

## When I Hear Pro-Life...

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1. When I hear pro-life, I think: What does it mean to be pro-life? I've never heard of it.
2. When I hear pro-life, I think: Pro-birth.
3. When I hear pro-life, I think: Anti-woman.
4. When I hear pro-life, I think: That's not me because I had an abortion.
5. When I hear pro-life, I think: Pro-Republican.
6. When I hear pro-life, I think: 'You only care about the baby before they are born, not after they are born'.
7. When I hear pro-life, I think: I am involved in pro-life ministry: I feed the poor, I work for an end to violence in the city, I take care of my family, I take care of the elderly, I mentor children, etc.
8. When I hear pro-life, I think: No one has ever invited me to get involved in pro-life ministry.

When you hear the term pro-life, what do you think? In this article, I hope to address, as succinctly as possible, these thoughts about what it means to be pro-life.

### *When I hear pro-life, I think...*

*"Human life is sacred and inviolable. Every civil law is based on the recognition of the first and fundamental right, that of life, which is not subordinate to any condition, neither qualitative nor economic, much less ideological."*

Pope Francis

**What does it mean to be pro-life? I've never heard of it.** The term, pro-life, came into common usage following the Supreme Court decision of 1973, [Roe v. Wade](#), which held that a woman had a constitutional right to abortion<sup>1</sup>. This term was adopted by the right-to-life movement in order to highlight that this movement was in support of

protecting and defending the life of the unborn child. The first principle of Catholic Social

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<sup>1</sup> "Summary of Roe v. Wade and Other Key Abortion Cases," USCCB Pro-Life Activities, accessed September 19, 2018, <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/abortion/upload/Summary-of-Roe-v-Wade-and-Other-Key-Abortion-Cases.pdf>.

Teaching is the ‘life and dignity of the human person’<sup>2</sup>. This principle is fundamental, for if a person is denied life at its inception, then that person is also denied, as a result, all other rights afforded to them by their existence as an image-bearer of God (Genesis 1:26-27). It is for this reason that [Pope Francis states](#): ***“Human life is sacred and inviolable. Every civil law is based on the recognition of the first and fundamental right, that of life, which is not subordinate to any condition, neither qualitative nor economic, much less ideological”***.

What kind of ministry is pro-life ministry? Pro-life ministry is any ministry dedicated to defending the most fundamental of rights: the right to life. This movement has grown to include other life issues, such as euthanasia (also known as physician-assisted suicide) and the death penalty, because these are also explicit threats to life at the societal level. On a practical level, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops have defined the nature of pro-life activities (or ministry) in their [Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities](#). In this plan, the U.S. bishops outline the four areas of pro-life ministry: *pastoral care, public policy, public information and education, and prayer and worship*. What I am doing now, in writing this article, would fall under the area of public information and education. A volunteer at a pregnancy center would be working in the area of pastoral care. [Project Rachel](#), the diocesan post-abortion healing ministry would also be part of pastoral care. A passionate constituent speaking to his or her representative about supporting pro-life laws, like the [Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act](#) or [opposing physician-assisted suicide](#) would be ministering in the area of public policy. Any parish community that prays for the unborn, for families experiencing miscarriage, for caregivers of the elderly and sick, etc. is doing pro-life ministry through prayer and worship. This is pro-life ministry. There are many more forms of it than I have mentioned here and many more ways to get involved.

**Pro-birth and anti-woman.** Because the physiological manner in which the human person comes into the world is through birth, then it is necessary to be, in a manner, pro-birth. Yet, because a human person comes into the world through a woman’s body, then to be pro-life must mean to be pro-woman. One cannot be pro-life and anti-woman because it is the woman who we must convince and empower, through love, truth and charity (practical charity as well) to welcome the life of her child into the world. To be against the woman would be a self-defeating principle: ***“a house divided against itself cannot stand (Mark 3:25)”***.

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<sup>2</sup> “Seven Themes of Catholic Social Teaching,” USCCB, accessed September 19, 2018, <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/seven-themes-of-catholic-social-teaching.cfm>.

**That's not me because I had an abortion.** The pro-life movement is here to serve and to be served by those who have participated in an abortion. This movement welcomes women and men who are suffering spiritually and emotionally after an abortion through post-abortion healing ministries, such as [Project Rachel](#). There are many women and men suffering after an abortion. Stories of women like [this mother](#) and of [men like these](#) tell of the hurt and pain that so many experience after making this decision. However, they also speak of the power of post-abortion healing and how God can turn tragedy into triumph. The pro-life movement is enriched by the stories and witnesses of those women and men who find healing after abortion.

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**Pro-Republican.** The right-to-life, the most fundamental of all rights, because it is the first right extended from God to his creation, transcends any political realities. From the United States of America to a small tribe in

sub-Saharan Africa, the right-to-life is given to each and every person who comes into existence. This is not a right granted by any particular government, but to us by our God. The government's role is to protect this right for its citizenry. Now, there may be political realities within each country such that some political groups or parties are more or less likely to protect this inherent right, yet, again, this right must transcend all political realities. Practically speaking, this means that the right-to-life does not belong solely to the Republican party. For example, there is a movement within the Democratic party called [Democrats for Life](#), which upholds pro-life views while adhering to other Democratic policies and platforms.

**People who do not care about the baby after it is born.** The pro-life movement is a grassroots movement. It is a movement made up of individuals and families, from different walks of life, different faith and racial backgrounds, and different ministerial calls, who have come together in the defense of human life. Although the faces of the pro-life movement are disproportionately of white people, people of color are actively involved and have great richness to add to the movement. As these individuals and families have involved themselves in the lives of those seeking abortion, it has become abundantly obvious the needs that many women (and men and families) have who are seeking abortion. Many women find themselves pregnant and homeless, perhaps in domestic violence situations, or suffering from addiction. Many women are unmarried and are either being pressured by the father or other family members to have an abortion. Some are high school or college students who do not want to lose their opportunities for an education and to build a career.

A lesser-known fact about abortion is how the laws supporting abortion rights disenfranchise men from fatherhood. While many fathers do participate either actively or passively in the abortion of their child, there are many fathers whose right to father their child is stripped away from them. Fathers have no rights when it comes to an abortion. The final decision is between a mother and

her healthcare provider<sup>3</sup>. The pro-life movement advocates for a voice for disenfranchised fathers and reaches out to wounded fathers through post-abortion healing. In other ways, particularly through fatherhood initiatives, the pro-life community tries to encourage fathers to step up and take responsibility for their children.

Whatever the situation, pro-lifers have worked and sacrificed tirelessly to address these issues either in a personal capacity or at an organizational level. However, the movement can always use fresh ideas, resources, and connections to under-reached communities.

This is a movement for you and for me because we are all the stewards of God’s creation and we all have a responsibility to protect the most innocent and vulnerable lives in our communities.

**I am already involved in pro-life ministry.**

There is lots of life-affirming work going on in our parishes and communities to address suffering humanity. In the Black Catholic Community, much of this life-affirming work is in the areas of racial justice, ending destitution due to

*“The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice.”*

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

poverty, and equality of opportunity in leadership structures. This tremendous work addresses the life and dignity of the human person and all of their associated rights and responsibilities. The pro-life movement is not a negation of this work, nor does it exist to be a catch-all for all of the work needed to help support and form the integral human being. We are all part of this God-given enterprise to support the integral development of the human person so that each person may accomplish the call to holiness given to him or her in Christ Jesus. I am writing to encourage our communities to get involved in the pro-life movement for a few reasons: abortion ends the life of a child and causes trauma and suffering to the mother and family; abortion disproportionately affects the Black community ([see infographic here](#)); [the threat of physician-assisted suicide would likely be more imminent for people of color](#), particularly given current health disparities and access to health care for people of color; because as the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches in [paragraph 2267](#), in a society such as ours: “the cases in which the execution of the offender is an absolute necessity ‘are rare, if not practically non-existent’”.

Much like the abolitionist movement during the times of slavery and the civil rights movement of the early-to-mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, this movement is necessary to restore justice to individuals and communities who have been denied rights through unjust laws. Laws that destroy innocent life or which do not take seriously enough the call to defend life, even the life of a criminal, are unjust laws. And like unjust slavery and Jim Crow laws, a response at a societal level is necessary. This

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<sup>3</sup> “The Court in *Planned Parenthood v. Danforth* invalidated broad portions of Missouri’s abortion law including those which banned abortions by saline injection, required a married woman to obtain the consent of her husband prior to an abortion, and required consent of parents before an abortion could be performed on their minor daughter. The court approved in principle, but without explanation, the need for informed consent.” See also, *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pa. v. Casey* (from “Summary of Roe v. Wade and Other Key Abortion Cases,” USCCB Pro-Life Activities, accessed September 19, 2018, <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/abortion/upload/Summary-of-Roe-v-Wade-and-Other-Key-Abortion-Cases.pdf>.)

response is the pro-life movement. As the late Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, *‘The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice.’*

**No one has ever invited me into pro-life ministry.** Consider this your invitation. You are invited into the pro-life movement. This is your movement and mine. You are invited to protect and defend life at all stages, but especially those lives threatened by abortion, euthanasia, and the death penalty. You are invited to bring all of your passion, talent, gifts, and resources - your whole person – to this movement. We want your insight, your new ideas, your

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perspective, your connection to your own family and community. Wherever you are, you can get involved. Some ways to get involve could be: volunteering at a local pregnancy center, participating in your local [40 Days for Life](#) campaign, getting involved in post-abortion healing through Project Rachel, contacting your parish or diocesan pro-life office, educating yourself on pro-life issues, reading the Church’s teaching on life issues ([Evangelium vitae](#) by Pope St. John Paul II is a good start), and most importantly setting an example in your own family by cherishing and protecting life from conception to natural death.

If you would like to speak to someone about how you can get involved with pro-life ministry, I strongly recommend speaking to your pastor and/or your local diocesan pro-life office. However, I would also be happy to speak with anyone who would like to know more. You can contact me at 410-547-5537 or at [natasha.wilson@archbalt.org](mailto:natasha.wilson@archbalt.org).