Abortion is both a health issue and a justice issue

9 Aug 2019 | Bioethics

The New Zealand Catholic Bishops today expressed concern about the proposed new abortion regime for New Zealand, whilst also looking forward to contributing to what they hoped would be an honest, respectful dialogue that explored the complexities surrounding abortion.

“The Bishops hear from a wide community of Catholic women and men on this important issue, and are also informed by the work of Catholic agencies who support the well-being of women and families,” said Cynthia Piper, speaking on behalf of the Bishops Conference. “We are mindful of the pressures and stresses that very often leave couples with seemingly little choice but to have an abortion. It is an acknowledged fact that, too often, a woman chooses an abortion because of poverty, social shaming, lack of community support, coercion from a partner or family or isolation.

“There needs to be a stronger focus on strengthening and extending policies and organisations that support women who are pregnant. Making abortions easier to get, as the new law proposes, does nothing to address these serious underlying issues. When you live in poverty, or are socially shamed, or are feeling coerced or isolated, ‘choice speak’ is meaningless because you don’t have real choices or options.

The Bishops strongly support the fact that, under the current abortion laws, the rights of the unborn are given statutory recognition, something they wish to see retained. “There is always a defenceless human life at stake. The way we look at it, abortion is both a justice issue and a health issue – the two are inseparable.

“We are particularly concerned that the proposed new law seeks to do away with any ‘tests’ for women up to 20 weeks gestation and only imposes a very vague ‘medical test’ for women who are more than 20 weeks pregnant.

“To treat the matter solely as a health issue for a woman is to ignore that there is another human life involved – a life that has no voice of its own. From a human perspective, this is less than honest. At the same time, it is also a disservice to the woman. For us as a society to pretend that there is not another life involved will only deny the woman concerned the chance to deal with their abortion as the significant and heart-wrenching moral issue that it is.

“The issues raised by abortion are many and they include both the immediate and long-term psychological, mental and emotional consequences of abortion. These consequences affect both women and men and impact on their other significant relationships.

Mrs Piper said, “We will be looking closely at the proposed new law and studying the other proposed changes concerning doctors’ freedom of conscience, the ready availability and desirability of counselling for women and the suggestion of safe zones around abortion facilities.