

## What does the Church teach about abortion?

The Catholic Church teaches today what it has for two thousand years: human life begins at conception and any deliberate participation in the killing of that defenseless life is a mortal sin (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2270-75).

## Acting with courage and with God

Most of us know the basic facts about unborn life and abortion. In our hearts, we know it's a tragic, terrible thing. We don't like to see photographs of the remains of aborted children. We don't even really like to say the word "abortion" or bring it up in polite conversation. We know all this, but sometimes fear, shame, pride, and hopelessness discourage us from doing what we know is right. How can we dig deeper and find the courage to live out our convictions? Jesus has the answer. Many things seem impossible for us to do alone, but there is no doubt that with God "all things are possible." When we see seemingly impossible situations through God's eyes, we find the courage to choose life.



## If you are ...

- **Facing an unexpected pregnancy:** It seems impossible to break the news, deal with the shock, adjust plans. Expectant mothers, fathers, grandparents, and friends all face this challenge. When we remember that God wants life and happiness for all of us, including the preborn child he's created, we find strength to let God make it happen in our lives.
- **Living with abortion's consequences:** It might seem impossible that God could forgive us for our role in an abortion — procuring one, paying for one, suggesting one, participating in one. But it's not. The road may be long and difficult, but it is not impossible because Jesus loves each of us and wants to forgive us. God's mercy knows no bounds.
- **Seeking an end to abortion:** It seems impossible that a society that has become so dependent on abortion could ever change. But polls tell us that at least half of all Americans believe abortion should be illegal

through most of pregnancy, so if every one of us lived and worked and prayed our convictions, perhaps it wouldn't be impossible.

We must also be aware of current efforts to secure abortion as the law of the land. Legislation to use government funding for abortion and efforts to loosen conscience protection for medical personnel, if successful, would lead to increased abortion rates and a further erosion of human dignity.

## Does the Catholic Church do anything to help?

A woman in need of help during an unexpected pregnancy can find it through the Catholic Church. Catholic Charities, Respect Life offices, and crisis pregnancy centers are staffed by loving, nonjudgmental people who want to love women and children during and after the spiritual and material challenges of pregnancy.

A woman who has had an abortion can find help, as well. Any priest can offer the healing love of Christ through the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and most dioceses have a program called Project Rachel, a special ministry for post-abortive women that sponsors support groups and weekend retreats.

## What can I do?

- Pray for all pregnant women, especially those who might be struggling with a decision at this moment.
- Contribute time and money to your local crisis pregnancy center or Respect Life office.
- Nurture nonjudgmental, welcoming attitudes toward pregnant women, the unborn, and young children.
- Practice the spiritual and corporeal works of mercy.
- Be aware of public policy issues and make your voice heard.



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WHAT THE CHURCH TEACHES

# Abortion

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*"Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!"*

— LUKE 1:42

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Centuries ago, a young pregnant woman set out on a journey. She was probably nervous and scared, because her pregnancy was unexpected, scandalous, and mysterious. The young woman arrived at her cousin's home, where she hoped she would find welcome and understanding. And she was welcomed — not only by her cousin but also by another who “leapt in her [cousin's] womb” with joy.

*The first person to rejoice in the presence of Jesus was an unborn child.*

### Life in the womb

Ironically, as abortion has become commonplace in American life, our insight into the reality of life within the womb has grown.

- Parents can watch their children move, sleep, and suck their thumbs in the womb, in real time, thanks to four-dimensional ultrasound technology.
- The survival of an infant outside the womb is possible at increasingly earlier stages of pregnancy — as early as twenty-one weeks in some cases — with new treatments to ensure the health of these tiny children being developed all the time.
- In recent years, surgery on children still in utero to correct spina bifida, hydrocephalus, breathing obstructions, and other problems has become more common, sophisticated, and safe.
- Our culture's sensitivity to the effects of a mother's lifestyle on her preborn child has grown as well. Expectant mothers are discouraged from smoking, drinking alcohol, or taking drugs, and parents are encouraged to interact with their unborn child through talking and music.

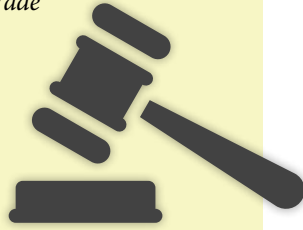


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It's worth thinking about long and hard: *What kind of society goes to such great lengths to care for unborn children but at the very same time declares that they have no right to life?*

### Abortion is only legal early in pregnancy, right?

No. Abortion is legal in the United States. On January 22, 1973, the Supreme Court handed down decisions in two landmark cases — *Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Bolton*. Together these two rulings declared abortion to be a constitutional right through all nine months of pregnancy. Together, these rulings made abortion rights the law of the land, and made it difficult for states to regulate abortion. Eventually, both women involved in the original court cases, Norma McCorvey (*Roe*) and Susan Cano (*Doe*), publicly renounced their roles and participated in efforts to reverse these decisions until their deaths.



### What is abortion?

Abortion is the willful and intentional destruction of human life in the womb. Sometimes miscarriages are referred to as “spontaneous abortions,” but they are different from what we usually call abortion. A miscarriage occurs without human intervention of any kind. When a preborn child's life is deliberately taken by another human being, that is an “induced abortion.” When people say “abortion,” this is what they mean. In fact, statistical reporting on abortion excludes miscarriages.

Abortions are procured in a number of ways. A chemical abortion results from taking medication prescribed to terminate a human pregnancy. The drug RU-486 is one of the most common forms of chemical abortion and is administered up to the seventh week of pregnancy. Abortion by medication accounts for approximately a quarter of all abortions in the United States.

Surgical abortion continues to be the most common type of abortion. These involve crushing or dismembering the child in the womb. The practice called “partial-birth abortion,” which involves suctioning out the brain of a child pulled partially out of the womb, was banned in a 2003 federal law, but other means of late-term abortion, such as saline abortions, are still legal.

The abortion rate in the United States has been declining since the mid-1980s, but there are still between 600,000 and 700,000 abortions every year. That means there are almost 2,000 abortions every day.

### When did YOUR life begin?

At birth? Three months before you were born? Somewhere in the middle of the second trimester? Day 17 after you were conceived? Or was it Day 16?

It's impossible and illogical to draw any lines once conception has occurred because at conception you were a genetically distinct being. In fact, you contain the same genetic material today that you did when you were conceived. That means you were no less a human person when you were conceived than you are today. The starting point is conception. That's when your — and everyone else's — life began.



### Abortion's impact

Regardless of what stage of pregnancy at which an abortion is performed, there are physical consequences. Decades of medical research indicate that induced abortions may be associated with higher incidents of infertility, problems in future pregnancies, and even breast cancer.

There are emotional consequences, too. The death of a child is one of the most devastating experiences any parent can endure. Whether the loss occurs through miscarriage, stillbirth, or after a child is born, the grief borne by survivors is deep and painful. Abortion has the same effect, with the added dimension of guilt for one's role in the death of a child. Sooner or later, mothers, fathers, grandparents, and friends are confronted with the loss of a child they will never know.



In any of these situations, we all need the sure knowledge of God's love and mercy. When we or those we love are confronting these feelings of grief and guilt, we should know that Christ is ready to welcome us through his Church, through programs such as Project Rachel, and through his presence in the sacraments, especially reconciliation and, once we have been reconciled, the Eucharist.

### Fetal Timeline

The birth of a child is an occasion for rejoicing, but it's nearly anticlimactic when considered in light of the baby's growth and development in the womb.

#### DAY 1

Fertilization. A unique, genetically distinct human life begins.

#### 3 WEEKS

Heart beats with baby's own blood.

#### 6 WEEKS

Brain waves detected.

#### 8 WEEKS

Baby begins to hear; fingerprints form.

#### 9 WEEKS

Baby turns head, can frown, hiccup, and react to loud noises.

#### 11 WEEKS

All bodily systems are functioning. Baby can grasp, yawn, suck, and swallow as well as feel and smell.

#### 12 WEEKS

Bodily parts that enable pain sensation are in place; baby can feel thumb.

#### 13-15 WEEKS

Baby has adult taste buds. The baby tastes the flavors of its mother's meals through the amniotic fluid.

#### 20 WEEKS

Baby can recognize its mother's voice.

#### 21 WEEKS

Babies born at this stage are sometimes saved.

#### 28 WEEKS

Baby breathes amniotic fluid; increases movement and kicking.

#### 34 WEEKS

Baby opens and closes eyes.

#### 38-40 WEEKS

Birth.

Source: “Diary of an Unborn Child,” National Right to Life, [www.nrlc.org/abortion/diaryofanunbornchild](http://www.nrlc.org/abortion/diaryofanunbornchild)

