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Dear Praying Friends in Europe,

Right to freedom of conscience of physicians: the example of Germany

Abortion is one of the greatest ethical challenges for doctors. There is no getting around the fact that it is an act of killing. According to their professional duty, doctors are required to preserve unborn life. This results in a medical dilemma. After all, doctors are the only persons authorized to perform abortions.

The internal medicine specialist and philosopher Prof Giovanni Maio, who has written a book on medical ethical problems, writes: "Experience from earlier times has shown that maintaining a pregnancy against the woman's will has little chance of success.

The threat of punishment for abortion has not led to the acceptance of the child, but to many of those affected having abortions in secret, and under conditions that often put their own lives in danger."

In many European countries, abortion can therefore be performed without punishment. The legislator does not rely on punishment, but on counselling. For many doctors, the counselling solution is burdensome because an intervention is to be carried out for which there is no urgent medical indication. The explicit request of the pregnant woman alone is sufficient.

The German "law on conflicts in pregnancies" states that "no one is obliged to co-operate in an abortion unless such co-operation is necessary to avert a danger of death or serious damage to the woman's health that cannot otherwise be averted." However, the law also requires that a sufficient supply of outpatient and inpatient facilities for abortions must be ensured.

This leads to a tense relationship. This is because the number of doctors performing abortions in Germany fell by 40 per cent between 2003 and 2018. In the same period, however, the number of abortions only fell by 21 per cent. Around 1,000 medical facilities in Germany currently perform abortions.

Some politicians see an urgent need for action here. In July 2020, a secretary in the Baden-Württemberg state government announced that the willingness of doctors to perform abortions could be made a recruitment criterion at university hospitals. Following public protests, including from doctors' associations, this proposal was withdrawn.

In its final report in April 2024, a commission of experts nominated by the German Federal Government emphasized that doctors cannot be forced to perform abortions. The Working Group of Christian Physicians in Germany also stated that the current right of medical personnel not to be forced to participate in abortions for reasons of faith and conscience should remain in place.

If medical staff are forced to act against their own moral convictions, feelings of guilt and even serious mental illness can arise. Therefore, no pressure should be built up to carry out abortions, for example through negative effects on professional careers or the economic security of a clinic or a physician's practice. At the same time, there is a responsibility to respond sensitively and constructively to the needs of women in pregnancy conflicts. Doctors therefore need information on how they can help women with unwanted pregnancies in their decision-making process.

Prayer request:

1. Pray that doctors in European countries will retain the right to refuse ethically controversial procedures such as abortions on grounds of their conscience.
2. Pray that doctors who exclude themselves from participating in abortions will not be accused of being 'disruptive factors' who endanger pregnant women through their behaviour.
3. Pray that in European countries the respect for the unborn life will increase in society and that women with unwanted pregnancies will be better supported in their distress.



US Elections

Although we in Europe have no say in who should be the next President of the USA, Europe will be affected by America's choice.

During his farewell visit to Berlin last week, President Biden met with key leaders, showing how important European defence has been in his foreign policy. The USA is by far the largest donor to Ukraine in its war with Russia but whoever the next occupant of the White House will be, there will be less clear leadership or military support available from Washington. Donald Trump had a turbulent relationship with NATO during his 2016-2020 presidency and Kamala Harris will likely have other priorities, such as China and Taiwan.

We may have no vote in this election, but let us unite in prayer for whoever is elected to the immensely important and challenging role of President of the USA.

Further Prayer:-

1. As "return hubs" for migrants are being discussed at an EU level, let's pray for just and humane ways to be found to return those who are not granted asylum to their home countries.
2. Pray for Austria to find a way to form a government after the refusal of other parties to join a coalition with the FPÖ.

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