

# New Mexico Conference of Catholic Bishops



**Archdiocese of Santa Fe**, Most Reverend John C. Wester, M.Div., M.A.S., M.A.

Most Reverend Michael J. Sheehan, Archbishop Emeritus

**Diocese of Las Cruces**, Most Reverend Oscar Cantú, S.T.D.

Most Reverend Ricardo Ramirez, Bishop Emeritus

**Diocese of Gallup**, Most Reverend James S. Wall

## **Statement on the Dignity of Human Life**

**March 6, 2017**

We the bishops of the State of New Mexico speak for the Catholic Church. We work to uphold the dignity of the human person from conception to natural death through our pastoral ministries and through our legislative advocacy via the New Mexico Conference of Catholic Bishops. We encourage individuals to live and proclaim their faith; however, they must be steadfast in stating they speak for themselves and do not speak for the Catholic Church.

Recently, statements have been made by some Catholic legislators regarding abortion, doctor-assisted suicide and the Catholic Church. These statements may be confusing to the Catholic faithful and do not represent the teachings of the Church. It is not appropriate for elected officials to publicly invoke their Catholic faith and to present their personal opinions as official Church teaching. This misrepresents Church teaching and creates a public scandal for the faithful. Furthermore, this action publicly separates a person from communion with the Catholic faith.

We acknowledge that there are Catholic legislators who advocate and vote for some issues that are of moral importance to Catholics, including concern for poor people and immigrants. We applaud their work giving voice to the voiceless. However, we are concerned by public statements by some legislators that seem to say that a faithful Catholic can support abortion or doctor-assisted suicide. Support for abortion or doctor-assisted suicide is not in accord with the teachings of the Church. These represent the direct taking of human life, and are always wrong. Furthermore, we are convinced that proclaiming and living the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the most effective way to change hearts and minds so that one day the scourge of abortion will be eliminated. Our message is consistent: All human life is sacred, from the moment of conception to natural death, and must be protected. As Pope Francis reminds us, "Even the weakest and most vulnerable, the sick, the old, the unborn and the poor, are masterpieces of God's creation, made in His own image, destined to live forever, and deserving of the utmost reverence and respect (7/17/13)." It is not morally permissible for a Catholic to support abortion or doctor-assisted suicide.

We also acknowledge that God's forgiveness is always available to us if we seek it, so that we may heal our soul and be reconciled with God, the Church and others. This is the case with abortion. Those who have had an abortion, participated in an abortion, or otherwise supported an abortion need to seek reconciliation with God and the Church through the sacrament of reconciliation. The Project Rachel ministry of the Catholic Church offers this hope for healing and reconciliation to men and women who have had or participated in an abortion.

We want to be clear. Individuals and groups do not speak for the Catholic Church. As bishops, we do. The Archdiocese of Santa Fe, the Diocese of Las Cruces and the Diocese of Gallup continuously preach Jesus' Gospel of Life in public and in private meetings with legislators. We visit the New Mexico Legislature when it gathers and host a time when together the priorities of the Church are made known to the legislators. We take the Gospel to the public square in public meetings and hearings as well as in private meetings and conversations with elected officials. We pray for all legislators and through the New Mexico Conference of Catholic Bishops are here to aid in the formation of consciences. We will continue to collaborate with many others to uphold the dignity of the human person through a consistent ethic of life from conception to natural death.—END