

Do not lose hope. Try rather to understand what happened and face it honestly. ... Give yourselves over with humility and trust to repentance.

*The Father of mercies is ready to give you his forgiveness and his peace in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. You will come to understand that **nothing is definitively lost** and you will be able to ask forgiveness from your child, who is now living in the Lord.*

*With the friendly and expert help and advice of other people, and as a result of your own painful experience, you can be among the most eloquent defenders of everyone's right to life. ... **You will become promoters of a new way of looking at human life.***
(*The Gospel of Life*, no. 99)

In addition to caring for those wounded by abortion through the Church's Project Rachel ministry, greater emphasis must be placed on helping the Christian family through better catechesis on the Sacrament of Marriage, the gift of children, and the resources of Natural Family Planning. As long as American culture persists in viewing sexual activity as recreational, marriage as optional, and children as burdens, it will be very difficult to build a Culture of Life. The Church should also offer counseling programs to help spouses and parents live out their roles in the Christian family.



Evangelization is truly the key, as it leads to developing a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and to a deeper understanding of his teachings. This, in turn, promotes a desire to act according to the virtues exemplified by Jesus and taught by our Catholic faith. The Church should be willing and ready to share its resources, information and catechesis with our non-Catholic friends and leaders within the African American ecumenical community.

At its core, the Gospel of Life “is the proclamation of a living God who is close to us, who calls us to profound communion with himself and awakens in us the certain hope of eternal life. ... It is the proclamation that Jesus has a unique relationship with every person, which enables us to see in every human face the face of Christ” (no. 81). This is the hope, the *truth* that alone can conquer the fear and despair that drive women to seek abortion. Through clear catechesis, expanded pastoral efforts, vigorous engagement in our parishes and in

the public square, through love and prayer, we can end the scourge of abortion. The Culture of Death will be defeated in the African American community and throughout our nation when we—as individuals and as Church—proclaim and witness with our lives to God’s love, the sacredness of human life, and the meaning of human sexuality and marriage. Let us embrace this task with the urgency and the enthusiasm it demands!

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The full-length version of this article is posted at <http://www.usccb.org/prolife/programs/rlp/holley.pdf>.



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A REFLECTION ON THE AFRICAN AMERICAN FAMILY AND THE CULTURE OF LIFE

by Most Reverend Martin D. Holley

Hope and Trust in Life!
RESPECT LIFE

In a September 2007 visit to Austria, Pope Benedict XVI expressed his great concern about the future of Europe. He stated that Europe “may extinguish itself, in numbers and spirit, if it embraces abortion and rejects Christianity.” He proposed that “rather than legalize abortion, governments create a climate of joy and confidence in life ... in which children are not seen as a burden, but rather as a gift to all.”

As an African American Catholic Bishop who was born in a family of fourteen children, it should not be surprising that the issue of abortion, particularly in the African American family, is of extreme importance to me. My knowledge that my father, mother, and siblings were all baptized into the Catholic Church on the same day (June 20, 1954), while my mother was six months’ pregnant with me, had a lot to do with forming in me a pro-life attitude. The witness of my parents taught all my siblings and me to respect the dignity of every human person and to always welcome the gift of life. Our family priest also left a solid impression on all of us as he mailed every letter sealed with a stamp, “Stop Abortions.” He understood the damage that abortion was doing to humanity and what it would eventually do to the Black family.

Over hundreds of years, African Americans have traditionally been pro-life. A pregnant unmarried couple could count on someone in their families to help raise, love and edu-

cate their child well into adulthood. This has happened more than once in my own family.

Today, discerning what is morally correct is a difficult challenge for many in the African American community because the *Roe v. Wade* decision of 1973 “legitimized” abortion as a legal “option.” The voices that would normally alarm the community, in the pulpits of many of our predominantly Black churches, are now often silenced or muted.

In my own homilies, I have often referred to African Americans as an endangered species. Abortion is currently taking a deadly toll on pregnant Black women because abortion facilities, which promote the Culture of Death, seem strategically placed in or near African American neighborhoods to make abortions easily accessible, especially to the poor. Statistics show that abortion has the greatest impact on Black, unwed women who live in an urban environment where there may not be much support from family, friends or social service networks.

Since the *Roe v. Wade* decision, the number one cause of death in the African American community is abortion. We have lost over 13 million lives. To put that in perspective, that is one third of our present Black population. *1,452 Black children are lost each day to abortion!*

In my opinion, the abortion challenge in the African American community is deeply interwoven with many other concerns. The Black



family constantly strives for social justice in confronting racism, poverty, violence, a lack of education, high unemployment, substance abuse, incarceration, AIDS, teen pregnancy, a lack of affordable housing, and many other needs, especially in urban areas. This endless and seamless garment of social concerns often tends to push the primary moral issue of abortion onto the back burner, when in reality it clearly must be at the heart and center of our discussion on the survival of African American people.

Through evangelization, preaching, and solid catechesis, the Catholic Church will need to intensify its efforts to reach the broader African American community, to help everyone understand how critical this issue is for the survival of African Americans. Stated plainly: With abortion in the Black family, there is no future, only further extinction.

What Can Be Done?

First and foremost, the local Ordinary and his diocesan staff need to make the issue of abortion in the African American community a priority. This entails a commitment to allocate funds to conduct workshops to train the laity in Pope John Paul II’s “theology of the body” and his encyclical *The Gospel of Life*, along with the encyclicals of Pope Benedict XVI, all of which promote the Culture of Life.

African American Catholic laity should be welcomed by their pastor and parish staff to be trained in the various life issues and become more involved with the parish pro-life committee.

At the same time, we have a profound social justice obligation to continue to provide funding and volunteer support for programs that offer assistance to unwed pregnant teens, women and families in the Black community, both Catholic and non-Catholic.

Because the Black family has been affected physically, psychologically, emotionally, and spiritually by racism and social injustices, and is being damaged even further by the trauma of abortion, there is an urgent need to offer healing to all those involved in an abortion decision. The invitation of Pope John Paul the Great to women who have had an abortion needs to resound in every Catholic church: