Opinion

Guest Voices



(RNS/Paul O'Donnell)



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Before backing a law banning abortion in Texas altogether, Gov. Greg Abbott propelled a 2021 measure banning abortion after a heartbeat has been detected, saying he "would protect the life of every child with a heartbeat." He happens to be Catholic.

So why did Abbott put razor wire and a floating barrier in the Rio Grande? Do migrant children not have heartbeats?

There is an angry selectivity when it comes to life issues. Abortion is certainly a tragic reality in too many places in the world. Without denying the ability of the polity to legally allow or disallow abortion, the better course is to make it unnecessary.

To respect life means just that: the unborn, yes, and the elderly and the stranger, the migrant and the homeless individual. Respect life includes the "other"; no matter how defined — by gender, skin color, language, ethnicity — the list is endless.

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Yet too many so-called pro-life advocates demonstrate an abject denial of others' right to life.

The task of religion is to expand the conversation, model good behavior and call out the frauds.

On abortion, for example, the leading candidates in the United States' presidential race exhibit distinct approaches to the question. One has said women who suffer abortion should be legally charged; the other supports legalized abortion.

We could call the first a "pro-lifer," but does he in fact respect life?

One has bragged about molesting a woman and has been found guilty of sexual assault. He currently faces 91 felony counts in four different jurisdictions. He does not pay his own legal bills, including those from one of his lawyers, Rudy Giuliani. (He complained that Giuliani lost. Recall his comments about the former Vietnam POW, Sen. John McCain.)

Since the federal right to abortion was overturned by a ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court, the other candidate has worked to circumvent the resulting patchwork of state laws. The complicating factor is his Catholicism, and it is hard to reconcile his position. Still, he seems to be a decent man. While in the U.S. Congress, he took the train home each night to Delaware. He is said to call his children every day.

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So, what to do? The U.S. bishops say not to vote on any candidate because of one position on one issue.

Abortion is important, and Catholic opposition is well known. But what happens when you expand the conversation? What happens when you look at other life issues, and how they fare inside the Catholic Church?

The church has stepped up to house immigrants, and there are some places for unwanted children. But here and there is not everywhere.

Too many questions linger.

Does the pastor pay women employees on the same scale as the men? Or are women workers part-timers without benefits or vacation pay? Does he snicker at the thought of ordaining women deacons? Is he capable of informed discussion? Is he an autocrat, a dictator?

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Did the bishop move the pederasts, and cover up his — and their — tracks? Has he drained diocesan bank accounts to fight rather than settle with the victims? Does he tweet against Pope Francis? Has he paid lip service to the Synod on Synodality? Does he answer letters of complaint?

These are real questions for the Catholic Church, as it continues to bleed money and adherents while it seems to focus only on abortion. If clerics preach against abortion, they must also preach against the razor wire. If they preach about the value of life, they must respect the people of the church.

Immigration? The death penalty? Workers' rights?

Too many clerics have replaced the Gospel with their personal politics. Until they demonstrate respect for all life, they will continue to be ignored.