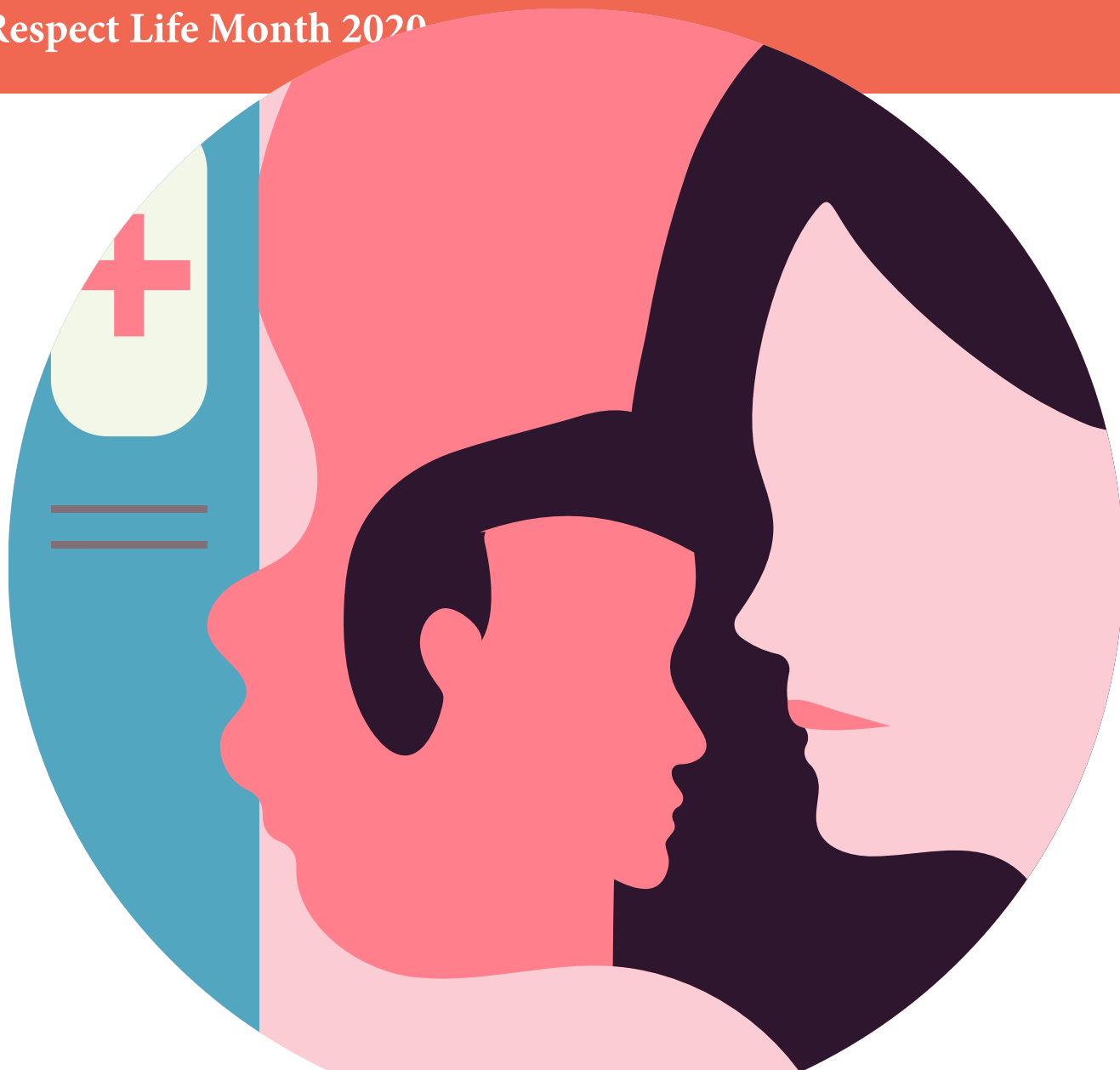


Respect Life Month

*The paradox of
choice*



Office of Life,
Justice & Peace
Archdiocese of Los Angeles



THE PARADOX OF CHOICE

why do women choose abortion?

If you could be a superhero, what power would you choose? X-ray vision? Super speed? Super strength? Amazingly, you already have a power that is far greater than any of these. We all do—we have been given the ability to create a brand new human being, a unique and unrepeatable person who, once created, will live forever in this life and in the next. Move over, Ant Man!

That's just reproduction, you say. That's not very exciting.

Squirrels can do that.

But squirrels don't live forever. They don't have immortal souls. They are not created in God's image, individually willed into existence by the Creator of the universe. So yes, a squirrel can reproduce, but in our ability to create life, we have been given the opportunity to participate with the Creator (that's why it's called procreation)—and that's a real superpower.

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Human life is not simply one good among many. It is the greatest good that God has given us. Each unique and unrepeatable person is of infinite value. Human life is so valuable that God himself came to earth in human form so that Jesus could show us our worth and die for our salvation.

Every human life has limitless value regardless of its qualities, circumstances, abilities, dependency on others, achievements or failings. We may forget that sometimes about ourselves as our vision is clouded by doubt or anxiety or others people's opinion of us. But, in God's eyes, every person is perfect, from the moment of conception and every moment afterwards.

This certainly puts sex in a whole different light. Why? Because sex is the way new human beings come into the world. We know this, of course, but do we actually think about what it means? Does knowing this shape our choices? Or has our culture so completely separated sex from children and the creation of new human life that we forget its true power?

In every poll taken in the U.S., the majority of people agree that while they wouldn't choose to have an abortion themselves, they wouldn't stop someone else from choosing to have one. But very few people have ever stopped to wonder why they answer that way. What makes them so personally opposed to abortion?

When a woman gets pregnant unexpectedly, she has one of two choices. She can either continue with the pregnancy, and give birth to a baby, or have an abortion and terminate the pregnancy.



One in three women will experience abortion in her lifetime, which means that just about 1 million abortions are performed every year in the U.S. alone. The number of lives lost is staggering, and it's important to understand what we're really dealing with here.

Abortion is the ending of a pregnancy; everyone agrees on that. But how exactly does this happen? Google defines pregnancy as "the period from conception to birth when a woman carries a developing fetus in her uterus." This is fairly

straightforward, not too much disagreement yet. An abortion ends the life of a developing fetus.

A few generations ago, actually even more recently than that, there was a great debate over whether that sentence was true. Science was not as advanced as it is today, and ultrasound images did not exist. It was possible for people to truly believe that an unborn baby was nothing but a mass of cells.

Today, we know differently.

We not only have ultrasound, but also high definition video from inside the uterus that shows the embryological and fetal development at all stages. And, we even have the ability to 3-D print from an ultrasound image so moms and dads can hold the likeness of their preborn child in their hands.



There is a famous quote – "If the womb had windows, there would be no abortion". We are almost there.

Today, we know exactly when a baby's heart starts beating (about 6 weeks after conception, when the baby is the size of a sesame seed), when arms and legs grow (8 weeks, when the baby is the size of kidney bean), or when all the internal organs start functioning (10 weeks, when the baby is the size of a kumquat). The abortion pill, RU-486 is taken up to 10 weeks of pregnancy. During the first trimester (first 13 weeks), approximately 90% of all abortions occur. By 20 weeks, when the baby is the size of a banana, we know for sure that he or she can feel pain, although scientists believe this may occur even earlier.

Because we know so much about how babies grow and develop in the womb, it's reasonable to wonder why abortion is still legal at all. If fetuses are unborn humans with working organs, central nervous systems, and the ability to feel and dream (yes, unborn babies have dreams while they sleep!), why aren't they protected like all born human beings?

This is a complex question with a relatively simple answer. Our society doesn't believe that human life is inherently sacred and deserving of protection. Instead, some lives have been deemed more valuable, and more worthy of living,

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than others.

The debate over abortion has pitted the needs of the woman against the needs of her preborn baby. Many people believe that the life of the woman is more important, and in doing so, try not to think about what happens to the baby.

Women who choose abortion do so because they are desperate. Often, they are alone. They may not have support—financial, emotional, or physical—from the baby's father, or from their families and friends. They are concerned that having a baby will keep them from their dreams in life, like finishing school, or keeping a job, or maintaining a relationship. Some women choose abortion for financial reasons. Maybe she is homeless or already has children and doesn't believe she can afford another. Still other women choose abortion when they are told that their preborn child has a condition, such as Down syndrome, and will have extra challenges in life.

From the perspective of a woman facing an unexpected pregnancy, it can feel like the choice is between her own life or the life of her unborn child. Motivated by fear in this situation, the woman may determine that her life is more important.

It's important to remember three things in these situations:



1. The woman is not alone. She may look around and see no one to support her in her pregnancy. In fact, she may even be surrounded by people who are pressuring her to have an abortion. But she is not alone. There are communities of people

around the world, in pregnancy clinics and adoption centers, who want to provide her with support and resources, not only during her pregnancy, but beyond. There will also be people in her life to walk with her and her child every day. As Christians, we know there is an additional level of support—God the Father who gave life to the woman has also given life to her child and has an amazing plan for both of them, though she may not see it yet.

2. Women are strong. Very often our culture, as well as people in our lives, will tell us we cannot do something. They set up barriers and teach us to have low expectations of ourselves. But, part of the superpower of women is the ability to rise to the occasion of motherhood—to be able to make it work. Women can be moms and go to school, and work, and ask others for help. To say a woman has to choose either a baby or her own success tells her that she is not strong enough, that she is not capable. Women need to surround themselves with supportive friends and family who can help them and their children thrive. Unexpected pregnancy situations can become positive life changes when both women and children are supported.



3. Women do not want to choose abortion. Even when people are pro-choice in theory, it is often because they have not thought deeply about what abortion is. When a woman becomes pregnant, and realizes she is carrying her own child, the situation

changes. In her heart, she wants nothing more than to protect that baby, but her fear often gets in the way, making her feel like her only choice is abortion. We need to support her in this reality so that she can make the choice for life.

This is the paradox of choice. When abortion is not a legal choice, society will have to support pregnant women and families in need.

As long as our country offers legal abortion, there is no motivation to fix the failures in our society which lead women to choose abortion. Our laws and our actions are not focused on protecting and supporting both the life of the mother and the life of the baby.

Abortion should never be seen as a solution. Abortion is the fastest and cheapest way to end the life of an unborn child.

The abortion laws in California allow a girl or a woman of any age to obtain an abortion for any reason at any time during her pregnancy. The law declares that this is her "choice," and hers alone.

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Let's examine just what this choice entails. A woman who is pregnant knows in her heart that she carries her own unborn child. Intellectually, she also knows that the baby is living and growing, a human person with his or her own DNA who, from the moment of conception, is a developing, unique, and unrepeatable person.

Mary Elizabeth Williams, a pro-choice advocate, wrote the following: "Here's the complicated reality in which we live: All life is not equal. That's a difficult thing for liberals like me to talk about, lest we wind up looking like death-panel-loving, kill-your-grandma-and-your-precious-baby storm troopers. Yet a fetus can be a human life without having the same rights as the woman in whose body it resides. She's the boss. Her life and what is right for her circumstances and her health should automatically trump the rights of the non-autonomous entity inside of her. Always."

What are we to think of Ms. Williams' claim that all life is not equal? Do we agree with Ms. Williams that autonomy is what confers human rights to a person? Or is it something else? Is human life, in and of itself, something precious to be protected? Is the right to life of a person, born or unborn, of greater or lesser importance than "what is right for [a woman's] circumstances"?

We know that each person is created in love by God at the moment of conception. As tempting as it may be to agree that a woman has the right to end the life of the unborn child, we know that can never be a just solution.

Imagine what it feels like to be the one person in the world to decide whether this unborn child lives or dies. How frightening and lonely it must feel to have to make that choice. What an immense burden! Who are any of us to have that kind of responsibility over the life of someone else?

You couldn't possibly go up to someone in your class and decide that he is bothering you, inhibiting you from doing your best in life, and ask someone to kill him. Yet, that is the power that we give to women when abortion is legal.

Is this the superpower you want? Or would you rather have the power to help women in need, with real solutions that allow them to make the choice for life for both themselves and their unborn children?

Questions for Discussion:

- What is the true power of sex?
- Why is sex separated from pregnancy and children in our culture? Who benefits from encouraging that separation?
- With all of the public evidence that abortion directly kills unborn children, why do people continue to choose abortion or participate in abortion? What is the greater good that they appeal to that makes them feel abortion is acceptable?
- Is it possible to come up with a logical argument for giving pregnant women the absolute right to determine whether an unborn person lives or dies? Why or why not?
- Are there any instances of living humans whose lives should not be protected? Are there any lives that are not as valuable as others'? What about people in a coma? With a terminal disease? On death row? Who have committed serious crimes?
- Can we build a society that supports women and their children so that women will not want to choose abortion? What would that look like?

