

A column in the June 23 & 30 Sunday bulletins under the Social Justice heading reprinted an article from the *National Catholic Reporter*, May 23, 2019, entitled "[Sr. Joan Chittister's 2004 quote on 'Pro-life' versus 'pro-birth' goes viral.](#)"

Chittister's article is fraught with untruths and with disparaging accusations about pro-life people. Her caricature of pro-life people as immoral hypocrites, as well as her fundamentally inaccurate statement of the Church's teachings on abortion, [demands](#) rebuttal.

- She claims we are only pro-birth and don't care what happens after a child is born.

This is fundamentally untrue.

This cliché purposefully distorts the values of the pro-life movement and attempts to dismiss or distract us from the real moral argument: *that each abortion takes the life of a human being*. Moreover, to make this claim one must intentionally ignore the facts. It is pro-life activists who, without any government funds, have established thousands of pregnancy-support organizations throughout the country.

In Minnesota alone, we have 92 organizations that offer life-affirming support and services. (For the list, see [Organizations Offering Alternatives to Abortion](#), Minnesota Citizens Concerned for Life). In contrast to the fallacy that pro-lifers are unconcerned with the welfare of women and children *after* the child is born, many of these centers offer classes in parenting and life skills, help with budgeting, formula, diapers, clothing, post-abortion counseling, free ultrasounds, pregnancy testing, prenatal programs, and so much more.

Most centers serve the poor and working class, offering compassion and solidarity to those in need while upholding and proclaiming the sanctity of life. Two weeks ago, an email went out from one local pregnancy center about a young mom with a small child whose car was broken. The center initially gave her bus fare to get to work, but once her car was deemed not worth fixing, a request for a car was sent out. Within one hour, a car was donated. But we don't have to look any further than our own often-overflowing crib in the rear of the Church to see the supplies collected every week for Birthright. In contrast, one might ask: where are the pro-choice organizations offering life-affirming assistance to women in crisis pregnancies?

- Chittister stands by her "critique of a single issue approach to abortion as morally inconsistent."

Pro-lifers are not single issue; we believe in the sanctity of life *from conception to natural death*. But it is true that the Catholic Church, as well as many pro-life groups, *do* focus on abortion. Why? Because it has been the cause of [more than 60 million deaths of unborn children in the United States alone](#).

This is a big deal. It is morally and politically relevant. To play devil's advocate: ...what exactly is the *harm* of focusing on a particular issue? Are other social justice advocates held to the same standard? Are those who advocate for immigration reform called "hypocrites" because they are not outside abortion clinics offering help to abortion-minded women? Are those who advocate for protecting our environment called "morally inconsistent" because they are not volunteering at pregnancy help centers? A review of history shows the roots of

the pro-life movement lie with the very activists who were on the forefront of fighting for civil rights, protesting unjust wars, and promoting a war on poverty. (See Defenders of the Unborn by Williams, Oxford University Press, 2016)

Our parish's Respect Life committee, in addition to educating on abortion, praying for life, and providing support for pregnancy centers, has focused on commercial surrogacy, adoption, the father's role in abortion, euthanasia, sex trafficking, post-abortion healing, and pro-life legislative initiatives.

Wouldn't it be more logical, more accurate, and more charitable to recognize that we all have limited time and resources, and we simply do our part as best we can? Many faith-filled Catholics hold that all human life is sacred and yet choose to focus on some *other* critical social issue. As we hear St. Paul say, we are one body, but many parts....

- Chittister claims that our morality is lacking because all we want is for a child to be born, but not to be fed or educated. She claims that she knows this to be true about those who oppose abortion, "because you don't want any tax money to go there." (The word "tax" appears in original quote, but not in the bulletin piece.)

That is an absurd and unfounded claim. She offers no documentation that those who oppose abortion are opposed to children being fed or educated. She has no idea what charitable contributions pro-lifers make, what other causes they support or even what governmental social programs they support. This egregious claim attempts to politicize the pro-life movement and to portray pro-life groups as monolithic. But the truth is that pro-lifers are a diverse group: rich and poor; male and female; politically conservative and liberal; religious and secular. For proof, see these links:

- Secular and atheist pro-life groups--
<https://www.secularprolife.org>
 - Pro-life alliance of gays and lesbians—
<http://www.plagal.org>
 - Pro-life feminist group--
<http://www.feministsforlife.org>
 - Republicans, democrats, libertarians for life --
<https://www.democratsforlife.org>
<https://www.l4l.org>
<https://www.rnclife.org>
 - Pro-life religious organizations are too numerous to list. A quick look at Wikipedia brings up innumerable organizations.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_anti-abortion_organizations_in_the_United_States
- Chittister claims that pro-lifers are "absolutizing" the debate by "allowing no distinctions whatsoever in abortion laws," stating: "It's hard to believe that there is never any medical reason whatsoever — ectopic pregnancies, for instance — that would not indicate that there are some moments when the moral nature of the act at least fits." She claims that the Church even forbids women "to save their own pregnant life."

This is completely untrue. The Catholic Church and pro-lifers clearly allow an exception for the life of the mother. Chittister says she wants “*nuance*” in the abortion debate. But what does she mean? Perhaps she is suggesting that abortion is immoral unless the baby is disabled, or the wrong sex, or the baby is unwanted, or was conceived in rape, or the wrong race, or an inconvenience. Rather than searching for nuance, one might take direction from Church encyclicals such as *Humanae Vitae*, *Evangelium Vitae* that clearly and unequivocally proclaim the sanctity of human life from conception to natural death.

Or she could look for guidance to another nun, Mother Teresa, a recipient of the Nobel Peace prize and now a Saint. She stated:

“By abortion, the mother does not learn to love, but kills even her own child to solve her problems. [Abortion is] really a war against the child, and I hate the killing of the innocent child, murder by the mother herself. And if we accept that the mother can kill even her own child, how can we tell other people not to kill one another? ... Any country that accepts abortion is not teaching its people to love one another, but to use violence to get what they want. This is why the greatest destroyer of love and peace is abortion.” Mother Teresa. (National Catholic Register – September 2, 2016)

The Respect Life committee appreciates this opportunity to rebut Sr. Joan Chittister’s unfounded comments. Attempts to discredit pro-lifers and to distract from the real issue of abortion will not dissuade us. With God’s grace, we will continue to cherish, protect, and hold sacred all human life...from conception to natural death.

Patricia Benham
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