

## Statement on the Freedom Of Choice Act by Bishops George L. Thomas and Michael W. Warfel

Congratulations are in order for all the newly elected national, state, and local officials who will be guiding our governments for the next few years. We offer them our support and our prayers as they boldly take on the enormous challenges of the world today.

The challenges are many: the economy, war and the devastation of natural disasters to name a few. As Catholics we pledge to continue our efforts to assist the least of our brothers and sisters through Catholic Relief Services, Catholic Campaign for Human Development and Catholic Charities, as well as local efforts in our Montana cities and towns. We will pursue public policy that benefits the vulnerable, the disabled and the poor. We will join with President-elect Obama, Governor Schweitzer, and all other elected officials in forming programs which provide hope and liberty for the common good of all.

We pledge to stand with our elected officials in the pursuit of policies that benefit the poor, the forgotten and the ignored. We also pledge to stand up for those who are the most vulnerable, those sons and daughters not yet born, those who may well be the target of executive decisions and legislation which could cause a dramatic increase in abortions.

Cardinal Francis George, president of the U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops (USCCB) issued a statement addressing the Freedom of Choice Act (FOCA) at the recent fall assembly of bishops. The statement issued on behalf of the conference made several salient points regarding FOCA and other efforts to expand abortion.

First, Cardinal George states that the Church's interest in the world is in "doing good and [the Church] will cooperate gladly with the government and all others working for these goods."

Second, the statement emphasizes that "The fundamental good is life itself, a gift from God and our parents." The statement goes on to address possible challenges to life through presidential executive decisions and through the passage of legislation such as the Freedom of Choice Act.

Potential executive decisions could include allowing federal funding for embryonic stem cell research, and overturning the Mexico City policy which prevents U.S. tax dollars from funding groups that perform, promote or counsel for abortions overseas. These decisions are not dependent on Congressional approval and could happen the day the president is sworn into office.

FOCA is a radical attempt to sweep aside all national, state and local restrictions on abortion. It would allow extreme measures such as partial birth abortion. It would also allow infanticide, which takes place when a live birth occurs from a botched abortion. The legislation would outlaw any life-saving measures to save a child born during or after an abortion attempt.

As Catholics we understand that every human life is sacred and as such we will work to protect life from conception to natural death. We will also work to create programs that support women and families and enhance the choices of parenting and adoption. In a society where there is increasing separation between the rich and the poor, we will continue to work to feed the hungry, clothe the naked and otherwise provide for the poor. We will work to develop policy which promotes the common good for all. We will always consider these options on their own merit, and yet we will never diminish our efforts to promote the rights of the most vulnerable – those sons and daughters not yet born.

Some have said we should set aside our resolve to protect the unborn because that quest is a lost cause. Others have said the protections our Church seeks for the unborn are antiquated. We must remember that many great causes in the history of this country could have been characterized as lost causes in their day, but by perseverance have been accomplished. As we look back on those struggles we understand the importance of persistence, for although the causes have succeeded, the victory was not easy or popular in its day. We as Catholic people will work tirelessly to protect the unborn.

The first 100 days of an administration provides a snapshot of the newly elected president's priorities. We pledge prayers, and support for those priorities that will work to protect the common good of all. And we likewise pledge we will work hard to oppose those measures that would have an adverse affect on the most vulnerable, even before they are born.

President-elect Obama ran on a theme of "change and hope." It is our prayer that the change and hope of all is to promote a culture of life where each person can be welcomed into our society, and the life and dignity of all humans will be celebrated, protected and cherished as the gift they are.

*December 2008*