

Pope Francis Allows Priests to Begin Pardoning Women and Doctors Who've Performed Abortions, Changing Catholic Practice

BY STOYAN ZAIMOV , CHRISTIAN POST REPORTER, May 7, 2015



(PHOTO: REUTERS)

Pope Francis embraces a boy and a girl during a meeting with young people at Manila university, January 18, 2015.

Pope Francis has said that Roman Catholic priests can begin pardoning women who've had abortions and doctors who have performed the procedure starting in 2016, changing long-standing Catholic practice. The Vatican insisted, however, that it continues to look at abortion as a sin.

Archbishop Rino Fisichella, the president of the Pontifical Council for the New Evangelisation, announced Francis' decision earlier this week, and said: "The missionaries of mercy are priests sent out by the Holy Father at the beginning of Lent. The Pope is sending them out [to dioceses and parishes] as a tangible sign of how a priest should be a man of pardon, close to everyone ..."

[The Irish Times](#) pointed out that Catholic tradition only allows bishops or the pope himself to absolve women of having an abortion, which is a sin that leads to excommunication from the Church.

The Catholic "Holy Year of Mercy" runs from Dec. 8 through Nov. 20, 2016, and will allow specially appointed priests "the authority to pardon even those sins reserved to the Holy See."

The special year will also mark several individual jubilee days, such as for the Roman Curia, catechists, teenagers and prisoners.

Archbishop Fisichella clarified in an interview with Italian news agency ANSA that priests will also be able to offer absolution not only to women who've had abortions, but also to the doctors that performed them.

[The Daily Mail](#) reported that the Vatican has previously faced criticism from the United Nations for excommunicating the mother and doctor of a 9-year-old girl in Brazil who underwent an abortion in 2009 after she was raped by her stepfather and became pregnant with twins.

Italian Cardinal Velasio De Paolis, who has published a book alongside four other cardinals called *Remaining In The Truth Of Christ*, which defends marriage and Catholic tradition, insisted that the Catholic stance against abortion will not waver, however.

De Paolis said: "Regardless of this decision by the Pope, the Church will continue to consider abortion a sin. I hope it does not cause confusion."

Francis has affirmed on a number of occasions his opposition to abortion, as well as to euthanasia, stem-cell research, and other attempts to end life.

Back in November 2014, the [pontiff dismissed the notion](#) that abortion is good for women, or that euthanasia is "an act of dignity," or "a scientific breakthrough to 'produce' a child (who is) considered a right instead of accepted as a gift." Francis also denounced "(the) use of human life as laboratory mice supposedly to save others."

The Vatican has set up an official [Jubilee of Mercy website](#) which talks more about the tradition and the planned events.

"I have decided to announce an Extraordinary Jubilee which has at its centre the mercy of God. It will be a Holy Year of Mercy. We want to live in the light of the Word of the Lord: 'Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful' (Luke 6:36). And this especially applies to confessors! So much mercy!" Francis said when announcing the Holy Year.