

**O** *rthodox Christians for Life (OCLife)* is a non-profit religious educational Pro-Life organization consisting of members primarily from the Eastern Orthodox Church. *OCLife* was founded in early 1986 by Rev. Edward Pehanich an Orthodox priest of the American Carpatho-Russian jurisdiction and John Protopapas, now a Deacon of the Orthodox Church in America.

It functions in cooperation with the hierarchy, clergy, and laity of the Orthodox Church regardless of jurisdiction or geographical location; and supports the doctrines and canons of the Church. The organization consists of over 800 members (including five chapters) in the United States and Canada as of February 2005. It is also open to interested non-Orthodox Christians on an affiliate basis.

Orthodox Christians for Life is primarily a religious-educational organization and does not organize marches, demonstrations, or sit-ins; however, we do participate in such Pro-Life events as a group, or as individuals, providing they are peaceful and do not conflict with Church doctrine. We condemn all forms of violence in any effort to resolve sanctity of human life issues.

## ***The Church and Abortion***

The Orthodox Church was founded by Jesus Christ and the Apostles, and bears witness to that continuous and unbroken faith.

*The precepts of the Orthodox Christian Faith mandate the protection of innocent human life, especially that of the unborn child. The Church has always regarded abortion as murder, and as such, takes a very active role in opposing legalized abortion.*

The personhood of the unborn is considered to exist from conception and has never been questioned in our theology. Indeed, conception has been always recognized as the time when the soul is uniquely brought into being and simultaneously united with the body.

The Christian Church from its inception, to which the Orthodox Church bears living witness, expressed a distinct and fundamental horror of abortion, at whatever stage of pregnancy. It never ceased to regard abortion as abhorrent and an abomination before God, and always considered it to be the killing of a human being. The loss of the life of the unborn child was regretfully tolerated only in cases where the life of the mother was in jeopardy. With the modern advancements we have in medical technology today, this tragic situation is rarely encountered.

In the early centuries of the Church, Her moral teachings were universally embraced, holding sway over almost the whole of Europe, the Middle East, and Northern Africa; from Hadrian's Wall to the frontiers of the Persian Empire. Indeed, the Orthodox Church's teaching can be traced to the earliest Christian document, the Didache (late 1st Century) and was constantly reiterated through the following centuries in Patristic writings and Canon Law. It was finally compiled as the Photian Collection, which was adopted as the official ecclesiastical law book of the Orthodox Church in 883 A.D.

If we turn to the Orthodox liturgical cycle of feasts, the consciousness of the personhood of the unborn is striking. This is manifest in three feasts:

The first we shall consider is the celebration of the conception of John the Baptist by St. Elizabeth (September 23). In this feast we sing:  
**“Rejoice, O barren one, who had not given birth; for behold you have clearly conceived the one who was about to illuminate the whole universe, blighted by blindness. Shout in joy, O Zacharias, crying in favor; truly the one to be born is a prophet of the Most High!”**

Although John the Baptist was yet in the womb, he is considered a full person. The second feast to be considered is that of the Conception of the Theotokos by St. Ann (December 9). At this feast the Kondakion proclaims at vespers:

**“Behold the promises of the Prophets are realized for the Holy Mountain is planted in the womb, the Divine Ladder is set up, the great Throne of the King is ready, the place for the passage of the Lord is prepared . . .”**

There can be no question that although the parents of John the Baptist and the Theotokos (Virgin Mary) had no inkling of God's Great Plan for Salvation, God was involved in the conception of each; it is notable that both Saints, Elizabeth and Anna were advanced in years and barren. It is a sobering thought of how God's Plan is being affected by the countless unborn who have been aborted - never to uniquely participate in that Plan.

The quintessential feast that illustrates the consciousness of the Church on the importance of the person from the moment of conception is the Annunciation (March 25). This feast is so important that a Divine Liturgy is to be served even when falls on Great and Holy Friday! The Troparion of the day makes a profound statement:

**“Today is the beginning of our salvation, the revelation of the eternal mystery!**

**The Son of God becomes the Son of the Virgin as Gabriel announces the coming of grace...”**

This is a far cry from the present cry, “who knows when life begins” or, “it is a blob of tissue” or a “product of conception.” At the Great Compline the hymnography states makes this astonishing claim:

**“ . . . O marvel! God has come among men; He who cannot be contained in a womb; the timeless One enters time . . . For God empties Himself, takes flesh, and is fashioned as a creature, when the angel tells the pure Virgin of her conception. . . ”**

This is not sung at the feast of our Lord's Nativity but at His conception!!! “Viability” and “quickenings” are utterly irrelevant. If we further consider the following passage in Luke 1:41 we find another astonishing image of the scriptural consciousness of the personhood of the unborn:

**“And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb”**

Here we have the image of the unborn John the Baptist recognizing the unborn Messiah - a fetus greeting a fetus! This is more than a literary device as some would have us believe, but illustrates the narrator's perception, or consciousness of the uniqueness of an unborn human.

Although we celebrate the birth of John the Baptist, the Theotokos, and the Lord Jesus himself, we also celebrate their conception which is their entry into time and the physical world - the “fullness of time” as called by St. Paul.

A more profound point to this all is that these feasts, especially the Annunciation, point to the Incarnation. By taking on our humanity from the moment of conception, existing in the pre-natal condition in the womb of the Theotokos, experiencing birth, living through infancy to adulthood, and finally dying, God sanctified every moment of human existence - from conception to death.

There is more to this - God also completely identifies with us in our fallen suffering nature, and by dying for us on the cross, He expresses His solidarity with us: whether we are a zygote, embryo, fetus, infant, child, adolescent, adult, or elderly: human existence is a continuum from conception, and - yes - beyond death to life eternal in the Lord!

The Orthodox Church has had a long history of outspoken condemnation of abortion which dates from Apostolic times. Although the aforementioned feasts did not exist in Apostolic times, they illustrate the Tradition from which Church teaching on the uniqueness and sanctity of human life, born and unborn sprang from - it was no vacuum! We either belong to the Kingdom of God or to the “World” . . .

***Abortion is not a political issue, but is a moral issue that has become politicized!***

## Today's Challenges

The primary sanctity of life issue now being debated in our society today is abortion. Since 1973, when the Supreme Court effectively made abortion legal throughout all nine months of pregnancy, over forty million (40,000,000) unborn children have been murdered by surgical or chemical abortion. This does not even consider those slaughtered by abortifacient contraceptives (i.e.: the IUD prevents implantation, and "the pill," if it does not prevent ovulation, will prevent implantation)! The position of the Orthodox Church has never wavered on the issue of abortion from the earliest days -

*Her theology is and always has been Pro-Life!*

## Our Vision

The aims and goals of *Orthodox Christians for Life* are as follows:

- (1) *To present and support the position of the Orthodox Church on matters of the sanctity of innocent human life to all peoples, Orthodox Christian and non-Orthodox alike. This includes not only abortion, but also euthanasia, infanticide (pediatric euthanasia), suicide, and child abuse.*
- (2) *To initiate and encourage education and energize action on all issues of sanctity of human life in all Orthodox parishes regardless of jurisdiction.*
- (3) *To act as a clearing house for information relating to sanctity of life issues for the Orthodox Christian community.*
- (4) *To aid and assist all those who wish to establish sanctity of life programs or Pro-Life groups on a parish, diocesan, or archdiocesan level and to have representatives available to work with those who wish to establish such programs.*
- (5) *To reiterate and underscore traditional Christian values such as the sanctity of marriage, the blessing of children, the holiness of chastity (both in and out*

*of marriage), the honoring of parents, the love of one's neighbor, and of course, the sanctity of all innocent human life regardless of age or condition of health.*

*(6) To work in a cooperative spirit with all Pro-Life organizations, regardless of religious affiliation, providing they espouse a complimentary sanctity of life ethic. In this area we serve as a unique witness to the teachings of the Early Christian Church.*

*(7) To present the Orthodox position on these issues to the secular culture.*

Examples of our activities include the coordination and creation of an Amicus Brief submitted to the United States Supreme Court (February 23, 1989) on behalf of the Orthodox Church. The document supported the State of Missouri (Webster Case) in its effort to overturn Roe v. Wade. Since 1986 we have coordinated the Orthodox Christian presence in the annual January 22 March for Life in Washington, DC.

The years 1989 and 1990 saw four Orthodox bishops participating in the March for Life: Bishop Herman (OCA), Bishop Nathaniel (OCA), Bishop Nicholas (Carpatho-Russian), and Bishop Maximos (Greek Archdiocese); also in 1996 there were over 400 bishops, clergy, and lay from various parts of the United States participating. Typically Orthodox attendance has been several hundred each year.

A yearly subscription to our newsletter, **Rachel's Children** is \$5.00 per year; a suggested minimum membership contribution is \$10.00 per year and includes the newsletter. Recognition pins are available for \$6.00. All donations and membership funds made out to: **Orthodox Christians for Life** (in U.S. Dollars). Please allow 6-8 weeks for delivery.

If you are interested in **Orthodox Christians for Life** write to: OCLife, P.O. Box 805, Melville, NY 11747 or Phone (631) 271-4408. The web site is at [WWW.OCLIFE.ORG](http://WWW.OCLIFE.ORG) and E-Mail is [OCLIFEHQ@AOL.COM](mailto:OCLIFEHQ@AOL.COM)

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# Orthodox Christians for Life



Serving Christ  
&  
His  
Holy Orthodox Church  
since  
1986

A Pan-Orthodox  
Pro-Life  
Organization