The Elliot Institute found that “coercion came from parents (including the boyfriend’s parents), husbands, boyfriends, doctors, counsellors and others. They may beg, threaten or blackmail a woman until she agrees to the abortion. In some cases, an abusive partner or a molester will force her to have an abortion.” The male partner played a central role in the abortion decision in 95 per cent of cases. Yet they also found that 70 per cent of women believed having an abortion was morally wrong and if they had been given appropriate support and encouragement from family and friends 80 per cent would have given birth.

Some women also describe being unsure about the abortion and hoping for some guidance from the counsellors. One womanLaura, when asked by the counsellor at the abortion clinic if this was what she wanted replied that she was unsure, only to be told, “well you’re here so it must be.”

**CALL TO CHANGE THE CULTURE. A CALL TO BE UNCONDITIONALLY PRO-WOMAN.**

How might we help break the cycle of abortion, abandonment and despair? There can be no simple answers to such a complex problem. Yet God has called us out of darkness into his marvellous light to be a people of life and for life.

We are to bring the Gospel, our source of joy and salvation, to those still caught in darkness. We are guided and sustained by the law of love and have been sent as a people. Everyone has an obligation to be at the service of life. Every member of the Christian community is called to welcome new life, and to welcome the vulnerable and the stranger.

Pope John Paul II has given us some great insights to this problem, he suggests:

“It is necessary to become courageously ‘pro-woman,’ promoting a choice that is truly in favour of women.”

**REASONS GIVEN FOR ABORTION**

What might drive women to seek abortion? There are possibly many reasons why women submit to abortion but too few studies have been done and women are often reluctant to talk about their abortion experience. However, surveys carried out by the Elliot Institute give us some insights. They found 60 per cent of abortions are coerced. The women gave the following reasons for their abortions:

- Forced by mother
- Husband or boyfriend persuaded me
- Father opposed
- No other option given
- Would have been kicked out
- Loss of family support
- Lack of support of society
- Clinic persuaded me

Of course it is no new thing for Australians to take the lead in criticizing the status quo and adopting pro-woman initiatives. Even in the 1830’s a young pioneer woman, Caroline Chisholm (see box) who we claim as one of our unofficial saints, was questioning life in the colony. Caroline felt great compassion for vulnerable women faced with a choice of prostitution or starvation. Her vision and passion for justice led her to strive for a more compassionate Australia. With the support of her husband and family she inspired others to work with her, to offer women positive alternatives and to challenge society. Some of that same passion led nearly 1000 women to come together in Sydney last December to develop strategies for the new millennium. This meeting has seen the emergence of a new network of young women – Women’s Forum Australia (www.womensforumaustralia.org) – who believe that pregnant women should be offered something better than abortion. And that same passion for justice has led others to bear witness—often heroic witnessed—to life. We are living in exciting times and together we can make a real difference.

We need to “show care” for all life and for the life of each individual. We need to work together to find new and effective programs to support new mothers and fathers so that young parents are not afraid to bring their child into the world and to raise him or her. We must work together and look for new ways to build a culture of life and love in which every pregnant woman might be welcomed, honoured and loved, no matter what her circumstances. “Women with unplanned pregnancy deserve to experience unexpected joy.”

Pope John Paul II quoting the words of St. Paul, reminds us: “Do not be conquered by evil but conquer evil with good.” The cycle of abortion, violence and despair that is destroying our country will be broken with the message of the Gospel. We believe that love is stronger than hate, stronger even than fear. We are called to be witnesses of hope and love and to work to bring about a cultural change through prayer and action. Many people are already actively working to bring about a change in thinking, but we must all do more. The Australian Catholic Bishops have set up a national taskforce to look into new ways in which the church can assist pregnant women and sponsor alternatives to abortion.

Now is the time to consolidate all that has been gained in the early years of this new century by giving people new hope and a new heart. “Changing hearts is the most effective method for eliminating abortion. A true culture of life cannot be sustained solely by changing laws. We need, most of all, to change hearts.” We must think of how we can offer practical help and support. Do pregnant women and their children deserve any less?

### PRAYER

**Heavenly Father**

You are the Lord of all life. Help us to recognize that every human life is a precious gift, worthy of our love and respect.

**Lord Jesus**

You have destroyed death and darkness forever. Help us to bring your light to a world trapped in the darkness of abortion.

Increase our love and compassion for vulnerable women and unborn children.

**Holy Spirit**

You inspired our pioneer Caroline Chisholm. Guide us as we search for new alternatives to abortion. And uniting, as we work together to change hearts. May all pregnant women be welcomed, and find love, acceptance and support in our community. May the people of life grow in number, to bring about a transformation of our culture, and the renewal of society. For you are the Lord of all life... Now and forever... Amen.