

Again, the Pregnancy Help staff is available to assist in making such connections. Fear is often the driving force behind a decision to choose abortion in these situations. Anything that can be done to help reduce the level of fear is advantageous for the woman/couple in the midst of such a difficult decision.

✚ Pregnant women who have serious health problems, such as cancer or diabetes, also are often strongly encouraged to abort. Again, reducing fear, taking the time to think and pray through the decision and seeking a second medical opinion and the supportive help of others are of vital importance. Often women are unaware that treatment can effectively be continued that does not compromise the life or health of her unborn baby.

✚ In those rare cases when treatment of the mother endangers the life of the unborn child, the principle of the double effect needs to be explained. This principle allows for an action whose primary aim is good while it can be foreseen, although not intended, that in performing the good act a bad or negative effect may occur. For instance, it is morally licit for a pregnant woman to receive chemotherapy to treat cancer although it may be anticipated that this could also precipitate a miscarriage. In such cases, an evil is foreseen but not intended. It is never licit directly to abort the child as a form of treatment. The U.S. Bishops' Statement on Anencephaly: Origins, October 10, 1997 (Vol. 26: No. 17) and Health Care Ethics, by Benedict M. Ashley, OP and Kevin D. O'Rourke, OP, published by Georgetown University Press, provide a fuller discussion of this topic.

✚ Some pastoral ministers who have counseled couples in these situations believe that the Church's prohibition on abortion is lacking in compassion or "too hard a teaching" in these very difficult situations. But that teaching must be maintained because it is true and truly compassionate. Our experience, both with women who continue to carry such a pregnancy and with those who choose abortion, affirms the soundness and wisdom of the Church's teaching. The aftermath for women who choose abortion because of fetal anomaly often leads to profound and unrelenting grief, sorrow and regret. The emotional and spiritual pain of the death of their child, which in many cases would have occurred during the natural course of the pregnancy or shortly after birth, is only intensified by the decision for abortion.

✚ It is not only a form of false mercy, but often confusing and dispiriting to those seeking counsel, for pastoral ministers to express ambivalence about the Church's teaching in the midst of the person's crisis. The message of tacit approval of a decision to abort is neither a pastoral service nor a compassionate response to the person turning to representatives of the Church for help. When a woman/couple comes to the Church for guidance in such a situation, it might appear that they are looking for approval to have an abortion. Invariably, they are really looking for the strength, wisdom and support of the Church to help them to choose life for their baby.

