

More than 30 Christian church leaders call for SC to keep abortion legal. Here's why

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It is easy to frame the abortion discussion as an either/or, an all-or-nothing debate. However, the issues inherent in abortion are far more subtle. As clergy from various denominations, we seek to advance a more nuanced approach. We do not condone the killing of unborn babies. We do offer a theological basis for allowing the one who is pregnant and both religious and medical advisors to choose abortion for the mental and/or physical health of pregnant people. As clergy members, we maintain that a total ban on abortions is immoral and punitive.

When asked about the greatest commandment, Jesus answered: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself." (Matt 22:37-39) Love God; love neighbor; love self. We are following the way of Jesus as we place the priority on love in all these dimensions.

Putting love first creates a more nuanced and, sometimes, murkier understanding of abortion "rights." When we take seriously the call to love both the unborn child and the one who is pregnant, tension results. If a ban on abortion with no exception becomes law, the unborn child receives love to the detriment of the one who is pregnant. A legality which advantages the one who is pregnant at the total expense of the unborn also lacks love. Love, as directed by Jesus, demands more than benefiting one or the other. The radical love called for by Jesus invites advantaging both the one who is pregnant and the unborn child.

A total ban on abortion potentially sentences people to mental and emotional deprivation or physical, and possibly spiritual, death. In cases of rape and incest, forcing a person to carry a physical tie to a vile abuser often leads to death—mentally, spiritually, and emotionally. Young pregnant children are at risk of dying from the complications of pregnancy and childbirth. Anyone lacking access to vital reproductive and prenatal care is at elevated risk of pregnancy-related trauma and death. Pregnancy involving a miscarried baby that the body cannot naturally expel, ectopic conception, sepsis and other serious health complications each carry a greatly increased risk of death.

As clergy, we believe abortion is not simply about "bodily autonomy" or "the rights of the unborn." Abortion is far more complex than the false binary choice between one or the other. To ratify abortion on demand does not exhibit God's love fully any more than does prohibiting all abortion. The tension between love of the unborn and love of the one who is pregnant cannot occur within an either/or framework. The question is how to make room for a both/and solution.

We call for the careful consideration of legislation that protects both the unborn and the pregnant. The unborn deserve protection, but at the same time, the one who is pregnant deserves the same protection as the fetus. A child, once born, deserves the same protection as the unborn fetus. We prioritize the love of God, neighbor, and self and, therefore, are opposed to a total ban on abortion. Defining legal parameters for abortion is a better way to provide for loving God, neighbor, and self. While we recognize and share the desire to show love for the unborn, we implore you not to ignore love for the people who are carrying them within their own bodies.

In addition, prioritizing love means that legislation will protect not just the fetus and the one who is pregnant but also the baby once born. Consequently, we advocate for the following policies: ensuring everyone has affordable access to quality health care and contraception; eliminating gender-based discrimination; and passing the pro-family policies stalled in Congress that would alleviate many of the economic stresses that prompt people to seek abortions.

Prayerfully,

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