



GREEK ORTHODOX METROPOLIS OF NEW JERSEY

ΙΕΡΑ ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΣ ΝΕΑΣ ΙΕΡΣΕΗΣ

New York Abortion Law

The Very Reverend and Reverend Clergy

Honorable Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, Esteemed Members of the Metropolitan Council, Esteemed Members of the Parish Councils, Philoptochos Sisterhood, Faculty and Students of the Catechetical and Greek Afternoon Schools, Directors and Participants of all Youth Organizations, and all devout Orthodox Christians of the Greek Orthodox Communities of our Holy Metropolis of New Jersey

*“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
before you were born I set you apart” (Jer. 1:5)*

My Beloved in the Lord,

This week the New York legislature, together with the support of the Governor of State of New York, voted and regretfully approved a revision to their abortion statutes which would allow for abortions to take place even up to the end of the term of pregnancy. This new law was passed under the guise of aiding women’s health and defending women’s rights, however, it constitutes nothing short of an expansion of state-sanctioned murder. I, as your Metropolitan, and I am sure all of you, condemn these actions of the State of New York in the strongest terms. One may ask, but that’s in New York? Yes, however, who and what is to stop such a law from being enacted in New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, Pennsylvania, in other words, our Metropolis, and eventually the rest of the Country?

Our Orthodox faith has always maintained that life, in all its forms and at every stage, is sacred. As Orthodox Christians, we believe that from the very moment of conception, we have a soul and we are, thus, human persons. This is evident in Scripture when we hear the words of the Prophet Isaiah, *“Before I was born the Lord called me; from my mother’s womb he has spoken my name” (Is. 49:1)* and those of the Evangelist Luke, *“When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit” (Lk. 1:41)*. This child leaping in the womb, of whom the Evangelist speaks, is St. John the Baptist. Furthermore, we see the Archangel Gabriel appearing to Elizabeth’s husband, Zechariah, months before and announcing the news of John’s conception, *“He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born” (Lk. 1:14-15)*. The Holy Fathers of the Church attest that when a child is conceived it received a soul. One example of this is St. Irenaeus of Lyons when he says, *“But, as each one of us receives his body through the skillful working of God, so does he also possess his*

soul. For God is not so poor or destitute in resources, that He cannot confer its own proper soul on each individual body, even as He gives it also its special character” (Against Heresies, Book II, Chapter 33).

Our Orthodox theology of personhood is rich in expressing the reasons for which life is sacred and precious. Principally, it is because we are all made in the image and likeness of God. Each person is endowed by God with a purpose, talents, abilities, and gifts to share with the world and with their Creator. The purposeful destruction of this image is nothing short of an affront to God and this is precisely because God is the Author of Life, not death. Personhood is a gift of which no person has the right to deprive another because we have received and are participants in the personhood of our Creator, acknowledging that our individuality is not entirely our own. This is why the Church stands opposed to any life being taken from another including through abortion, war, and the death penalty.

The New York State Legislature and the Governor of New York have sought to shed a different light on this new law. They seek to make this an issue of reproductive rights. If this were true, however, they would acknowledge that both male and female fetuses develop reproductive organs at two months in the womb and female fetuses have fully developed reproductive organs at five months. Where are their reproductive rights? Even so, their argument about reproductive rights is egregious since no mention is given to human rights, the rights of the child. Furthermore, they seek to make this an issue of the health of the mother. In the tradition of the Church, it has been recognized that if the life of the mother is in danger and the only solution was an involuntary abortion, that it was a lamentable, but an unavoidable and regrettable action. However, the language of the new law is purposefully ambiguous so that doctors and **non-doctors** alike who wish to perform these abortions can perform an abortion if they determine it constitutes a “health risk”, without the law ever clarifying what constitutes a “health risk”.

In reality, this is not an issue about rights, for if it were, all individuals would be considered, both those outside and inside the womb. This is not an issue about health since, if it had been, due diligence would have been taken to define and clarify terms. This is a moral issue about who constitutes a person; a topic of debate this country has encountered far too many times. This is about the fundamental belief that each being has intrinsic value. This is about our basic human character.

My beloved brothers, sisters and children in the Lord, St. Paul tells us, *“Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Eph. 6:12).* Even as we witness these abhorrent acts in a society that has become apathetic to this issue, we must remain faithful to the teachings of the Church. We must proclaim the truth of Christ.

Finally, we must stand firmly in **support of life** for all people both born and in the womb. It is my sincerest hope that you will reflect upon these words and upon the teachings of the Orthodox Church honestly and prayerfully. Furthermore, let us all pray for the souls of the millions of children aborted every year and pray that loving Father in Heaven enlightens the minds of those who perpetuate this human crisis, and may we, the Orthodox Christians remain firm in our Holy Orthodox Faith and vigilant so that we may deal with any ungodly and unholy Bills which may be introduced by our State and U.S. Representatives, and which could affect **LIFE**, our life, our children's lives, both born and unborn, and most certainly, our relationship with the **Source of Life, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, the One who offered His Life so that we and ALL may LIVE.**

With Paternal Love and Blessings,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Metropolitan Evangelos". The signature is written in black ink and is centered on the page. The background of the signature area is a grid of small, faint text that reads "Signature.doc" and "2/16/10" repeated in a pattern.

† **EVANGELOS**
Metropolitan of New Jersey