

Archbishop Michael J. Sheehan's Call for Action to Oppose Freedom of Choice Act (FOCA)

January 5, 2009

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I write to all the faithful Catholics and people of good will in our Archdiocese on a matter of the greatest urgency. The Presbyteral Council unanimously urged me to send you this letter about a critical moral issue. **It is the most serious and comprehensive threat to innocent human life in our country since the 1973 US Supreme Court decision, *Roe v. Wade*, which made abortion legal in our country at any time during the nine months of pregnancy.**

The Freedom of Choice Act (FOCA) will likely be reintroduced again and come to a vote in the new Congress, and will surely receive a promised presidential approval. **It will become the law of the land unless we unite to protest it and persuade the representatives we elected not to approve it.**

- This legislation would go far beyond the *Roe* decision. By insuring that any woman's, or even minor female child's, "right to an abortion" is made absolute, it will effectively remove even the most modest veil of protection for the unborn child's life.
- It will have far reaching and devastating effects on other vital and fundamental rights. For example, state laws enacted to insure "informed consent" so that a woman is fully informed about the reality of what abortion is, would end. The so-called "conscience clauses" allowing a doctor or other medical professionals like nurses, pharmacists and others not to perform or take any part in an abortion procedure, or for Catholic hospitals which serve the poor and receive public money for health services to refuse to perform abortions, would all be struck down. This law could spell the end of the operation of Catholic hospitals in our country, and the end of licensing of doctors, nurses, pharmacists and other health care professionals who object to participating in abortions on the basis of conscience.
- The wording of FOCA also prevents any person or organization from "interfering" with any woman wanting or seeking an abortion. This language could eliminate state laws allowing parental notification when their minor child is seeking an abortion, and therefore, parental involvement in the case of their own child in crisis is jeopardized. The most fundamental right of parents—the care and guidance of their own children could easily become a casualty! These are only some of the potential effects of what can only be truly called an evil law.

FOCA would mandate the use of our tax dollars to fund abortion on demand and all programs dealing with health care to include abortions. All citizens would lose their right

to speak through their state governments to limit in any way, even in the slightest manner, abortion and the expenditure of their tax dollars for it. FOCA removes all safeguards and limits, not only on abortion, but also on every individual's right to decide for himself or herself, according to his/her conscience, whether to participate or cooperate in such evil.

There is no longer an effective element to protect innocent human life from the first moment of individual and unique life—conception at the moment of fertilization—at any level of government. It is now really up to the citizens of our country to rise to this challenge.

We must call and write to our elected representatives, and in respectful but the most forceful terms, let them know that we do not want them to approve this legislation by voting for it, and that we want them to defeat it. Early efforts by pro-abortion forces may aim at overturning the Hyde Amendment, forbidding federal funding of abortions or other laws limiting abortions and only then moving on to FOCA. Our Archdiocese joins with many others throughout our country to offer ways to communicate with our Representatives. We will participate with other dioceses in a postcard campaign to members of Congress. I urge you to get the postcards at your parish in early January, sign and send them to your congressional leaders. In addition, I exhort you to call your representatives to voice your position on this matter. I am enclosing the names and addresses to help you accomplish this vital and urgent communication.

Please know that the New Mexico State Legislature will probably be considering a State version of FOCA and we should all strongly oppose it. In addition, efforts will be made to pass a same-sex union bill which several courts have ruled means the State must also grant same-sex marriage status. The Church has consistently taught that marriage is between a man and a woman in keeping with what Jesus teaches in *Matthew* 19, 3-9. We should all stand firm in supporting the traditional definition of marriage and I urge you to let your State leaders know your beliefs.

Recently, Alveda King, pro-life niece of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was quoted in the *National Catholic Register*, as saying, "To everyone who said, 'I will vote for a pro-abortion candidate this time,' I say now is the time to prove your commitment to the unborn. March for truth and justice. Flood the White House and Congress with messages that you do not agree with the slaughter of innocent children. Stand up for 'the least of these.'"

Let us, indeed, *all* stand up for them. And let our voices *now* be clear and strong.

Sincerely yours in the Risen Lord,

Most Rev. Michael J. Sheehan
Archbishop of Santa Fe