

## **Bishop Owensby's Response to the Supreme Court Decision**

As had been widely anticipated, the Supreme Court of the United States struck down *Roe v. Wade* on June 24. A majority of the Justices ruled that the Constitution contains no language guaranteeing a woman's right to abortion.

According to the Court, laws granting or denying a woman's access to abortion are legislative matters. Legislatures in each state will determine how, when, and if a woman can have access to the medical procedure. Like a number of states, our own Louisiana has a trigger law on the books. Upon repeal of *Roe*, these laws automatically ban access to abortions deemed medically unnecessary in the first and second trimester.

Our nation has been deeply divided over the issue of abortion for decades. The Court's ruling—and the legislative actions likely to be taken by some states—will increase that divide. While some are elated by the Court's ruling, others are grieved and outraged by it. Those with scarce resources will be impacted to a greater degree than those who can afford to travel to get the medical services they seek.

The fabric of our society had already been strained by gun violence, political animosities, racial inequities, the pandemic, supply chain woes, and downward economic pressures. The pull toward fragmentation will now be even stronger.

The Way of Christ includes the pursuit of the common good. This pursuit is undermined when we can no longer see ourselves as parts of one community. So being a Jesus-follower involves working toward an honest unity.

I don't mean that we should paper over significant differences: go along to get along. Or that we should accept what is simply unacceptable for the sake of a phony sense of community. No, that's not the Jesus way. Just read the Gospel stories about his own conflicts with the religious and political leaders of his day.

Instead, we have to speak and listen. Clearly and sincerely. Refuse to demonize those who disagree with us or oversimplify each others' views or use coercion to get our way because, well, it's what we want or how we feel about it. Reason and humility should be our guides here.

As a start for us Episcopalians, here's what our Church has been teaching for decades:

Abortion is a moral decision. We recognize that human life is sacred. And yet, depending upon the specific circumstances, an abortion can be the right if difficult and sorrowful choice to make.

It can also be the wrong decision to make. For instance, we have stated that “we emphatically oppose abortion as a means of birth control, family planning, sex selection, or any reason of mere convenience.”

In the end, after reflection and consultation, the pregnant woman should be the one to make this weighty decision.

In order to exercise their choice, women must have access to the medical procedure. Accordingly, the Church continues to oppose any legislative action that would deny women reasonable access. My friend and colleague Bishop Bonnie Perry of Michigan put it this way, “Abortion should be safe, accessible and rare. I believe it should be medically informed and not legislatively dictated or judicially restricted.”

Jesus taught us to love our neighbor as ourselves. He would never have had to tell us this if it came easily or naturally. Jesus knew that we are likely to have disagreements and conflicts—serious ones—with our neighbors. Love means having those disagreements and conflicts while also realizing that tomorrow morning our neighbor will still be our neighbor.

Speak truth. Be merciful. Walk humbly. We're in this together. We'll only get through it together.