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# Helping pregnant women not enough, prelates say

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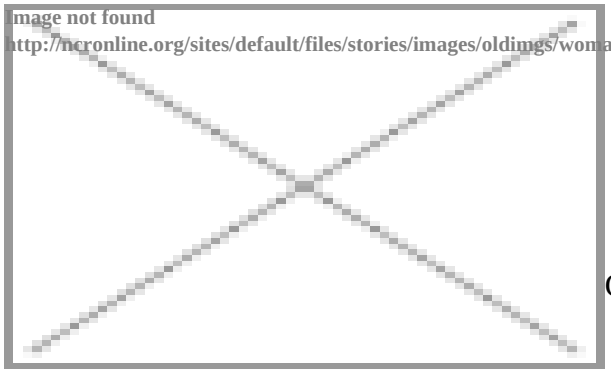
**WASHINGTON**




Catholics are required to oppose abortion on demand and to provide help to mothers facing challenging pregnancies, the chairmen of two committees of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops said in an Oct. 21 statement.

Cardinal Justin Rigali of Philadelphia, chairman of the Committee on Pro-Life Activities, and Bishop William F. Murphy of Rockville Centre, N.Y., chairman of the Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, also urged Catholics to study church teaching on matters pertaining to abortion rather than rely on statements and materials from outside organizations.

The prelates' statement was released in response to two arguments that have surfaced in the abortion debate during the run-up to the Nov. 4 election.

**Editor's note: Read the full text of the joint statement** [1].

The first maintains that the Catholic Church should accept the U.S. Supreme Court's 1973 Roe v. Wade decision on abortion as a "permanent fixture of constitutional law" and the only way to reduce abortions is through broader government support for pregnant women. The second holds that the

church should focus solely on restoring recognition for unborn children's human rights and that proposals to provide life-affirming support for pregnant women distract from that effort.

"We want to be clear that neither argument is consistent with Catholic teaching," the prelates wrote. "Our faith requires us to oppose abortion on demand and to provide help to mothers facing challenging pregnancies."

In issuing their statement, the bishops signaled both sides of the abortion debate that efforts to protect life must take place both in the social and political realms.

"Providing support for pregnant women so they choose to have their babies is a necessary but not sufficient response to abortion," they said. "Similarly, reversal of Roe is a necessary but not sufficient condition for restoring an order of justice in our society's treatment of defenseless human life.

"Both approaches to opposing abortion are essential. By protecting the child's life to the maximum degree possible, improving life-affirming support for pregnant women and changing the attitudes and prejudices imposed on many women to make them see abortion as an acceptable or necessary solution, we will truly help build a culture of life," they said.

Overturning the court's decision would not automatically grant legal protection to the unborn, Cardinal Rigali and Bishop Murphy said.

The prelates also cautioned Catholics about the numerous materials that have surfaced recently that attempt to "interpret Catholic teaching" or imply that such resources "represent the teaching of the church." They affirmed that the year-old "Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship" document is "the teaching that has been approved" by the bishops to help guide Catholic voters.

They also encouraged Catholics to review documents issued by local bishops and state Catholic conferences for guidance prior to the election.

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[1] http://usccb.org/prolife/Rigali-Murphy-Joint-Statement.pdf