



DIOCESE OF FRESNO
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May 28, 2019

To the faithful of the Diocese of Fresno and all people of good will:

In its teaching on Catholic participation in political life, the Catechism of the Catholic Church states, "It is necessary that all participate, each according to his position and role, in promoting the common good. The obligation is inherent in the dignity of the human person." Our country has a noble tradition of Christianity prophetically bringing its influence to bear upon political life to combat the evils of slavery, racism, and other attacks on the dignity of the human person. The Catholic Church carries on this tradition today in its advocacy on behalf of all those who are marginalized within society.

Attempting to imitate the Good Shepherd who defends his sheep at the approach of wolves (John 10:11-12), I wish to alert the faithful of the Diocese of Fresno to two bills currently before the California Legislature. The first is a direct attack upon innocent unborn life through an alarming expansion of state-furnished abortion. The second is an attack upon the Confessional Seal, an unprecedented and gross infringement on the First Amendment rights of the Catholic Church and other religious bodies.

- SB 24: This legislation requires that the student health centers at every CSU and UC campus prescribe and distribute so-called medication abortion. Abortion by medication is the process wherein a woman takes a series of two drugs over two days to induce an artificial miscarriage at 8-10 weeks of pregnancy. According to the FDA, 22 women have died from this medication, with thousands suffering serious adverse outcomes. In addition to facilitating this attack on human dignity on our college campuses, the legislation could impose various costs that will be shouldered by our taxpayer dollars and student tuition fees. It also makes no provision for the conscience rights of healthcare personnel who work in CSU and UC health centers, to allow them not to participate in abortion. Governor Brown vetoed this legislation last year, but Governor Newsom expressed his intention to sign it into law, should the bill pass through the Senate and the Assembly.
- SB 360: Catholic clergy are mandatory reporters for incidents of child abuse or neglect. The Church supports maintaining this status for its ordained ministers, and is dedicated to constant vigilance in the protection of minors.

This legislation, however, would require Catholic priests to report incidents of abuse or neglect communicated during the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Maintaining confidentiality during Confession is essential for the Church to pass on the merciful love of Jesus Christ to sinners. At the state and federal levels, American law has consistently recognized the sacredness of confessional statements among all religious bodies—not just among Catholics—and provides carve-out exceptions to protect religious ministers from being compelled to reveal information communicated in a penitential setting. Any legal measure requiring priests to violate the Confessional seal is a direct attack on the liberty of the Church, and an infringement on our First Amendment right to free exercise of religion.

I exhort the Catholic faithful of the San Joaquin Valley to call their state legislators and urge them to block these attacks on life and liberty. I particularly urge our Valley legislators—Senators Andreas Borgeas, Anna Caballero, Melissa Hurtado, and Shannon Grove; and Assembly Members Jim Patterson, Dr. Joaquin Arambula, Frank Bigelow, Devon Mathis, Rudy Salas, Vince Fong, and Adam Gray—to oppose these disastrous bills. I also call upon the Governor to veto these unprecedented attacks on the human person and religion.

Let us ask the intercession of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the Empress of the Americas and patroness of the unborn, for her intercession on behalf of our Golden State. O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee!

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joseph V. Brennan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Most Rev. Joseph V. Brennan, D.D.