Standing up for the Gospel of Life
CBCP Pastoral Statement on Reproductive Health Bill

“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10).

Human life is sacred because from its beginning it involves the creative power of God (CCC 2258). The Church carries out the mandate of the Lord to go and proclaim to all the nations the Gospel of Life. The protection and preservation of human life and the preservation of the integrity of the procreative act of parents are important elements of our mission from the Lord. It is our fidelity to the Gospel of Life and our pastoral charity for the poor that leads us your pastors to make this moral stand regarding Reproductive Health Bill 5043 that is the object of deliberation in Congress.

The Bill makes a number of good points. Some of the issues that it includes under reproductive health care, for instance, are the kind of things no humane institution would have any reason to oppose—maternal, infant and child health and nutrition, promotion of breastfeeding, adolescent and youth health, elimination of violence against women, etc.; but the Bill as it stands now contains fatal flaws which if not corrected will make the Bill unacceptable. It is our collective discernment that the Bill in its present form poses a serious threat to life of infants in the womb. It is a source of danger for the stability of the family. It places the dignity of womanhood at great risk.

The Church has always concerned itself with the poor. It has innumerable institutions and programs meant to help the poor. Our objection to this Bill is precisely due to our concern that in the long run this Bill will not uplift the poor. “The increase or decrease of population growth does not by itself spell development or underdevelopment”. (CBCP Statement, July 10, 1990)

Even as we recognize the right of the government to enact laws, we also reiterate that there must be no separation between God and Man. We appeal to our legislators to state in the Bill in clear categorical terms that human life from the
moment of conception is sacred. We appeal to our legislators to insure that the Bill recognize, preserve and safeguard freedom of conscience and religion. The Bill must inspire parents not only to be responsible but to be heroic in their God-given and State-recognized duty of parenting. Without these conditions, the Bill if enacted into law will separate our nation from Almighty God.

**Sacredness of Life from Conception.** The current version of the Bill does not define clearly when the protection of life begins. Although it mentions that abortion is a crime it does not state explicitly that human life is to be protected upon conception as stated in the Constitution. This ambiguity can provide a loophole for contraceptives that prevent the implantation of the fertilized ovum. The prevention of implantation of the fertilized ovum is abortion. We cannot prevent overt abortions by doing hidden abortions. It is a fallacy to think that abortions can be prevented by promoting contraception. Contraception is intrinsically evil (CCC 2370, Humanae Vitae, 14).

Even in the case of doubt as to the precise moment of the beginning of human life, the mere probability that the fertilized ovum is already a human life renders it imperative that it be accorded the rights of a human person, the most basic of which is the right to life (Evangelium Vitae, #60; cfr. Declaration on Procured Abortion, Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, November 18, 1974). When there is doubt whether a human life is involved, it is immoral to kill it. This is not just specifically Catholic Church teaching but simply natural law ethics.

**Freedom of Conscience.** By mandating only one Reproductive Health Education Curriculum for public and private schools, the Bill could violate the consciences of educators who refuse to teach forms of family planning that violate their religious traditions. This provision also could violate the rights of parents to determine the education of their children if the proposed curriculum would contradict their religious beliefs.

The Bill mandates that employers should ensure the provision of an adequate quantity of reproductive health care services, supplies and devices for their employees. This provision could be a violation of the conscience of employers who do not wish to provide artificial means of contraception to their employees because of religious reasons.
The Bill’s provision that penalizes malicious disinformation against the intention and provisions of the Bill (without defining what malicious disinformation is) could restrict freedom of speech by discouraging legitimate dissent and hinder our mandate to teach morality according to our Catholic faith. The Bill does not mention any consultation with religious groups or churches which could be interpreted to mean that religious and moral beliefs of citizens are not significant factors in the formation of policies and programs involving reproductive health.

**Heroic Parenting.** Family health goes beyond a demographic target because it is principally about health and human rights. Gender equality and women empowerment are central elements of family health and family development. Since human resource is the principal asset of every country, effective family health care services must be given primacy to ensure the birth and care of healthy children and to promote responsible and heroic parenting. Respect for, protection and fulfillment of family health rights seek to promote not only the rights and welfare of adult individuals and couples but those of adolescents’ and children’s as well.

We admonish those who are promoting the Bill to consider these matters. It is the duty of every Catholic faithful to form and conform their consciences to the moral teaching of the Church. We call for a more widespread dialogue on this Bill.

As your Pastors we speak to you in the name of the Lord: Choose life and preserve it. Stand up for the Gospel of Life!

May Mary, Mother of Life, who carried in her womb Life Himself, guide us to the Truth of Life.

For the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines

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