

February 11, 2019
Memorial of Our Lady of Lourdes

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

During the past weeks, I have received numerous letters from many of you expressing your grief, anger and frustration over the abortion policy passed by our state legislature and signed into law by Governor Cuomo. I share your sorrow and fury.

The legislation is horrific and violates the dignity of every person created in the image and likeness of God. The legislation insists on the right to an abortion up to the moment of birth; drops all charges against an abortionist who allows an aborted baby to die; mandates that a physician need not perform the abortion; and could be used to suppress the conscience rights of healthcare professionals not to assist in the grisly procedure. In an Op Ed piece in the Wall Street Journal Cardinal Dolan captured the magnitude of the recent legislation: “It seems that abortion’s supporters no longer hope it will be safe, legal and rare. Rather, it is celebrated, unregulated and frequent.”

As your bishop my greatest concern is the salvation of those entrusted to my pastoral care. In the striking account in St. Matthew’s Gospel of the final judgment, Jesus tells us that our eternal destiny depends on how we treat one another. No one should doubt that the vulnerable, innocent child in the mother’s womb is our brother or sister. Our treatment of the unborn impacts our eternal destiny.

I believe it is essential to our salvation that we remain “in Christ” as faithful disciples and in full communion with His Church. Communion with Christ and His Church involves regular participation in Mass and the sacraments, especially Reconciliation and Eucharist; forming our consciences according to the moral tenets of our faith; keeping the two great commandments of love of God and neighbor; knowing, living and sharing our faith and welcoming the repentant sinner into the community.

Pope Francis reminds us often that we are called to extend Christ’s love and mercy to all, especially those on the fringes, those at a distance from us and even those distant from the Church. The Church is the instrument of salvation for all of us, the vehicle of God’s mercy. Along with the outcry against the new state legislation extending abortion, I have heard also the cry for retaliation.

Let me be clear. The act of abortion is deplorable to all who support the sanctity and dignity of life. However, to alienate those who publicly disregard the sanctity of life is contrary to a Church that should always be open to receive the repentant sinner. Let me remind you that no formal statement of excommunication is needed to separate one from the Church. Those involved in the passage of the recent legislation have in fact separated themselves from communion with Christ and His Church – whether they admit this or not. I pray that they will utilize the sacrament of Reconciliation and once again enjoy the merciful embrace of Christ and His Church.

In conclusion I wish to address those who have been involved in an abortion. I am thinking particularly of the mothers and fathers who turned to abortion rather than allowing a child to come to full term. No sin removes us from the possibility of God’s forgiveness. As Pope Francis reminds us, “God never tires of forgiving us.” If you have not already done so, “come home” to the Church and the loving embrace of its community. If you are struggling with the after-effects of an abortion please know that we have diocesan resources available to assist you.

We renew our pledge to offer the resources and services of our charitable agencies and health services to any woman experiencing an unplanned pregnancy, to support her in bearing her infant, raising her family or placing her child for adoption. There are life-affirming choices available, and we aim to make them more widely known and accessible.

Please join me in prayer for a renewed appreciation for the sanctity of human life.

Devotedly yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Robert J. Cunningham". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Robert J. Cunningham
Bishop of Syracuse