



*The Roman Catholic
Diocese of Phoenix*

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COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE

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**Questions and Answers
Re: The Situation at St. Joseph's**

Is abortion ever allowed, even to save the life of the mother?

No. Abortion is never permitted as an end or as a means. Abortion is always immoral since it constitutes the direct killing of an unborn child.

What can be done when a pregnant woman's life is in danger?

The underlying condition should be treated. Her life is not in danger from her child, it is in danger from an actual pathology or illness. That illness should be treated and managed with due regard for the child's health as well. We must always remember that in a situation like this we are dealing with two patients.

If the baby cannot survive outside the womb and the mother may die, isn't it better to save at least one life?

First, we have to remember that a physician cannot be 100% sure that a mother would die if she continued the pregnancy.

Second, the mother's life cannot be preferred over the child's. Both lives are equal, both have an eternal soul and both are created by God. No one has the right to directly kill an innocent life, no matter what stage of their existence.

It is not better to save one life while murdering another. It is not better that the mother live the rest of her existence having had her child killed.

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What if the treatment provided to the mother results in the death of her unborn child?

Certainly a physician should try to protect both lives equally. If the child can grow past viability and then can be delivered, that is always preferable. If, however, a necessary treatment brings about the death of the child indirectly it may be allowable. A Dilation and Curettage (D&C) or Dilation and Extraction (D&E), however, would never be such a treatment since it is the direct killing of the unborn child and is, morally speaking, an abortion.

Why was Sr. McBride excommunicated?

Sr. McBride held a position of authority at the hospital and was frequently consulted on ethical matters. She gave her consent that the abortion was a morally good and allowable act according to Church teaching. Furthermore, she admitted this directly to Bishop Olmsted. Since she gave her consent and encouraged an abortion she automatically excommunicated herself from the Church. “Formal cooperation in an abortion constitutes a grave offense. The Church attaches the canonical penalty of excommunication to this crime against human life.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church #2272) This canonical penalty is imposed by virtue of Canon 1398: “A person who procures a completed abortion incurs a *latae sententiae* excommunication.

Does that mean that all women who have had an abortion are excommunicated?

Yes, anyone who has had an abortion is automatically excommunicated. But so are those who encouraged the abortion, helped to pay for the abortion, or performed the abortion, including those who directly assisted in its performance.

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From the news reports we were told that Sr. McBride also consulted with others who agreed that the abortion should be performed. Are they also excommunicated?

Yes. Those Catholics who gave their consent and encouraged this abortion were also excommunicated by that very action. So too is anyone else at St. Joseph's who participated in the action; including doctors and nurses.

What does it mean that a person has been excommunicated?

A person may not participate in the Sacraments, including the celebration of the Eucharist or any other act of public worship. They also may not hold any ministerial position within the Church or be allowed to exercise any authority. In short, their own action has placed them outside the Church.

What is the purpose of excommunication?

The purpose is to repair scandal, to restore justice and to reform the offender. It is a scandal to the entire Church that a woman religious would consent to and encourage an abortion. It is also a scandal that a Catholic Hospital would perform such a reprehensible act. Furthermore, it is a grave injustice to the child who was killed, as well as to the mother who was told that it was permissible. Finally, a person who has been excommunicated definitively knows that by their own evil action, they have removed themselves from communion with the Church. The action of excommunication is a call to repentance and conversion.

How does a person return to full communion with the Catholic Church after being excommunicated?

Since it is the law (i.e., canon law) that has imposed the penalty by virtue of the crime committed, there must be a canonical process for removing the penalty. This is accomplished through Sacramental Confession with a priest. In addition to the absolution from sin confessed, a priest is also to lift the excommunication during the Rite of Penance. Historically, abortion has been a "reserved sin" in that its

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absolution and resolution of the penalty have been reserved to a diocesan bishop. However, most diocesan bishops grant to priests of their dioceses the faculty to lift the excommunication. All priests of the Diocese of Phoenix have been granted this faculty to lift excommunication in cases of abortion.

A second and crucial step in the resolution of the excommunication is that there is often grave scandal created by the person's actions. In these situations it may be necessary for the excommunicated person to assist in the efforts to repair the scandal they helped create. This would be accomplished through consultation with the diocesan bishop.

Is anything more required of a woman religious who has been excommunicated by participating in an abortion?

Yes. Canon Law requires that a member of a religious community be dismissed from religious life unless their superior decides that dismissal is not completely necessary and that correction of the member, restitution of justice, and reparation of scandal can be resolved sufficiently in another way.

Is St. Joseph's Hospital in danger of losing their endorsement from Bishop Olmsted?

Bishop Olmsted is attempting to work with St. Joseph's Hospital and Catholic Healthcare West to help them to be able to fulfill that which is required of any institution that claims to be Catholic. Unfortunately, it is clear that in this situation St. Joseph's was not faithful to Catholic Moral Teaching (as outlined in the Ethical and Religious Directives). Moreover, Catholic Healthcare West has not followed the Ethical and Religious Directives of the Church in at least one of their institutions, Chandler Regional Hospital. These realities are a scandal to the faithful and must cease if CHW wishes to be maintain its recognition as a Catholic institution in the Diocese of Phoenix.

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