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Abortion and the facts of lifestyle

A RECENT REPORT FROM A hospital-based pregnancy phone-line reveals that the vast majority of abortions in Victoria are performed for lifestyle rather than medical reasons.

In the 19 January issue of the *Medical Journal of Australia*, the Pregnancy Advisory Service at the Royal Women's Hospital in Melbourne reported an audit of the women who contacted them in the year from 1 October 2006 to 30 September 2007.

The report explores 3827 records from that period. It notes both that 90% of these women requested an abortion, and that "at the time of the study, Royal Women's Hospital provided abortion". Thus, while we cannot know exact figures, we may reasonably conclude that the report gives us an insight into a not insignificant percentage of the 20,000 or so abortions which are performed in Victoria each year.

Only 3.3% of these women sought abortion for medical reasons. 0.8% sought abortion because the pregnancy was the result of rape.

By contrast, the report notes that

54% sought abortion because their pregnancy came at the 'wrong time'. These responses included 'does not want children now' (23.2%), 'too young' (11.2%), 'not the right time' (10.8%), and 'has young baby' (8.7%).

In addition, another 18.1% sought abortion because they 'already had enough children'.

Taken together, these lifestyle reasons total 72%. Three-quarters of abortions were sought simply for reasons of lifestyle.

The report adds that "most men who were the biological partner in the pregnancy were described as aware and supportive of the woman's decision to consider or seek an abortion."

How should we respond to this? I offer four comments:

First, all of us as Church and as individuals must continue to insist that an unborn child is a human life, and human life must be cherished and protected from the first moment of its conception. Quite simply, it's a child. It's not a choice.

The ready legal and social acceptance of abortion in our society

can cause some people to forget or ignore this sometimes inconvenient truth. It is our task to remind them.

In *Juno*, a recent popular movie, a young high-school student named Su-Chin cried out: "All babies want to be borned!" *Juno* was pregnant and on her way to have an abortion, but this not very eloquent protest caused her to reconsider. Each of us must find our own way to speak this truth.

I offer my second comment to any woman who is pregnant in any circumstances and who is perhaps considering abortion. Many women do feel ambivalent about pregnancy. Even when a child is wanted and planned, many women feel ambivalent simply because their own life will soon change so dramatically. This ambivalence increases when a pregnancy is unplanned, or when there are other problems.

If this is your circumstance, please know that you need not face these difficulties all alone. There are caring people to help you at the Caroline Chisholm Society (9370 3933 or 1800 134 863), Open Doors (9870 7044 or 1800 647 995), and Centacare Catholic Family Services (9287 5555). If you

take the first step and make a phone call, other people will walk with you every other step of the way.

Also, if you are ambivalent, consider taking a chance on life. Very few families who welcome another child ultimately regret it. And many women who continue even an unplanned pregnancy feel great satisfaction about this decision, especially when their child is born.

My third comment is to women who have had an abortion. Many women come to regret the decision they have made. Some women suffer great anguish even years after an abortion. Some find that they cannot get on with life, or that they 'punish' themselves by making all sorts of harmful choices.

If this is your story, there is help. The caring counsellors at Open Doors, Centacare Catholic Family Services and the Caroline Chisholm Society are there to listen. They offer not condemnation but compassion. This will bring healing and hope.

You might also consider attending a Rachel's Vineyard retreat (1800 063 510 or

www.rachelsvineyard.org.au). This two-day experience has helped many women suffering after an abortion to find healing and peace.

My final comment is again to all of us. Pope John Paul II reminded us that it is women who pay the highest price for abortion. He continued: "The only honest stance, in these cases, is that of radical solidarity with the woman. It is not right to leave her alone." My plea, therefore, is that each of us finds our own way to stand in solidarity with women, and to help offer them something better than abortion.

A good beginning would be to watch the Australian bishops' DVD *Walking with Love* (\$45 from www.walkingwithlove.org.au). It contains stories and insights to help us increase our support of women during pregnancy, and to reach out to those who have been hurt by abortion. ■

Fr Kevin McGovern is director of the Caroline Chisholm Centre for Health Ethics, which is sponsored by Victoria's Catholic hospitals.

GARDEN VIEWS WITH ROOMS

AN ARTIST'S GARDEN created on the site of the famous Edna Walling Bickleigh Vale in Mooroolbark will be open to the public on 22 March between 10am and 4pm to raise money for East Timor.

St Peter Julian Eymard parishioner Madeleine Willingham and husband Norm established Maddie's Embellished Garden four years ago, beneath the canopy of the original garden.

The garden presents a labyrinth of pathways leading to various 'rooms', each adorned with objets d'art and furniture, mostly recycled from council clean-ups.

Entry is \$4 per adult; children free (must be fully supervised). There is wheelchair access and there's plenty of seating along the way.

All proceeds from the day will go to Mary Mackillop East Timor. ■

The garden is at 80 Pembroke Road, Mooroolbark. Details: Maddie or Norm on 9728 5628.

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