

# CHRIST MEDICUS

CATHOLIC JOURNAL ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND HEALTH CARE

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Welcome to the latest issue of the Christ Medicus Catholic Journal on Religious Freedom and Healthcare! As you read this journal, we invite you into a deeper reflection on the sacred dignity of the human person, the moral obligations of caring for the sick as Jesus commands us, and the indispensable role of religious liberty in both.

At the Christ Medicus Foundation, we believe that authentic healthcare must honor the whole person—spirit, mind, and body. Founded on the truth of the Gospel and the moral teachings of the Catholic Church, our work is centered on helping people to encounter the love of Jesus the Divine Physician in all aspects of their life.

This edition features a guest column from Julie Grimstad of the Healthcare Advocacy and Leadership Organization (HALO), reflecting on her grandson's Josh's miraculous healing journey from a traumatic brain injury. This article gives hope to those who are battling brain injuries and makes clear that Jesus is the true healer and can heal even when doctors are pessimistic about outcomes. There are then articles from CURO staff members Mariah Buzza, Rebecca Wilson, and Michael Vacca about various aspects of the culture of life.

Whether you are a healthcare professional, policy maker, religious, or concerned Catholic, we hope you find in this journal not only information but inspiration: to act courageously, to serve compassionately, and to stand faithfully for the God-given freedom to live and care in accordance with our deepest beliefs.

Thank you for joining us in this important conversation. May the Holy Spirit guide you as you read, and may your heart be stirred to respond.

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The Christ Medicus Foundation is a 501(c) (3) Catholic nonprofit organization that defends religious freedom and builds Christ-centered Catholic health care. Our mission is to share Jesus Christ's healing love in health care, to build authentically Catholic care, to defend life and religious freedom, and to protect the poor and vulnerable. We work for a person-centered health care system. For over 20 years CMF has educated religious and lay leaders on the intersection of healthcare, the exercise of faith and religious freedom, and the defense of the right to life. CMF has launched coalitions, campaigns and conferences to educate and form Catholic laity to make Christ-centered healthcare decisions.

## JOSHUA GRIMSTAD'S JOURNEY FROM HOPE TO HEALING

Guest Writer : Julie Grimstad

It is my family's earnest prayer that Josh's journey to recovery may inspire others in whatever way they need; that it will encourage hope even when presented with a "hopeless" prognosis.

On January 14, 2023, my 19-year-old grandson Joshua worked all day as a volunteer at the Fort Worth Stock Show. A sophomore at Tarleton State University in Stephenville, Texas, Josh was driving back to school that night when he had a single-car rollover accident crushing the car's roof and Josh.

### A Bleak Prognosis

Care-flighted to John Peter Smith (JPS) Hospital, a Level I Trauma Center in Fort Worth, Josh had suffered a severe traumatic brain injury, multiple skull fractures, and a pontine stroke, as well as orthopedic and pulmonary injuries. Everyone we knew and many we did not know were praying for Josh. His father, Thomas, requested that we seek the intercession of Blessed Solanus Casey for a miracle. On day two, Father Maul, a priest at the family's parish, gave him the anointing of the sick. Thus, Josh was entrusted to God's mercy.

In the first couple of weeks post-accident, Josh would open his eyes but appeared unresponsive and paralyzed. His mother, Amy, stayed with him nearly 24/7. She taped pictures of the family on his bed rails, talked to him, played music, prayed for him, and did all she could to make him comfortable. Meanwhile, Thomas "held down the fort" at home. Josh is the oldest of 10 children and it is, indeed, a very busy house.

Seeing no change in Josh's condition, the hospital's head neurologist had a meeting with Thomas and me. He told us that Josh would never recover; that rehabilitation would do him no good. Thomas and Amy, in the name of Jesus, renounced the negative prognosis and prayed over Josh. I consulted my friend Dr. Paul A. Byrne, a frequent advocate for patients with head injuries. He encouraged us, "Pray. Healing comes from God. Doctors are always negative under these circumstances." Good advice!

*"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen."*

– Ephesians 3:20-21 (NIV)



### Glad to Be Alive

In the next few weeks, Amy saw Josh respond to requests like "calm your breathing" and "stop biting your tongue." He even made minor arm movements at her request. These events gave the family more hope than the doctors, who did not observe these responses, had. Next, Josh began tracking our movements with his eyes and blinking to answer questions – a short blink for "yes" and a long one for "no." College friends visited him at JPS, which, I'm certain, stimulated and encouraged Josh.

After two months at JPS, we rejoiced when Josh was accepted at Baylor Scott & White Institute for Rehabilitation in Dallas. The Baylor staff was amazed at Josh's awareness and responsiveness but concerned that he was not moving at all other than his eyes and head up and down. They put him in a wheelchair for the first time and rolled him outside. He loved it! Josh learned how to use an eye-

driven communication device that allowed him to "talk" with eye movements. He told his dad that he had thought he was dead but was glad to be alive; he was more thankful than before the accident; and he was much less anxious and depressed now that he had a "voice." Thomas reported, "The conversations we had through the device were fantastic and gave me the best night sleep I'd had in months."

After six weeks in rehab at Baylor, Josh moved home. Thomas and Amy became his caregivers as he still required total care and tube-feeding. Over time, modifications were made to the family home to accommodate Josh's evolving needs. Unfortunately, Josh had few services for the first six weeks at home. This was due mainly to a lack of providers who would take his insurance and the slowness of obtaining approval for things Josh needed to continue making progress. Obtaining services for a disabled person proved to be a time-consuming, frustrating process. The key was Thomas' persistence.

### **Great Strides in Rehabilitation**

On June 7, 2023, Josh was admitted to Pate, a post-acute day neuro brain injury rehabilitation program in Fort Worth. There, he received speech, physical, occupational, and aquatic therapy, and basic care five days a week, six hours a day. The therapists praised his determination and hard work and said Josh was fun to work with. He was soon driving his chair unassisted, showing improvement in strength and endurance, and had an amazing memory and cognitive skills. Josh was also writing devotionals which he shared with his rehab group on Fridays.



**Big news! On May 21, 2024, Josh's PEG (feeding tube) was removed. He could now feed himself whatever he wanted and stay hydrated by drinking thickened water!**

On July 26, Josh graduated from Pate and moved to a new phase – home therapy with Rehab Without Walls. Therapists began working with Josh at home. By the end of 2024, Josh had made great progress.

Thomas reported:

#### **Physical therapy:**

Josh's power chair keeps needing modifications, removing extra supports to better accommodate his increasing ability. At the beginning of 2024, a Hoyer lift was necessary to move Josh from his bed to chair and back again. Now, he transfers from bed to chair with assistance from family members but can get into bed without assistance. He is also learning to walk using a specialized walker.



#### **Socially/Family:**

Josh attends church every Sunday, plays games with family and friends, goes out to movie theaters, and receives visits from the awesome friends he made while attending college for three semesters.

Josh and Thomas spoke at a program called Shattered Dreams at Birdville High School in North Richland Hills, Texas. Shattered Dreams is a program that addresses the dangers of impaired driving. Josh was not impaired as he drove, but he is living the results of a car accident.

#### **Occupational therapy:**

Josh is now able to put on his shirt and remove it. He uses his computer with both hands, though his left side is still weaker than his right. He has always been artistic. He uses this talent to create graphic designs. His designs include graphics for t-shirts and logos for high school clubs and his grandpa's golf group.

With gifted money, Josh purchased a heat press to transfer his designs to t-shirts.



## We are so grateful!

Apparently, Josh's survival and recovery after his type of injuries is extremely rare. Recently, Anna Woods, D.O., a fellow at Baylor Scott & White, prepared a PowerPoint presentation on Josh's case. Dr. Woods wrote, "In my literature review, I was not able to find another case report that provided 2-year progress after this injury." In conclusion, she stated, "Basilar artery entrapment secondary to longitudinal clivus fracture is often catastrophic, but fortunately was not in this patient." Her most important point was, "Time and therapy shows great benefit in this case." How often are patients lost because they are not given the time and therapy needed to survive and recover?

We (and that includes Josh's extended family) are so grateful for God's Providence. All the family's needs – financial, emotional, and spiritual – were met by the people who supported Thomas, Amy, Josh, and the other children. We were overwhelmed by the love and generous gifts (too many to list) that they received.

We are also thankful to Josh for his determination and hard work. Josh says, "I am just doing what has to be done," but he never gives up. And neither do we.



**About the author:** Julie Grimstad is Vice President of the Healthcare Advocacy and Leadership Organization (HALO). Website: [www.halovoice.org](http://www.halovoice.org). Julie has served the medically vulnerable and their families as a volunteer patient advocate since 1985. She began her career as a licensed practical nurse caring for elderly and disabled patients. A speaker and writer, Julie addresses life issues beyond abortion. *A guide for helping non-responsive people recover their ability to communicate, A Gentle Approach*, is available at <https://halovoice.org/resources/>.

## The First Commandment and the Culture of Life

Writer : Michael A. Vacca Director of Ministry, Bioethics and Membership Experience



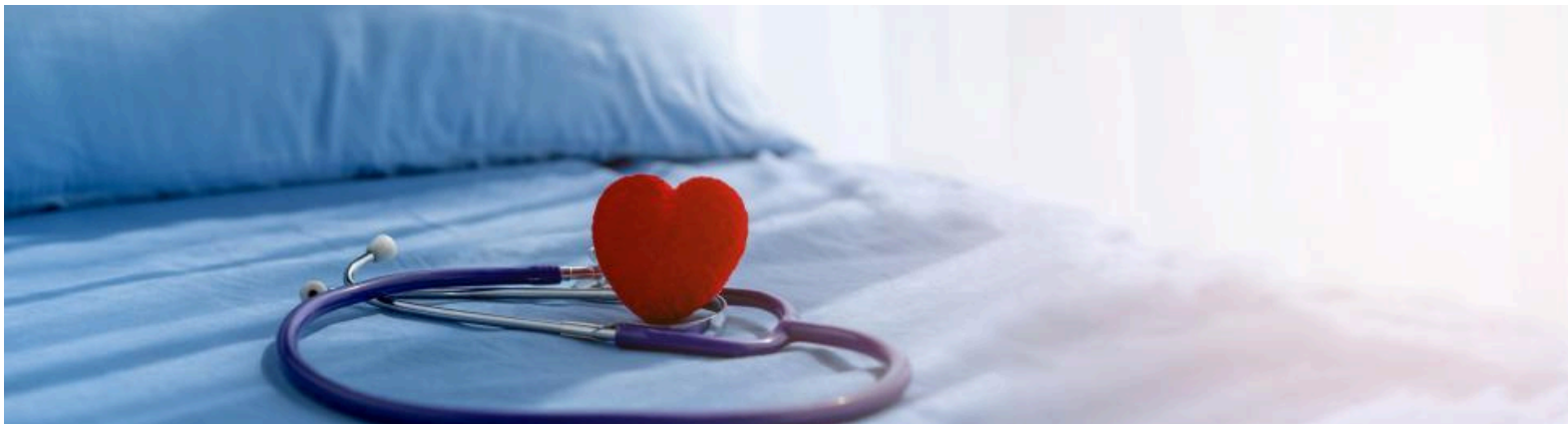
In this article I set forth a connection that I believe is at the center of epic battle between the culture of life and the culture of death. The connection is between the commandment to worship God alone, that is, not to commit the sin of idolatry, and the defense and preservation of human life. At surface level, you may not realize that there is a connection here. I want to argue that not only is there a connection between worshipping the one true God and Him alone and defending and preserving human life, but that the only way we can truly defend and promote human life is through destroying the idols of our culture and restoring respect for God as owner of the human person.

The first thing to recognize is that the destruction of human life, whether through abortion, assisted suicide, euthanasia, or any other immoral means, is a particularly egregious form of the worst sin: idolatry. Why is this the case? It is self-evident that only the owner of a thing has the right to dispose of its use. In the case of the human person, God is our owner because He alone created us (Genesis 1:26). True, we have stewardship over our own selves, but there are limits to what we can morally do to ourselves. We are not free, for example, to mutilate or kill ourselves since God owns us and we are His creation created for His purposes. So only God has the total right to dispose of our lives as He wills. For anyone other than God to coopt the human person is, therefore, an act of idolatry because they are replacing God with themselves and exercising an authority only He rightfully can exercise. So abortionists are idolaters, those who commit euthanasia are idolaters, and those who take it upon themselves to change a person's biological sex are idolaters. Only God can decide when a person dies and only God can decide a person's biological sex.

So you see, the culture of death is theft writ large: the coopting of God's sovereign primacy and lordship over His most valuable possession:

*"The human person made in His image and likeness." (Genesis 1:26)*

Whatever takes the place of God becomes an idol, and in the case of the culture of death, those who are responsible for the harm or death of the human person are replacing God with themselves.





Now that we have established the vital connection between idolatry and the culture of death, and conversely, between the worship of the one true God and the culture of life, we can see why atheistic, dictatorial regimes like the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany and Communist China kill so many people. They have essentially replaced God with the state, an act of idolatry, and this allows them to do what only God can do: take human life. Thus, we see, that religious freedom undergirds the culture of life because without the freedom to worship God, the very life of the human person is in jeopardy. Either we respect the lordship of God over everything, especially human life, or we surrender the power to kill to someone else or something else, and that is nothing more than an egregious form of idolatry.

In Wisdom 14:27, the Holy Spirit tells us: "For the worship of idols not to be named is the beginning and cause and end of every evil." This applies especially to the destruction of human life. So I want to suggest is that our strategy to promote a culture of life needs a theological anchoring in the worship of God alone and the tearing down of idols that detract from the worship of God. Typically, we don't think of worshiping God as the centerpiece of the culture of life, but that is exactly what I am proposing. So let us worship the one and only Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, with abandon, and in so doing, we are promoting a culture of life!



**About the Author:** Michael Arthur Vacca is the Director of Ministry, Bioethics, and Membership Experience. He is a devotee of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and holds a B.A. in Political Philosophy and English Literature from Hillsdale College, a Master's in Theology from Holy Apostles College and Seminary with a concentration in bioethics, and a Juris Doctorate from Ave Maria School of Law. Michael leads CURO's team of 15 spiritual directors and is a certified spiritual director, having completed the 2-year Heart of Christ Spiritual Direction Program, which is affiliated with the Avila Institute. CURO's bioethics consulting services are also overseen and provided by Michael. He is certified in Catholic Healthcare Ethics by the Catholic Distance University and the National Catholic Bioethics Center. He is the Managing Editor of the International Catholic Jurists Forum, which seeks to educate about life, family, and faith from within the Heart of Christ. Michael is a widely published legal scholar who has written on the natural moral law, bioethical issues, religious freedom, and natural marriage. He is the chair of the Healthcare Civil Rights Taskforce. He was a founding board member of Sidewalk Advocates for Life and currently serves on the board of Casa Vitae.

## Building the Culture of Life Through the Lens of Pope Leo XIV

Writer : Becca Wilson, Director of Catholic Wellness Programs Christ Medicus Foundation CMF CURO

On Friday, May 9<sup>th</sup>, the whole world watched as white smoke billowed out of the chimney in St. Peter's Square. While still mourning the loss of our late Holy Father, Pope Francis, Catholics around the world along with countless others of various faith backgrounds excitedly awaited the arrival of a new Holy Father. In a similar way to the paschal mystery which we just celebrated, as Catholics, we hold both suffering and joy in tandem. We are not left alone, the Holy Spirit guides our Church! As we watched and heard the proclamation "Habemus Papem," the world rejoiced at the news of Pope Leo XIV.

Pope Leo's first message[1] to the world was one of Peace. From the balcony, he said, "Peace be with you all! Dear brothers and sisters, these are the first words spoken by the risen Christ, the Good Shepherd who laid down His life for God's flock. I would like this greeting of peace to resound in your hearts, in your families, among all people, wherever they may be, in every nation and throughout the world. Peace be with you!" Living in a fallen, broken world, peace can become cloudy and difficult to distinguish at times. We can easily get distracted by the loudness of violence, despair, sin, and the culture of death. But we are a Resurrection people! We celebrate new life! As Pope Leo XIV would later say, "All of us are in God's hands. So, let us move forward, without fear, together, hand in hand with God and with one another other! We are followers of Christ. Christ goes before us. The world needs his light."



As members of the body of Christ, we are given the unique responsibility and privilege to be bearers of true peace to our world! This is the life Christ promises, being messengers of peace, true Peace that only Christ can give to our broken world is the clearest way to promote the Culture of Life! So where do we begin? In a speech to the diplomatic corps [2], Pope Leo explained three essential words that represent the pillars of the Church's missionary activity: peace, justice, and truth. As we seek to build up the culture of life, let us take our marching orders from Pope Leo's instruction:

### Peace

He begins his discussion saying that we often see peace in more of a negative context, "indicative only of the absence of war and conflict." But true peace, the peace which Christ brings, the peace he spoke to in his opening message, "is first and foremost a gift. It is the first gift of Christ." He goes on to say that "peace is built in the heart and from the heart, by eliminating pride and vindictiveness." This is a radical call that requires humility and love. It is a call that seeks to uphold the dignity of all people.

*"Peace be with you! It is the peace of the risen Christ. A peace that is unarmed and disarming, humble and persevering. A peace that comes from God, the God who loves us all, unconditionally."*

-Pope Leo XIV





# Building the Culture of Life Through the Lens of Pope Leo XIV

Writer : Becca Wilson, Director of Catholic Wellness Programs Christ Medicus Foundation CMF CURO

## Justice

Pope Leo explains that working for peace requires acting justly. “This can be achieved above all by investing in the family, founded upon the stable union between a man and a woman, ‘a small but genuine society, and prior to all civil society.’ In addition, no one is exempted from striving to ensure respect for the dignity of every person, especially the most frail and vulnerable, from the unborn to the elderly, from the sick to the unemployed, citizens and immigrants alike.” We all must work to build up this civilization of love, as Pope Benedict XVI so often spoke of and as Pope Leo describes, the family has a unique role to play! Loving families transform our world, they show love, they receive love, they give love. To build up the culture of life, to help all people recognize their dignity as a beloved child of God, our society must be guarded by the family and be built into a civilization of love.



## Truth

Finally, Pope Leo explains that a proper understanding of truth is necessary for being a missionary people, building up the culture of life. But what is truth? He explains, “truth can never be separated from charity, which always has at its root a concern for the life and well-being of every man and woman. Furthermore, from the Christian perspective, truth is not the affirmation of abstract and disembodied principles, but an encounter with the person of Christ himself, alive in the midst of the community of believers.” We then, are called to know Christ, and to spend time with Christ. In order to bring Christ’s peace into our world, to promote the Culture of Life, we must know Christ’s heart and bring that heart to all those we encounter! This is the call of the Christian!



As we celebrate the feast of Pentecost, let us invite the Holy Spirit to help us to live these three pillars, and to bring true peace into our world! Now is the time for action – we are in our new Upper Room. As the apostles awaited the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, let us invite the Holy Spirit to help us go out and build up a Culture of Life in the world.



**About the Author:** Becca Wilson is the Director of Catholic Wellness Programs for the Christ Medicus Foundation, where she combines her passion for evangelization and the human person with a holistic approach to health and healing. Rebecca has a master’s degree in Marriage and Family Theology from the International Theological Institute in Austria and a BA in Theology from Benedictine College. As a certified Health Coach through the American Council on Exercise, she walks alongside CMF CURO members on their journey toward whole-person wellness—spirit, mind, and body. Her work has been featured in the National Catholic Register, ENDOW, and Ave Maria Radio, and she continues to share the message of faith-filled wellness with enthusiasm and joy.

[1]<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2025-05/pope-leo-xvi-peace-be-with-you-first-words.html#:~:text=pope-Pope%20Leo%20XIV%3A%20Peace%20be%20with%20all%20of%20you,Jesus%20and%20to%20the%20Gospel.>

[2]<https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/speeches/2025/may/documents/20250516-corpo-diplomatico.html>



# A Post-Roe Pro-Life Movement: Looking at the Heart and Maternal Mortality in the United States

Writer : Mariah Buzza, LAPC, Mental Health and Wellness Advisor CMF CURO

The maternal mortality rate in the United States exceeds that of virtually every other developed nation in the world[1]. While some believe that the root of this problem lies in the fact that the U.S. does not provide Universal Health Care, even in light of the highly subsidized care provided by the Affordable Care Act, I believe that a profound cause of this high rate lies in our cultural outlook on pregnancy and motherhood, particularly in the field of Women's Health.

Recently, I discovered I am pregnant with my fourth child. I have two living children and lost a precious soul in an ectopic pregnancy almost 3 years ago. The experiences I have had in the treatment for all of my pregnancies have each been unique. But at my first prenatal appointment for my most recent pregnancy, I was reminded of the discouraging common denominators between the medical care I've received in each, a lack of recognition for the mystery of motherhood as a product of spousal unity and the inseparable reality that every child is a gift. These discouraging realities in Women's Health are seen most starkly in the standards of care at work which I have experienced and observed.



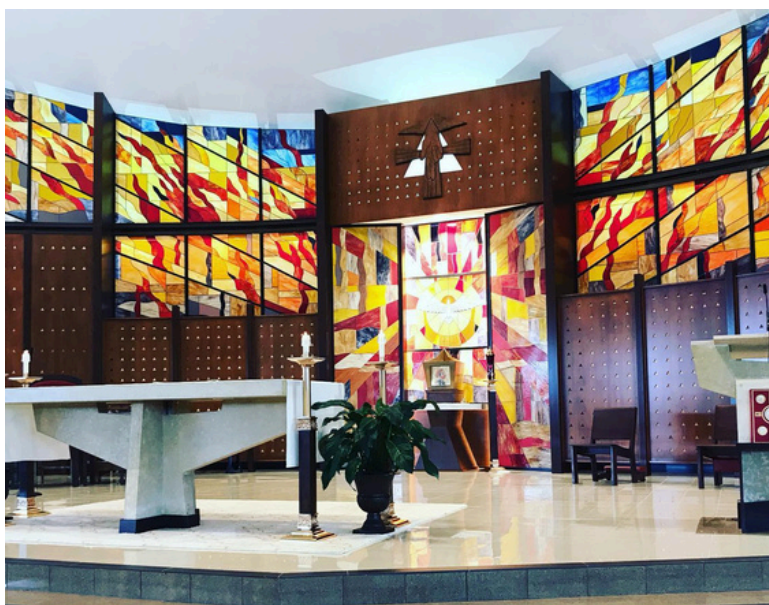
According to the Guttmacher Institute, 65% of women of child-bearing age in the United States were using contraceptives in 2008[2]. If you are a woman in the U.S. and have visited an OB/Gyn in your child-bearing years, you know that you will be offered birth control. It is the standard of care for avoiding pregnancy, and many women are told it is necessary during the post-partum period[3] as doubts regarding the effectiveness of natural family planning abound in secular practices.[4]



However, our Church teaches that even “legitimate intentions on the part of the spouses do not justify recourse to morally unacceptable means (for example, direct sterilization or contraception.”[5] This is because “the two meanings or values of marriage (fidelity and fecundity) cannot be separated without the altering the couple's spiritual life and compromising the goods of marriage.”[6] To disassociate the unity of spouses from openness to life has grave affects as it is contrary to God's intention for marriage. Furthermore, in *Mulieris Dignitatem*, Pope St. John Paul II states, “motherhood involves a special communion with the mystery of life, as it develops in the woman's womb.”[7]

Professionals in Women's Health know the processes and systems of the female body through years of observation and study. But do they know and remember the purpose of the body when considering standards of care and recommendations? Do they know the mystery of every human life as it unfolds in its mother womb? As I recall the experience of seeking treatment for an ectopic pregnancy, I recall the bleak reality that care was offered lacking recognition for the communion occurring in my womb. I was offered a commonly used but gravely limited solution to eliminate the threat to my life at the expense of the child's dignity.

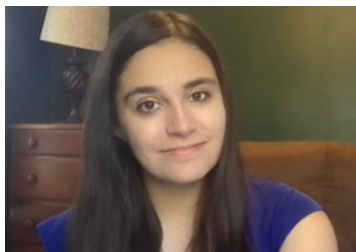
The widespread use of contraceptives to regulate one's fertility and medical interventions which fail to recognize the dignity of every child are not only contrary to the Church's teaching on the family and marriage but produce an illusion of certainty and control over a woman's overall health. So much more are we given and subject to the advertisement of methods of avoiding pregnancy, thus neglecting the fleeting nature of female fertility. This nature reminds us that fertility is a gift, not to be suppressed, but responsibly cultivated. This nature reinforces the reality that children are gifts that stem from the unity of spouses.



As stated in a 2006 study on postpartum maternal health care in the United States, "Currently, the major component of the routine 6-week postpartum checkup is limited to vaginal examinations and contraceptive education. In a national survey, about one third of mothers who received a postpartum checkup felt their health concerns were not addressed." [8] On top of feeling dismissed by health care providers in the post-partum period, many women in the U.S. feel immense financial and occupational pressures to return to work due to a lack of or inadequate paid maternity leave. [9] The inflexibility of many companies and industries combined with the illusion of complete control given by medical standards in women's health has

created a culture in which motherhood and pregnancy are not prioritized as they should be. It has created a culture in which motherhood is feared as an isolating and medically dangerous experience if not sought within the parameters set by the contraceptive mindset and workplace parameters. As a woman in her childbearing years, I have felt this and know many others who have. To me it is no surprise that women across our country feel that abortion is necessary— we are being told it is by what society has done and fails to do.

What drove the sinner into believing sin was the way to joy or relief? Similarly, what drove the mother into believing abortion was the solution? We are called to be a people of mercy. Mercy stems from the heart of Christ and, thus, resides in those conformed to Him. Let us conform our hearts to Him so that abortion becomes not only less tempting, but unthinkable to any vulnerable woman to whom it is offered.



**About the Author:** After graduating from the University of California, Berkeley in 2018 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science. In 2023 Mariah graduated from Divine Mercy University with a Master of Science in Clinical Mental Health Counseling and is a Nationally Certified Counselor (NCC) as well as a Licensed Associate Professional Counselor (LAPC) in Pennsylvania who works with children, adolescents, and young adults. At CMF, Mariah is currently creating and advises on policies related to mental health in the wellness and community programs provided through CURO.

[1] <https://www.commonwealthfund.org/blog/2022/us-maternal-mortality-crisis-continues-worsen-international-comparison#:~:text=New%20international%20data%20show%20the,mother%20other%20high%20income%20countries>.

[2] <https://www.guttmacher.org/fact-sheet/contraceptive-use-united-states>.

[3] <https://www.acog.org/womens-health/faqs/postpartum-birth-control>.

[4] <https://www.acog.org/womens-health/faqs/fertility-awareness-based-methods-of-family-planning>.

[5] Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2399.

[6] CCC, 2363.

[7] [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_letters/1988/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apl\\_19880815\\_mulieris-dignitatem.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1988/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19880815_mulieris-dignitatem.html).

[8] <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1595301/>.

[9] <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/11/11/global-paid-parental-leave-us/>.



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