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Essay: How to end the Abortion Stalemate??

by Sr. Sharon Dillon

Few rulings in American history reverberated across the political and social landscape with as much seismic fallout as the *Roe v. Wade* decision handed down 36 years ago.

Liberals cheered the landmark case as a breakthrough in women's rights. Conservatives and religious leaders railed against the Supreme Court's decision as an affront to human life and a classic display of judicial overreach.

Decades passed, ideologies hardened and bumper sticker slogans ruled the day. The abortion culture wars rewarded the shrillest voices and shattered bridges to common ground.

Today a new generation of Catholic, evangelical and other faithful Americans who believe that over 1 million abortions performed a year represent a profound moral failure are pushing to end the abortion stalemate.

Recognizing the tragedy of terminating a pregnancy will never be solved by harsh rhetoric or through legal battles alone, these religious voters support bipartisan efforts to reduce the number of abortions by preventing unintended pregnancies, expanding adoption opportunities and increasing economic supports to vulnerable women.

A post-election poll conducted by Public Religion Research, sponsored by Faith in Public Life, Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good and *Sojourners*, found overwhelming support for this approach. This consensus aligns with common sense and research.

A national abortion study Catholics in Alliance commissioned found lower abortion rates in states that provide robust economic assistance to low-income families, quality child care for working mothers and where employment figures are strong.??

Let's be clear. It's a mistake to think about preventing abortion and social justice as competing priorities. We need to promote a consistent ethic of life that recognizes the connections between poverty, lack of health care, economic inequality and abortion rates.

Those who doubt that living wages and access to affordable health care won't also help prevent abortions should remember that the abortion rate for women living in poverty is more than four times higher than for women earning 300 percent above the poverty line.

At a time of economic crisis and increasing unemployment, any serious effort to prevent abortion must grapple with finding pragmatic solutions to these socioeconomic realities. This will require creative thinking, political courage and bold leadership.

Democrats must do a better job acknowledging the moral dimensions of abortion and not write off pro-life voters. Republicans must put meat on the bones of pro-life rhetoric by starting to fight for increases in the minimum wage, children's health insurance programs and other robust efforts to stitch together our nation's tattered social safety net.

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Pro-life and pro-choice members of Congress are working together to find common ground and push common-sense initiatives that offer women a helping hand instead of condemnation. The Pregnant Women Support Act and the Reducing the Need for Abortions and Supporting Parents Act will not please everyone on both sides of this divisive issue. But these measures represent an era of new thinking that marries moral urgency with pragmatic action.

Research tells us what works. Voters are looking for a new path forward. Do we have the political and moral will to make abortion reduction a priority?

Sharon Dillon is the former Executive Director of the Franciscan Federation of the Third Order and the Operations Coordinator for Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good.

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