



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

## DIOCESE OF WHEELING-CHARLESTON

1311 BYRON STREET  
POST OFFICE BOX 230  
WHEELING, WEST VIRGINIA 26003

February 3, 2022

### **Every Life, that of a Mother and that of Her Child, is Precious and Deserves our Respect and Help**

A Statement on Pro-Life Issues by  
Most Rev. Mark E. Brennan, Bishop of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston

My friends, however the US Supreme Court decides the *Dobbs vs. Jackson* case, the Court's ruling is not likely to change the minds and hearts of the people of our country. We hope for a decision that provides the greatest possible protection for unborn children, but we will still have much work to do to move public opinion toward a genuine respect for all human life.

To show our true colors to our fellow citizens who are neither diehard supporters of abortion or diehard opponents, we must be as concerned for the welfare of mothers as we are for their unborn children. We must show we are both pro-child and pro-woman. Many mothers are in truly difficult situations and struggle over the decision to have or to abort their child. We need to understand that, without denying our principles. If we are judgmental in our attitude, harsh in our speech and unwilling to offer positive help, we will not win many people over to the side of protecting all life.

How can we change attitudes? We start with ourselves. We must recognize that a woman inclined to abortion or who procures one is still a person made in God's image and likeness. We are called to love everyone without exception. That does not mean approving or promoting bad behavior, but it does mean trying to understand why some women think their only viable choice is to abort their child. We must think and act in such a way that we come across as their allies in dealing with the pregnancies that are causing them distress. Many pregnant women face powerful threats, some from their own families.

What positive help can we offer? We have outreach centers for pregnant women all around this state. They not only counsel women to respect and cherish their unborn child but they offer concrete help, ranging from providing baby clothes, diapers and formula to giving parenting classes. We need to support them and ensure that their good work is widely known. A Catholic initiative called "Walking with Moms in Need" joins local parishes to pregnancy centers to mentor pregnant women and mothers with infants and offer them the assistance they need.

An effort to establish a safe, welcoming place for a woman to live while pregnant and for some time after the birth of her child is underway in the Eastern Panhandle. How can we establish more of these programs in our state to help pregnant women who need a place to stay?

Do we condemn or turn our backs on women who have had abortions? Does that do any good? We show the compassionate side of our movement when we offer post-abortion counseling, as some pregnancy centers do, and initiatives such as Project Rachel counseling and Rachel's Vineyard retreats. We can help post-abortive women move from remorse and guilt to forgiveness and peace.

Many of these efforts can be undertaken of our own initiative and without government assistance but government policy can also be a help to pregnant women, and those already raising children. We can continue to ask our state and local officials for relief from the housing and food insecurity that many women face, for resources for women experiencing domestic violence, for effective laws that forbid discrimination against pregnant women in the workplace, for adequate maternity leave, and for affordable child care options for working mothers. In these ways we may broaden society's support for pregnant women and those with young children. These things are consistent with the love, compassion and kindness that define our movement. This approach to women can indeed change the minds and hearts of West Virginians who are not strongly in the pro-abortion camp but sympathize with women who are desperate for help and struggling with an abortion decision. We can, and we must, be both pro-child and pro-woman.

Every life is a gift from God. Every life, that of a mother and that of her child, is precious and deserves our respect and help. We are grateful for signs that our West Virginia legislators want to strengthen our laws to reduce abortions in this state. Let us also show that we are committed to helping mothers deal with the challenges that a pregnancy can present. Mother and child should not be pitted against one another. They are not natural enemies. We can support both. I urge you to pray, fast and serve in whatever ways you can so that mothers and children in the Mountain State may live with dignity and thrive.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark E. Brennan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning of the first letter.

+Mark E. Brennan  
Bishop of Wheeling-Charleston