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OPINION

Opinion: How to sustain life during a pandemic

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The outpouring of compassion and hope that has emerged across the state amid this COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated how leaders, organizations and everyday citizens have rallied with concern and care to protect life and the vulnerable among us.

Every day medical personnel perform their essential work, placing their own health on the line to serve the needs of others. Neighbors are finding creative ways to check on those who are alone during this



time of isolation. Social distancing has demonstrably been effective to prevent the virus from spreading, particularly keeping safe the elderly and those with underlying health conditions.

Pro Life supporters gather at the Washington Monument to hear Vice President Mike Pence speak at the March for Life rally on Jan. 27, 2017, in Washington, D.C. (Photo: Tasos Katopodis / Getty Images)

The Catholic Church in Michigan has expressed its appreciation to Gov. Gretchen Whitmer for her administration's efforts to keep residents safe during the pandemic. For the purpose of safety and precaution, those efforts have resulted in Michigan residents putting off a slew of activities, existing arrangements and routines.

For some, the toughest part of weathering the pandemic has been hearing their medical procedure has been postponed, resulting in significant anxiety and ongoing discomfort or pain. Yet, many recognize how their personal sacrifice has allowed for medical resources to be diverted toward emergencies and caring for others who have contracted the virus.

Every Michigan life has value and is worth protecting, especially the most vulnerable. We are seeing that up-close these days.

It is within this context that residents of the state found hurtful a comment made by the governor in an interview last week that abortion is “life-sustaining.” The governor was defending her decision to allow for the procedure to continue during the pandemic, despite the directive to limit all non-essential medical procedures.

To speak in such terms about abortion, which terminates the life of an innocent, unique individual and poses emotional and physical harm to women, the governor has sought to place elective abortion in the same category as critical emergencies. The correlation is baffling; it has confused and angered people who are accepting isolation in order to protect the life and health of others.

While acknowledging the deeply held views that exist regarding abortion, is it not possible for elected officials to set aside divisive topics and focus entirely on providing compassionate care to one another? Efforts to protect all life, to promote community programs that help low-income and vulnerable neighbors, and to support pregnant women and mothers in need — before and after birth — are with us and should be prioritized.

The coronavirus has demonstrated how interconnected we are and how much we need one another. Community agencies that wrap services around vulnerable women do make a difference. Take a look at the work of pregnancy resource centers and Catholic charitable agencies, initiatives that empower women in unexpected pregnancies, and other anti-poverty programs that assist those who feel marginalized. Resources are available. Individuals are willing to help.

Many women understandably deal with a number of fears when learning of their pregnancy, especially when struggling through poverty, having limited or no support, or experiencing abuse within a harmful relationship. They become unsure if they can provide for a child or finish school, or simply keep their job.

Resources and caring people are available for pregnant women in need. From providing transportation, temporary housing, baby care items or simply being there to walk and talk with a woman through her difficult journey, society has the ability to be a part of the solution.

This is what life-sustaining efforts truly look like. And they make us proud to be Michigan residents.

Rebecca Mastee is a policy advocate for the Michigan Catholic Conference, the official public policy voice of the Catholic Church in Michigan.

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