

Good evening everyone. Thanks very much to Fr O'Donnell for allowing me to speak.

My name is Lucy Kelly. I am a parishioner of St Brigid's and a member of Youth for Life NI.

Pope Francis at the World Meeting of Families questioned whether a "materialistic throwaway culture" has made people "increasingly indifferent to the poor and to the most defenceless members of our human family, including the unborn, deprived of the very right to life."

Abortion is an incredibly emotional and very divisive issue. As Christians, we believe in God's endless love and mercy. We must in no way condemn women who have had abortions. Zeal must be balanced with sense, empathy and compassion. However, in the same way, our Christianity demands we be pro-life in every circumstance. A pro-life message must be delivered with kindness and gentleness. Every person – born and preborn – must be protected regardless of gender, race, disability, circumstances of conception or predicted lifespan.

It is either a human being or it is not. If an unborn baby is not a human being - then no justification for abortion is necessary. However, if an unborn baby is a human being then no justification for abortion is adequate. It is an undisputed scientific fact that life begins at conception. The British Heart Foundation research reveals that the baby's heart can be detected as early as 16 days after conception. By 6 weeks, brain waves can be detected. Despite the lies that were spread during the Republic's referendum, by 12 weeks, the baby is fully formed with all bodily organs and extremities present and he or she just needs time to grow.

There are places that provide life-affirming healthcare, support and love for women in unplanned pregnancies, for example, Gianna Care in Dublin and Stanton Healthcare in Belfast, that provide medical, financial and emotional support for women during and after pregnancy, particularly those in crisis pregnancies. Former Director of Stanton Healthcare Belfast, Kiara McCoy, who tragically passed away in a car accident last October, said Stanton is about "**protecting and loving both lives**".

There is a serious threat to innocent human life within our island of Ireland following the heart-breaking referendum in the Republic of Ireland in May. In the North of Ireland, we have accelerated pressure now from Westminster to change our life-saving laws that safeguard women and preborn babies. We all need to speak out with courage on behalf of those who have no voice – the most defenceless human beings whose fundamental right to life is being eroded in the name of "choice." We must unite in prayer that the value of human life and its sacredness is reaffirmed and everyone sees the need to protect, save and love each and every human life.

While the Irish Health System is over 70 million euros in debt, priority will be given to killing babies over real healthcare that saves lives, instead of giving pregnant women actual compassionate alternatives or "choices."

As Christians, our belief that we are all made in God's image and in his likeness should solidify the sacredness of human life, in and outside of the womb. At least 100,000 people are alive today because of our laws in Northern Ireland.

Our Lady of Medugorje assures us that prayer and fasting can stop wars. Saint John Paul II makes our duty very clear, "**the inescapable responsibility of choosing to be unconditionally pro-life**".

I, as a member of the Church, believe we all have a part to play. We must pray that we are all given the wisdom and a sense of justice to speak the Gospel of Life to a world overshadowed by a culture of death.

I hope and pray that all our pro-life groups will unite in this moral and spiritual battle. We must be positive. We have God on our side, an all-powerful and all loving God. Hearts and minds can be changed.

I don't want the North of Ireland to follow the example of the rest of the UK that allowed for abortion in supposedly "restricted circumstances" in 1967, yet it has now led to abortion for any reason up to 24 weeks and up to birth for disability. Over 9 million babies aborted – one death every 3 minutes; 20 lives ended every hour. Or America where over 60 million children have been slaughtered since Roe v Wade in 1973. Who have we slaughtered? Each potential father or mother killed removed a future generation and all of their descendants.

There is always a better answer than abortion. If we took the £757 million of taxpayers' money over a decade in Britain paid to abortionists in the incredibly lucrative abortion industry and used it to help and support women so they can choose life – we would live in a much more progressive, compassionate, humane society. To advocate abortion as a solution is denying the evidence of the physical and psychological effects of abortion on women. Abortion kills babies and hurts women.

We must not allow "choice" to be elevated above all other considerations, even life itself. English philosopher GK Chesterton once said, **"Right is right even if nobody does it. Wrong is wrong even if everybody is wrong about it."**

Since when has the right to life become a regressive, draconian concept? There is enough bloodshed and tragedy in our world without abortion. Abortion has now claimed more lives than all wars combined. Over 55 million babies killed worldwide every year through abortion. We must fight to protect, save and love women and babies. Lord Alton spoke at the 50th anniversary of the 1967 Abortion Act, the 50th anniversary of nearly 9 million human lives. He challenged all of us and I quote, **"The humanity of the unborn child, the barbarity of abortion, and the shallowness of pro-abortion rhetoric, is obvious to those who choose to inform themselves; who choose to see the reality of so-called 'choice.'"**

He also said, **"Those who recognise and champion human dignity, it is our role to stand for every silenced voice, for every individual light extinguished by the darkness of human selfishness and ignorance."**

Today is significantly the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.

This is a Holy Day of Obligation. If human life doesn't begin at conception then why is this day so significant in our Holy Calendar. The miracle and joy of the Immaculate Conception should be reflected in our attitude to every baby in the womb made in God's image and likeness.

Saint Padre Pio once said, **"The day that people lose their horror for abortion will be the most terrible day for humanity."** Good will always overcome evil. Abortion will destroy itself. Our Lady of Fatima said, "In the end, My Immaculate Heart will triumph."