



Life Matters

The Newsletter of the Respect Life Office of the Diocese of Rockford
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August 2010

vol. ix • no. 11

Moral Clarity

by Mitch Striedl

I suppose that I should give a brief introduction. As many of you already know, the former director of the Respect Life Office, Patricia Pitkus Bainbridge, has retired. I was offered and accepted the opportunity to be the new director for this office. I am looking forward to helping lead the efforts of the Diocese on respect life and I am grateful for all the hard work and dedication my predecessor put in to further the Gospel of Life.

I grew up as a parishioner of Holy Cross in Batavia, IL. After spending the last four years working for the Archdiocese of Chicago, I am glad to come home to work for the Diocese of Rockford. With your help, it is my goal that the Respect Life Office can continue to be a source of hope for all those trapped in the culture of death. Now on to the matter at hand.

It was recently revealed in the news that several states were intending to include abortion coverage in the federally funded Pre-existing Condition Insurance Plans (PCIP), which are meant to provide insurance to individuals with pre-existing conditions until the insurance health exchange takes effect in 2014. The PCIPs are a direct result of the new health care law passed several months ago. Pennsylvania, New Mexico, and Maryland submitted plans to the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to have their insurance plans cover abortion with federal money.

What is troubling is that HHS did not offer any guidelines to the states that submitted these plans and did not deny these plans until pro-life leaders raised alarm and until after states had already started enrolling people. This is what many feared about the health care law

when it passed and why pro-life leaders and the USCCB remain skeptical that the new health care law won't lead to taxpayer-funded abortions.

The current President of the USCCB Pro-Life Secretariat, Cardinal Daniel DiNardo indicated that he was pleased that HHS issued clarifications to the states "while continuing to be gravely concerned that it was not issued until after some states had announced that pro-abortion health plans were approved and had begun to enroll patients." Cardinal DiNardo went on to say that legislation is needed to clearly prohibit tax-payer money from being used to cover abortion.

This latest controversy highlights the problem with the new health care law and with our government in general. It speaks to a lack of moral clarity and adds to the idea that there is a fog surrounding our elected officials on issues of morality, especially when it comes to the killing of innocent human life.

The situation reminds me of a poem written by Carl Sandburg titled "The Fog." Sandburg writes, "The fog comes on little cat feet. It sits looking over harbor and city on silent haunches and then moves on." It seems that the fog that Sandburg wrote about has been looming over Washington, D.C. for some time now. Unfortunately, it hasn't moved on. In a time when we desire moral clarity from elected officials, we instead find a "moral fog," created by some officials to distract the public from the truth of certain issues.

We saw this most recently during the health care debate, and we also see it continually on the issue of abortion. If you paid attention to the health care debate, you probably noticed that several key legislators mentioned that passing health care reform was the "right thing to do." In the end, these legislators voted

for this legislation despite opposition from the majority of Americans. The problem was not that legislators said passing health care reform was morally right. In fact, our bishops have been strong proponents of health care reform for decades, concluding that affordable health care for all is a moral issue. However, our bishops have also been very clear that health care reform cannot expand abortion. For this reason, the bishops came out against the recently enacted law, which they feared would provide taxpayer-funded insurance coverage of abortion (fears that don't seem unfounded considering the most recent controversy with HHS).

What struck me during the health care debate is that these legislators tried to convince us that they were exhibiting moral clarity on health care, yet, even though the majority of Americans are pro-life, they refuse to do the same on the issue of abortion.

Moral clarity means that we recognize what is right and true and are willing to act on that truth no matter what others may think or say. The same legislators, who indicated passing health care reform was morally right, are the ones who seek to create a "moral fog" around the killing of unborn children. Most of them say, "I am personally opposed to abortion, but I must follow the law of the land and represent all of my constituents." The politicians who use this phrase try to empathize with the pro-life majority but also want the ability to vote continually for anti-life legislation.

Wouldn't it be nice if these politicians exhibited moral clarity on abortion, especially considering that innocent life is at risk? The words, "I am personally opposed, but..." ring hollow. It should trouble us all that a politician is personally opposed to something but fails to act on that belief. When elected officials are able to separate their personal beliefs from their actions, they really don't care about doing right. After all, we elect

representatives because of their personal opinions, not in spite of them. Because these legislators are not concerned with doing what is right but are merely concerned with being re-elected and holding on to power, cynicism and unpopularity of politics is at an all-time high.

In order to lift this fog we need to elect officials who exhibit moral clarity and act on it. We also need to hold elected officials accountable for their actions irregardless of their words. In the interim, we must work tirelessly to evangelize our officials, helping them to understand that protecting innocent human life is the right thing to do. If these officials still don't understand, remind them that they supposedly passed health care for this reason, or maybe their words about that were just as hollow! Either way, let us not be fooled by words—actions reveal true beliefs.

Therefore, let our actions reveal our belief in the hope and love of Christ. It is my goal that the actions of the Respect Life Office will do just that. If together we act on this hope and love, we can lift the fog of the culture of death that has enveloped our culture and our government. Our actions can be a beacon of moral clarity. Fortunately, we have a Shepard in Bishop Doran who provides moral clarity in word and deed. Our office will continue to follow his example.

For additional commentary on life issues, check out "Life Lines" on the first Friday of each month in *The Observer*.

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If you are interested in donating to the Respect Life Office, please contact us at 815-399-4300 x 435 or email mitchstriedl@rockforddiocese.org.