You Are Not Alone

Information for Catholic women about the abortion decision
It is often difficult for Catholics to talk about abortion

You may feel that no one else shares or understands your experience, or that your religion condemns you. On these pages we answer some common questions Catholics have about abortion and provide two liturgies to assist in the abortion decision. We want you to know you are not alone.

As a Catholic, I’d like to know the church’s teaching on abortion

The institutional church teaches that abortion is morally wrong in all circumstances. This is not, as most Catholics think, based on the belief that the fetus is a person. The church has no firm doctrine on when the fetus becomes a person. Thus, this teaching has never been proclaimed as infallible by the pope.

The church is also more than the pope and bishops. It includes all the people of God. Clergy, theologians and laity work together to develop church teachings. Many theologians and lay people today believe that abortion can sometimes be a moral decision and that conscience is the final arbiter of any abortion decision.

Will I be excommunicated if I have an abortion?

At the present time, the official Canon Law of the church states that anyone who commits the sin of abortion automatically excommunicates herself from the church. To commit the sin of abortion, you have to think that an abortion in your case, weighing all the circumstances of your life and your pregnancy, is a sin against God. You then have to decide that you are going to do it anyway, thus going against your conscience.
The Catholic church officially teaches that the conscience of an individual is supreme. If you carefully examine your conscience and then decide that an abortion is the most moral act you can do at this time, you are not committing a sin. Therefore, you are not excommunicated. Nor need you tell it in confession, since, in your case, abortion is not a sin.

If you do feel you committed a sin by having an abortion, you can seek reconciliation with the church by speaking to a priest in the sacrament of Reconciliation (confession).

**do Catholic women have abortions?**

Good women, including Catholics, have decided both for and against having an abortion. In fact, recent studies show that Catholic women have abortions at a rate comparable to women in the general population (USA: The Alan Guttmacher Institute, 1996).

**how do Catholics feel about abortion?**

Polls show that Catholics the world over support the right to legal abortion and believe it can be a moral option.

- Seventy-nine percent of US Catholics believe that Catholics can make up their own minds on moral issues such as abortion and birth control (USA: National Catholic Reporter/Gallup Poll, 1999).
- A full 69% of Catholics believe that a woman who has had an abortion for reasons other than to save her life can still be a good Catholic (USA: ABC/Washington Post poll, 1995).
- In Great Britain, 50% of Catholics say abortion should be legally available for all who want it. In Scotland, 68% of Catholics say women should have the right to choose abortion (Great Britain: MORI survey, 1997).
After all is said and done, how do I go about making up my own mind?

Decisions involving procreative choices are serious ones. When faced with the question of whether or not to have an abortion, accept that it is your decision, not someone else’s.

- Consider your personal and moral commitments in life. Know that there is no one acceptable, morally justifiable way of living your life.

- Know what you are deciding. Inform yourself about the medical aspects of abortion and childbearing—the medical procedures and risks.

- Understand your feelings, religious beliefs and values as they relate to the fetus; weigh those against your circumstances.

- Look at all the alternatives open to you. No alternative will be all good or all bad. Consider them all to lessen the possibility of regret.

- Conversations with trusted friends or unbiased counselors are good for anyone who faces a major choice.

- Clinics where abortions are performed can usually refer you to clergy or counselors who will raise the questions you should be asking. If you feel you are being pressured in any way, look elsewhere for help. Good counselors try to help, not coerce, you.

Throughout your decision-making process, know that good women have decided for and against abortion. No choice will leave you without some qualms and some uncertainty. That is the human condition. Come to the decision you can live with, and then be as strong as you can be, knowing that you have done your best.
**Liturgies for Responsible Reproduction**

We sometimes forget the spiritual dimension of all-important decisions and events in our lives. Women need spiritual support and affirmation as they make difficult choices about reproduction. The following liturgies celebrate women's spirituality by affirming the integrity and holiness of their decisions. They can be used alone or shared with a partner, friends or family. Women may need encouragement to consider celebrating such a liturgy because traditional churches and society do not provide them.

**Liturgies for Seeking Wisdom**

**Background**
This liturgy will help a woman decide whether to bring her pregnancy to term or to have an abortion.

**Centering**
Play soothing instrumental music quietly in the background.

**Candle Lighting**
Light candle, absorb its power, pray.

**Prayer**
Gracious and loving Holy Wisdom, fill me with wisdom that I may see clearly the choice that I need to make. Bless me and comfort me with your Spirit.

**Visualization**
- See yourself walking on a path through the woods. You are walking into the future. At the end of this path see yourself in ten years if you decide to bring this pregnancy to term. (Pause for three minutes and listen to yourself.)
Now begin again. (Pause fifteen seconds.) See another path through the woods. Walk along this path. At the end of this path see yourself in ten years if you do not bring this pregnancy to term. (Pause for three minutes and experience what this is like.)

After you have visualized these two pathways, find a cozy room with a comfortable chair. Sit in this chair and think about what you have seen. (Pause for as long as you like.)

**Reflection**
Sit and watch the candle burn, write down your thoughts in a journal and/or share your insights.

**Closing**
Wisdom comes when we reflect on our life and make choices based on honesty and truth. Wisdom lives within us. Listen to her. Trust her. Talk to her whenever you need to. She is your friend.

**Song**
"i found god in myself" from *for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf*.

*i found god in myself, i found god in myself and I loved her fiercely, i loved her fiercely, i found god in myself.*

Blow out the candle when you are finished. Do something comforting, for example, drink a cup of tea or take a warm shower.
Liturgical of Affirmation for Making a Difficult Decision

Background
This liturgy affirms that a woman has made a good and holy decision. It provides strength and healing after making a difficult decision. It brings closure to an often intense and emotional process. It is intended to be celebrated with friends.

Gathering
The celebrant invites friends, and if appropriate the partner, to gather in a circle. She welcomes them and introduces the liturgy.

Song
A favorite, comforting song, one that the woman likes.

Prayer
Blessed are you, Holy One, for your presence with ______ (name of woman).

Praised be you, Mother and Father God, that you have given your people the power of choice. We are saddened that the life circumstances of ______ (woman’s name or, if appropriate, woman’s name and her partner’s name) are such that she has had to choose to terminate her pregnancy. Such a choice is never simple. It is filled with pain and hurt, with anger and questions, but also with integrity and strength. We rejoice in her attention to choice.

Our beloved sister has made a very hard choice. We affirm her and support her in her decision. We promise to stand with her in her ongoing life.

Blessed are you, Holy One, for your presence with her.

Reading
Choose a poem, reading, or scripture verse that captures the message of the liturgy.

Sharing
The celebrant invites the woman (and her partner) to speak about her (their) decision to have an abortion. If there is a symbolic gesture that expresses her (their) feelings such as sprinkling flower petals, or sharing
dried flowers, invite her (them) to incorporate.

**Blessing of _______ (name of woman): _______ , we love you very deeply.** As a sign of our affirmation of you and of your choice, we give you this bowl and this oil. Oil soothes the bones that are weary from making a difficult decision. Oil strengthens and heals. Oil... (add sentences that reflect what the woman spoke in her story.)

We bless you with this oil. (Each person takes oil from the bowl and anoints the woman’s hands, face, feet, neck, shoulders and/or head. Each closes the blessing by embracing her.)

_______ (name of woman), the bowl is a tangible symbol of this day. When times are difficult — and such days come to each of us — look at this bowl and remember our love for you.

**Closing song**

A blessing song like the following closes the liturgy. “Blessing Song” from the album Circling Free. © 1983 by Marsie Silvestro

Bless you my sister, bless you on your way
You have roads to roam before you’re home
And winds to speak your name.
So go gently my sister let courage be your song
You have words to say in your own way
and stars to light your night.
And if ever you grow weary and your heart song has no refrain
Just remember we’ll be waiting to raise you up again.
And we’ll bless you our sister, bless you in our way
And we’ll welcome home all the life you’ve known and softly
speak your name.
And we’ll welcome home all the self you own
and softly speak your name
Bless you my sister, bless you on your way.

Liturgies by Diann Neu, feminist liturgist and psychotherapist and co-director of WATER, the Women’s Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual, in Silver Spring, MD.
You Are Not Alone: Information for Catholic Women About the Abortion Decision is one in a series of publications from Catholics for a Free Choice.

The other two in this series are:

Abortion: Deciding in Good Conscience . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . $10.00
This definitive guide to assist Catholic women in making the abortion decision answers the moral questions women most frequently have about abortion.

Reflections of a Catholic Theologian on Visiting an Abortion Clinic by Daniel C. Maguire . . . . . . . . . . . . . . $3.00
In this compelling essay, a noted theologian reflects on his visits to an abortion clinic and finds theological arguments that support a woman’s right to choose.

If you would like to order either of these, please call +1 (202) 986-6093 or email cffc@catholicsforchoice.org for ordering information.
Catholics for a Free Choice  
A Social Justice Organization

Catholics for a Free Choice shapes and advances sexual and reproductive ethics that are based on justice, reflect a commitment to women’s well-being, and respect and affirm the moral capacity of women and men to make sound decisions about their lives. Through discourse, education, and advocacy, CFFC works in the United States and internationally to infuse these values into public policy, community life, feminist analysis and Catholic social thinking and teaching.

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