

Diocese of Honolulu • Office of the Bishop • www.catholicahawaii.org
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September 2, 2015

Statement regarding forgiveness for abortion

Dear faithful of the Diocese of Honolulu:

On September 1, the Vatican publicly released a copy of a letter from our Holy Father, Pope Francis, written to Archbishop Rino Fisichella, President of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization. In that letter, Pope Francis laments the sin of abortion and the harm that it does, not only to the unborn children, but to the women who have been scarred by the decision that they have made and who, at times, fear that their sin is unforgiveable. It is the Holy Father's intention that women seek the mercy of God during the upcoming Jubilee Year of Mercy and receive forgiveness and healing.

The Holy Father's inexact wording perhaps gave the impression that a priest's ability to forgive the sin of abortion was something new. In fact, the current *Code of Canon Law*, promulgated in 1983, no longer contains any provision for "reserved sins," so no matter what the sin, when there is true repentance the priest can grant you absolution in confession. This remains true before, during, and after the Year of Mercy.

Pope Francis' statement on this, in fact, is nothing new. In his 1995 encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, St. John Paul II made a similar plea: "I would like to say a special word to women who have had an abortion. The Church is aware of the many factors which may have influenced your decision, and she does not doubt that in many cases it was a painful and even shattering decision. The wound in your heart may not yet have healed. Certainly what happened was and remains terribly wrong. But do not give in to discouragement and do not lose hope. Try rather to understand what happened and face it honestly. If you have not already done so, 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 definitely lost and you will also be able to ask forgiveness from your child, who is now living in the Lord." (no. 99)

I would also like to mention that here in the Diocese of Honolulu our Respect Life Office sponsors Rachel's Vineyard Weekend Retreats as an outreach to those who have experienced abortion to facilitate the healing process. I would encourage you to visit www.catholicahawaii.org/rachel and invite those you might know who feel that they cannot be forgiven to consider participation.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Larry Silva". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Most Reverend Larry Silva
Bishop of Honolulu