

Bishop in Belfast dismayed about planned opening of abortion clinic

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BELFAST, Northern Ireland

A Catholic bishop said he is dismayed that one of the world's largest family planning organizations is scheduled to open the first abortion clinic on the island of Ireland.

Bishop Noel Treanor of Down and Connor, whose diocese includes Belfast, expressed dismay that Marie Stopes International was scheduled Oct. 18 to open a clinic in Belfast.

"The opening of this facility further undermines the sanctity and dignity of human life in our society where the most vulnerable and defenseless human beings are already under threat," Treanor said.

He noted that Sunday marked the launch of the church's "Choose Life" appeal.

"Not only must we show compassion for women who find themselves facing an unwanted pregnancy, but we should support them to explore avenues which provide care while respecting the life of their child in the womb. We should enable them to respond to such situations in a life-affirming and positive way," he said.

The clinic will offer only medical, not surgical, abortions and will only terminate pregnancies up to the first nine weeks of pregnancy, as per Northern Irish law. Unlike the rest of the United Kingdom, where abortions can be performed up until the 24th week of pregnancy, the 1967 Abortion Act does not apply in Northern Ireland -- instead, abortions may only be conducted where three doctors separately agree that there is an immediate risk to the life of the pregnant mother or where there is a long-term or permanent risk to her physical or mental health.

The Northern Ireland Assembly -- the region's self-governing legislature -- has passed motions on two occasions opposing moves to extend Britain's abortion laws to Northern Ireland.

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