important calling and a profoundly rewarding responsibility.

Toward a Culture of Life

Blessed John Paul II cautioned that abortion poses "an immense threat to life: not only to the life of individuals but also to that of civilization itself."²²

The Church encourages believers to speak out against abortion and to collaborate with others of like mind. Special care must be taken to educate children and youth in the self-giving nature of human sexuality so well articulated in the Church's theology of the body. Only when we grasp the truth that our bodies are more than mere instruments of pleasure – that they are instruments of God's love – will the scourge of abortion end.

We are all called to promote a culture of life, beginning with changing our view of the child to be born: rather than a threat, this child is a gift, a treasure and a promise. Together we can humanize Canadian society so that it will always welcome the new lives that guarantee our country's future.



20 weeks from conception

RESOURCES

(COLF accepts no responsibility for the content of websites referenced in this document.)

If you or someone you know is experiencing an unplanned pregnancy and needs assistance or direction, please visit, one of these websites:

- Birthright: www.birthright.org/
- Canada Adopts!: www.canadaadopts.com/canada/resources_pregnancy.shtml
- Canada Silent No More: www.canacal.com/canada/about.cfm
- CAPSS: www.capss.com/
- Life Canada: www.lifecanada.org/
- Respect for Life – Education Movement (RLEM): www.rvme.org/anglais.html and www.rvme.org (6th point)
- Tu n'es pas seule : www.tunespasseule.qc.ca/
- VIVERE – Canadian Newborn Adoption Support: www.adoptionviverecanada.com/About_Us.html

If you or someone you know is suffering due to the psychological effects of abortion, please visit these sites to find out more about post abortion healing in your area:

- NOPARH: www.noparh.org/international.html
- Project Rachel: www.hopeafterabortion.com/
- Rachel's Vineyard: www.rachelsvineyard.org
- Second Chance Ministry: www.secondchanceministry.ca/

Do you want to witness the miracle of human gestation? Visit the following sites:

- Life Issues Institute: <http://www.lifeissues.org/>
- The Biology of Prenatal Development (National Geographic): www.ehd.org/products_bpd_dvd.php
- Intellego.fr www.intellego.fr/soutien-scolaire--/aide-scolaire-svt/developpement-embryonnaire-chez-l-homme--video-des-huit-premieres-semaines-de-grossesse-/37406

- 1 Environics Research for www.lifecanada.org, 2011.
- 2 San Jose Articles, launched at the United Nations, 6 October 2011 (see www.sanjosearticles.org).
- 3 Bernard N. Nathanson, M. D., "Deeper into Abortion", *New England Journal of Medicine*, November 28, 1974, Vol. 291, No. 22, pp. 1189-1190. (See also Dr. Nathanson's pro-life documentaries *The Silent Scream* (1984) and *Eclipse of Reason* (1987)).
- 4 Keith L. Moore, *Before We Are Born: Essentials of Embryology*, 7th Edition. Philadelphia, PA: Saunders, 2008, p. 2.
- 5 Alliance for Life Ontario (www.personhood.ca).
- 6 AbortionInCanada. http://www.abortionincanada.ca/stats/annual_abortion_rates.html
- 7 Christine Boutin, *L'embryon citoyen*, Sarment, 2001, pp. 159-160.
- 8 Paul Wells, "Harper's Surprising Abortion Vote", *Maclean's*, 21 December 2010.
- 9 Andrea Mrozek, "Canada's Missing Daughters", *National Post*, 6 June 2006.
- 10 Alice Paul quoted in Edward F. Mannino, *Shaping America: the Supreme Court and American Society*, University of South Carolina Press, 2009.
- 11 V. Rue, *Forgotten Fathers*, Life Cycle Books, Lewinston, NY, 1997.
- 12 P. Shah and J. Zao "Induced termination of pregnancy and low birthweight and preterm birth: a systematic review and meta-analyses", *British Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology*, 2009, 116, pp.1425-1442.
- 13 Elizabeth Ring-Cassidy and Ian Gentles. *Women's Health after Abortion*, de Veber Institute for Bioethics and Social Research, 2003.
- 14 Jennifer M. Dolle, et al., "Risk factors for Triple-Negative Breast Cancer in Women Under the Age of 45 Years", *Cancer Epidemiology Biomarkers & Prevention*, 18: 1157, April 2009.
- 15 D. M. Fergusson, J. L. Horwood, J. M. Broden, "Abortion and mental health disorders: Evidence from a 30 year longitudinal study", *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 193, 2008, pp. 444-451.
- 16 Cassidy and Gentles, *Op. cit.*, Ch. 15
- 17 This constellation of symptoms was described by Canadian psychiatrist and researcher, Dr. Philip Ney, in 1979. See also Dr. Marie Peeters-Ney, *Evangelizing Abortion Survivors* (forthcoming).
- 18 *Respect for human life in its origin and the dignity of procreation, replies to certain questions of the day*. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Éditions Paulines, Sherbrooke, 1987, p.17.
- 19 de Cathelineau, Philippe "The Psychological Consequences of Abortive Mentality in the Family" in *Oil in the Wounds, a Contemporary Examination of the Effects of Divorce and Abortion in Children and their Families*. Eds. Livio Melina and Carl A. Anderson. Garden City Park, New York: Square One Publishing, 2011, pp. 179-193.
- 20 See also John J. Dillon, *A Path to Hope – For Parents of Aborted Children and Those Who Minister to Them*, Resurrection Press, 1990.
- 21 We Want The Debate Campaign (www.wewanthedebate.ca).
- 22 Blessed John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, paragraph 59.