

19.2.08

*Pastoral message from
Cardinal Cormac Murphy O'Connor
President of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales*

Dear brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ,

As you will know, there is a Bill currently in Parliament which touches on profound questions of human life and dignity. The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill has just completed its passage through the House of Lords and will be debated in the House of Commons in the next few weeks.

The Bill extends the scope of scientific research on human embryos and even allows the creation of animal and human hybrid embryos for research. It removes a provision to have regard for the child's need for a father when IVF methods are used. And there is every chance that there will be attempts in the House of Commons to use this Bill as a vehicle to liberalise the abortion law still further.

Many people of all faiths and none are deeply concerned by the moral questions raised by this Bill. These concerns were set out in Parish briefings sent to every parish from the Bishops' Conference to all our parishes over the last few weeks. Now is the time for our voices to be heard. This needs as many people as possible to write to - and better still - to go and see their MP and to register their deep concern about this Bill. Please urge your MP to support amendments to the Bill which would limit embryo research, recognize the need for children to have knowledge of their biological father, and which would reduce rather than increase the numbers of abortions. MPs should also request and be granted a free vote on those parts of this Bill which deals with fundamental issues of personal conscience.

During this time of Lent we are encouraged to reflect on our own lives and to rededicate ourselves as Christians to serving the Gospel in our world. Taking action on this pressing issue now helps to remind us that our Christian witness can never just be personal but involves us too as citizens committed to serving the common good of society and to upholding the human dignity of all.

With my prayers,



Archbishop of Westminster
on behalf of the Bishops of England and Wales