

## **Abortion, the uncomfortable and divisive issue**

Just recently, our state parliament decriminalised abortion by overturning a law of 1899. On balance one would have to say that is probably a good thing for women whose pregnancy threatens the life of the mother. But always with these things the devil is in the detail. It also must be stated that there is no clear Anglican position on abortion because we are a federation of independent Anglican Churches around the world, and each having its own position on the issue. Our American Church supports it as a fact of the law of the land, and that every woman must exercise their own choice in the matter. It also states a need for compassion and understanding for those who take this step. The Church of England *'combines a strong opposition on abortion with a recognition that there can be -strictly limited - conditions under which it may be morally preferable to any available alternative. In the light of our conviction that the foetus has a right to live...'* It would seem the governing factor is that each abortion is different, a personal choice with its own difficulties, in which hard and fast rules are not much help.

Another difficulty is the language used for unborn children – *foetus* if it is not wanted, but *my baby* if it is wanted. The change in terminology is significant. Most legislation, including our state allows an abortion of a foetus at 22 weeks. This is the same time a baby is viable at 22 weeks in an early delivery. This past week an operation, within the womb, saved an unborn child at this time of gestation. The most horrifying fact is that an abortion at 22 weeks can mean the child survives the procedure – and is left unattended to die or even killed by suffocation or cutting the spinal column – is that murder?. This side of the abortion industry is never made public.

Another aspect is the statistical facts of abortion in Australia – it is around 80,000 per year, roughly the total population of Bundaberg. This is estimated at approximately 13% per thousand women aged 15-44. This figure is about twice that of Germany and the Netherlands, which have very relaxed laws for pregnancy terminations.

As we all know, the Roman Catholic Church is against any form of abortion – I am not sure that is a helpful stance. Roman Catholic Canon Law can be uncompromising and lacking pastoral care and has little provision in recognising every set of circumstances which is different. It is governed by the *right to life of the unborn*. The Church of England also states that, but recognises that there are circumstances when this is not paramount. However, who cares what the Churches teach on this matter anyway – and it is politically incorrect!

In my own priestly ministry, where I have had to deal with this issue, I have two sets of circumstances and all have been lonely even desperate choices. The first set of circumstances in which the conclusion was that an abortion was the right course of action. The other was a deep sense of guilt and loss. My advice, as there is no body and no name, was to name the foetus so it became her child – a real person, and to bury it by burying a rose. The day the child was named becomes its birthday.

Last of all we have hundreds of Australian couples who have no child, but adoption is so difficult that seeking a child requires going overseas – we are so odd!