

COLUMN BY LINDA DUNN of Hancock County

While the anti-abortion groups prepare to celebrate, the rest of us are trying to sort out how this leaked Supreme Court ruling is going to affect our lives and the lives of those we care about.

I recognize that those opposing legal and safe abortions have good intentions and a firm belief in the sanctity of human life. I fear, however, that the law of unintended consequences is going to lead to results that many of them would strongly oppose.

My youngest grandchild is a modern day medical miracle, the result of IVF that followed years of medical issues and surgeries. She's not the only embryo that successfully implanted and had a heartbeat. However, she is the only one that survived through that critical first trimester when so many pregnancies fail.

It troubles me greatly that many people - including a few I otherwise dearly love - would have, if they could have, prevented my granddaughter's existence. Their faith-based belief that life begins at conception leads them to favor laws that could criminalize miscarriages in addition to eliminating IVF as an option for infertile couples.

The Catholic Church - of which six members of our Supreme Court are members - views IVF as "immoral and illegal".

Of course, not all Catholics - let alone all Christians - agree with this. However, it is still alarming to those of us who hold different religious beliefs to see so many members of one faith or another attempting to make law for the rest of us based upon their doctrines while dismissing our own beliefs and sometimes even scientific reports as "wrong".

It is especially troubling when our legislators, either due to deeply held personal beliefs or because they want the support of voters who hold those beliefs, try to pass off wishful thinking and outright falsehoods as potential solutions.

When Ohio legislator John Becker proposed dealing with ectopic pregnancies by "moving the embryo to the womb", I could not help but wonder if he'd confused science fiction with science fact.

If our medical technology were developed to that point, we'd have artificial wombs as well as flying cars and space colonies.

We live in the real world in 2022 and real- world options for those doomed fallopian tube pregnancies unfortunately always result in the loss of the pregnancy and can be fatal for the woman as well.

It's understandable that we want positive outcomes for all pregnancies, but the reality is that "...approximately 40-60% of embryos are believed to fail between fertilization and birth..."[1]

Far too many of us want to ignore this uncomfortable fact, but medical advances have allowed us to buy tests over the counter and routine scans can show us our future child about a week after the stick turns blue.

This has led to an era where miscarriages may feel far more like a death than they did for me and my peers.

We had a hope and an expectation and then a disappointment. We grieved privately and were given scant comfort. Today's generation shares videos and pictures on social media and chatters back and forth about progress and plans that are sometimes tragically followed by tears and public grieving.

It's understandable with these changes that our society has shifted to viewing the "pre-born" as a person deserving of protection but in that process, we seem to have also shifted to seeing the pregnant woman as little more than a birthing pod with no rights beyond those deemed necessary to assure a safe birth.

Even then, we're not giving women the tools necessary to achieve that goal. Maternal-fetal grants often focus more on "fetal" than "maternal" and pregnancy complication rates are continually increasing.

Professionals estimate that 20-50% of maternal deaths are due to preventable causes, such as: hemorrhage, severe high blood pressure, and infection.[2]

Why aren't we focusing more upon positive outcomes for all active participants in a pregnancy?

I remember well what it was like being a teenager in the pre-Roe v. Wade era where abortions were illegal and dangerous but not uncommon.

This is not a future I want for my granddaughters.

I want abortions safe, legal, and never viewed by anyone other than a team of licensed and respected medical doctors as "necessary".

1 [Citation: Jarvis GE. Early embryo mortality in natural human reproduction: What the data say. *F1000Res*. 2016;5:2765. Published 2016 Nov 25. doi:10.12688/f1000research.8937.2]

2 [Citation: "Maternal Mortality and Morbidity in the United States: Classification, Causes, Preventability, and Critical Care Obstetric Implications". *The Journal of Perinatal & Neonatal Nursing*. 222-231.]

NEWSLETTER REMARKS BY LWVSWIN PRESIDENT VICKI SMALL

The news coming from the Supreme Court about Roe v. Wade, even though not unexpected, was still a punch in the gut to me. If the Supreme Court decides to overturn Roe, then it will reverse almost 50 years of precedent and will allow a decision that is intensely personal and heartfelt to be made based on the whims of politicians. The leaked brief has further implications because Roe recognized that prohibiting abortion violated a right to privacy guaranteed under the Fourteenth Amendment of the constitution. Other rulings using this same logic include the use of contraceptives and interracial and same-sex marriage.

As a young adult in the 70's I had come to rely on the Supreme Court as the last bastion for protecting individual rights. The leaked brief, regardless of whether it becomes the final ruling, shows how wrong I was. It is a strong reminder that all elections have consequences. Although it may seem that there is little we can do, that is not the case. The National and State Legislative bodies can take steps to codify Roe now and send a strong message there are limits to how much the government can encroach on our personal lives. It is time for us to show up in solidarity and make our voices heard for reproductive choice. Stand together at local protests. Join in asking Congress to codify Roe into law. Be an informed voter on November 8. In the end, if we want judges to protect our rights we've got to elect officials committed to doing the same.

BRIAN HOWEY: THE STATE OF HOOSIER CHILDREN (IN THE SHADOWS OF ROE)

Sunday, May 8

INDIANAPOLIS — On Monday, Politico broke the story of a leaked SCOTUS draft opinion that had by a 5-4 margin the termination of Roe v. Wade which has legalized abortion over the past 49 years.

"We hold that Roe and Casey must be overruled," wrote Justice Samuel Alito. "It is time to heed the Constitution and return the issue of abortion to the people's elected representatives. Roe was egregiously wrong from the start. Its reasoning was exceptionally weak, and the decision has had damaging consequences. And far from bringing about a national settlement of the abortion issue, Roe and Casey have enflamed debate and deepened division."

When the Dobbs case out of Mississippi is announced in late June or early July, Gov. Eric Holcomb will almost certainly call a special session of the General Assembly and Indiana is expected become one of 26 states to outright ban abortions. This will likely preclude the traditional carve outs that had allowed abortion in the case of rape, incest or the life of the mother is in peril.

“The vast majority of House Republicans, including myself, have been abundantly clear that we want to take action to further protect life should the U.S. Supreme Court overturn, in full or in part, Roe,” Republican House Speaker Todd Huston, R-Fishers, said in a statement Tuesday. “We will continue to await the court’s final decision.”

“I have a hard time being the person that’s part of taking of a life,” Holcomb said on Wednesday. “And I’ll review the decision that has impact on that.” Holcomb said a special session is “obviously on the table,” but said there are “a lot of ifs, ands and what-ifs” that potential legislation will look like.

The outright outlawing of all abortion will bring more children into our state. I was curious about how the children already with us are doing, so I read the 2022 Kids Count Data Book published by the Indiana Youth Institute.

Indiana is home to the 14th largest population of children nationally, with more than 1.57 million children younger than 18 residing, including 51% who were males and 49% females. Some 4.5% of Indiana’s population identify as LGBTQ+, and 34% of the LGBTQ+ population has children.

According to the Indiana Department of Health, the number of abortions in Indiana grew by 119, or 1.6%, to 7,756 during 2020. That increased number remained below the some 8,000 performed in 2018, Indiana’s highest number since 2014.

Indiana ranks 36th in the United States in kid’s health, with 8.2% of babies born with low birthrate in 2019. In 2020, some 101,618 Hoosier children did not have health insurance — or 6.3%. However, Indiana is higher than the U.S. rate for children without health insurance, which was 5.1% in 2020.

Indiana ranks 40th in the nation for children without health care; it is also the lowest-ranked state for children without health insurance compared to our neighboring states: Michigan (10th), Illinois (18th), Kentucky (20th), and Ohio (24th).

Indiana’s 2020 infant mortality rate was 6.6 per 1,000 live births and there were 527 deaths. Black infants were more than twice as likely to die before their first birthday (13.2 per 1,000) than white infants (5.5 per 1,000) and Hispanic/Latino infants (6.0 per 1,000). The infant mortality rate stood at 5.26 in Illinois, 6.23 in Kentucky, 6.5 in Michigan and Ohio, and 3.8 in Massachusetts. In Canada it was 5, in Cuba 5.8, in Germany 3.9, in Japan 2.8, in Russia 10.5 and in Mexico 18.4.

In 2020, some 10.9% of expectant Hoosier mothers smoked while pregnant. This percentage has steadily decreased since 2008, when 18.5% of expectant mothers smoked.

Indiana’s teen birth rate for ages 15-19 continues to decrease (2018: 22 per 1,000 improved to 2019: 21 per 1,000), though it is still above the national rate (17 per 1,000). In 2020, some 4,126 babies had a mother between the ages of 15 and 19. This represents 5.3% of total births.

The report states upfront that "Indiana's overall child well-being ranking has stayed consistent at 29th since 2019." Overall, Indiana ranks third best among neighboring states with Illinois (21st), Michigan (28th), Ohio (31st), and Kentucky (37th).

Indiana ranks 25th with 8% of our kids living in high poverty areas. Some 35% of Hoosier children are living in a single-parent family, which ranks 27th.

In 2019, neglect was reported as a reason for 87% of referrals to remove children from homes, and 91% of reasons for foster care placement. Of the 7,547 total removals conducted in 2020, some 61.1% included parent drug and/or alcohol abuse as a contributing reason. Some 20.9% of Hoosier children have experienced two or more adverse childhood experiences.

Hoosier children living with a grandparent stood at 19% in 2014, 23.9% in 2016, 29.9% in 2018, and 23.5% in 2020. In 2018 and 2019, 6.0% of Indiana adults reported having an alcohol use disorder in the past 12 months, compared to 5.7% nationally; 9.9% of Indiana children have lived with someone who had a problem with alcohol or drugs, higher than the national rate (8.6%).

The number of Indiana children in foster care was 20,763 in 2014, 34,269 in 2018, 30,237 in 2019 and 26,913 in 2020. There were 8,676 open Children In Need of Services cases in 2020, prompting 7,547 removals.

If medically-supervised abortions are going to be banned, the question here is: What will Hoosier leaders do to protect those children arriving from the womb?

<https://www.yahoo.com/news/state-organizations-respond-potential-overturn-040100724.html>

Makenna Hall, The Evening News and the Tribune, Jeffersonville, Ind., May 4, 2022

SOUTHERN INDIANA — With the possibility of Roe v. Wade being overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court, state legislators could move to ban abortion in Indiana.

A leaked draft opinion of the Supreme Court case considering Mississippi's proposed ban on abortion suggests that Roe v. Wade, the court decision that legalized abortion nationwide in 1973, could be overturned.

In 2020, there were 7,756 abortions in Indiana, 7,372 of which were Indiana residents, according to the latest annual Indiana Department of Health Terminated Pregnancy Report.

Leaders from Indiana sectors of the ACLU and Planned Parenthood agree that the draft opinion heightens their deepest fear that the right to an abortion will be taken away.

The repeal would allow individual states to determine their laws regarding abortion, or as the draft opinion states: "It is time to heed the constitution and return the issue of abortion to the people's elected representatives."

"The consequences of the impending Supreme Court decision this summer could be swift and devastating for communities nationwide. What comes next is dangerous and will open the floodgates for states across the country to ban abortion," said Rebecca Gibron, CEO for Planned Parenthood Great Northwest Hawaii, Alaska, Indiana, Kentucky.

If there were a full abortion ban in Indiana, Planned Parenthood said that at least 1.5 million women and people of reproductive age would not have access to abortions.

Without this access there would be a 21% increase in pregnancy-related deaths and a 33% increase in pregnancy-related deaths for Black women, the group estimated.

In 2019 the Indiana State Department of Health reported that Black women had the highest rate of pregnancy-related mortality with 37 deaths per 100,000 live births from 2012 to 2016. This can be compared to the national rate of 16.9 deaths per 100,000 live births.

The Terminated Pregnancy Report showed that almost 50% of those who received an abortion in Indiana in 2020 were white and about 34.6% were Black.

The number of abortions for Black women are disproportionate to the total population of Black people in the state, which is 12.4%, according to the 2020 Census. The same dataset showed that 61.6% of the state population is white.

Without access to abortions, the CEO of Center for Women and Families, Elizabeth Wessels-Martin, said that women in domestic violence situations who are raped are at risk of further trauma and abuse.

“Forcing survivors to keep that baby and raise that baby will continue to have devastating traumatic effects on survivors,” Wessels-Martin, said, “We know case after case where that has been a situation.”

While the Center for Women and Families does not provide medical guidance to clients, it does provide Indiana residents with resources that can give them medical information.

Wessels-Martin said that if *Roe v. Wade* is overturned it could be devastating to survivors of abuse. She noted that physical and sexual abuse go hand in hand and often perpetrators will purposefully impregnate their partners as a way of controlling them

“They’ll hide their birth control pills, they will put holes in their condoms, or won’t wear a condom and full-blown rape their partners even in marriage,” Wessels-Martin said.

Without the option for an abortion, Wessels-Martin said that women are forced to co-parent with their abuser, putting them at risk to receive further abuse.

If *Roe v. Wade* is overturned and Indiana passes a law that bans abortion, ACLU of Indiana executive director Jane Henegar said there could be repercussions for other laws.

There are a number of lawsuits that the ACLU has been working on over the years that have been pending at various levels of the federal courts as judges await a ruling in the Mississippi case, Henegar said.

“Once that decision comes down, those lower courts will evaluate the laws that they have in front of them and based on the court’s reasoning and guidance they’ll make decisions about those various laws,” she continued.

Examples of some of these laws that Henegar provided include whether parents need to know about a minor's decision to get an abortion if deemed competent by a judge and what doctors have to say when advising patients.

"There have been numerous laws that have been blocked thus far, and so, of course, lower courts will look at those," she said.

Going forward, Henegar said that the ACLU is prepared to continue to fight for a woman's right to control her body and have access to abortions, regardless of the outcome of the Supreme Court ruling.

Barb Anderson, local social activist and former executive director of the homeless shelter Haven House, said that she identifies as a pro-choice Catholic woman and believes in a woman's right to reproductive choice.

"I've worked with so many poor women over the years and I've watched as people encourage them to have children they can't afford, and then they can't feed them once they're there," Anderson said.

Anderson said this can result in the child being taken away from a mother, "and so they hurt her all over again."

Mostly though, Anderson emphasized that Roe v. Wade is needed to protect women from having their bodies regulated.

Not all groups are disappointed with the news, however. Mary Ellen Van Dyke, executive director of Right to Life of Southwestern Indiana, said that the organization is hopeful that Roe v. Wade will be overturned.

Van Dyke said that overturning the decision would demonstrate how far the country has evolved since 1973, in both medical science, passion for unborn children and support for pregnant individuals.

She said that the use of ultrasounds prevents 90% of women from proceeding with abortions, though that number has since been contradicted by a 2011 study.

The study published in the journal Obstetrics and Gynecology found that 98.4% of the participants who viewed their ultrasound images proceeded with the pregnancy termination, compared to 99% of those who did not view the images.

Indiana law requires that abortion providers perform a fetal ultrasound and offer the person seeking an abortion the opportunity to view it.

If Roe v. Wade is overturned, Van Dyke said Right to Life of Southwest Indiana looks forward to the Planned Parenthood in Evansville closing, along with all of the abortion clinics in the state.

"Indiana is a very pro-life state, and we are looking forward when Hoosiers will have the chance to come together to demonstrate our value for life and commitment that every person deserves to be born," she said.

The Supreme Court is expected to rule this summer on Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization, the Mississippi case proposing an abortion ban.

Indiana legislators signed a letter in March asking for Gov. Eric Holcomb to call a special session in the summer because of the expected ruling that could overturn Roe v. Wade.

The letter asks that the session be held should the Supreme Court's ruling "expand Indiana's ability to protect unborn children." Local legislators Sen. Kevin Boehnlein, Sen. Gary Byrne, Sen. Chris Garten, Rep. Karen Engleman and Rep. Zach Payne signed the letter.

"Before further commenting on a leaked draft document out of the Supreme Court, like the rest of the country, I'll wait to review the official and final decision they release on the matter in the few weeks and months ahead," Holcomb said in an email to CNHI News Indiana.

With supermajorities in both chambers, Republican leadership has enough votes to pass anti-abortion legislation.

REMARKS IN MOTHER JONES

Monika Bauerleinmay, MOTHER JONES, MAY 9, 2022

This is about minority rule. And it always has been.

That's what I found myself thinking as I watched my feeds fill with the breaking news of the Supreme Court leaked draft decision to overrule Roe v. Wade a week ago this evening, and I wanted to process the shocking, but also not all that surprising news with you all and hear what you're thinking on the online version of this evening's note.

I thought about the pregnancies that my loved ones, my friends, and I have ended, and about what it would have been like to be forced by the state to carry them to term. I thought about a future of state-enforced pregnancies for my children. I thought about the lives lost trying to end pregnancies with no legal protection. I reread the searing 2004 essay in which Mother Jones contributor Eleanor Cooney recalled her terrifying pre-Roe journey to doctor after doctor, each of whom told her she was "too far gone" for an illegal abortion. The article contains a photo of a woman who died in 1964, after her boyfriend tried to perform an abortion in a hotel room. It is grim. And necessary.

But most of all, I thought about how far gone a democracy is when 54 percent of the population support a constitutional right and 28 percent oppose it, yet the 28 percent position wins out.

My colleague Ari Berman wrote about this in 2019, after Georgia passed one of the first in the new crop of anti-abortion bills even though only 44 percent of Georgians favored it. As Ari explained, "Republicans invest so much energy into voter suppression...because it allows them to enact cruel, unpopular policies with no accountability at the ballot box. The GOP doesn't need to have the support of a majority of the state's voters if it skews who actually gets to vote."

Same in Washington, DC. Five of the Supreme Court's nine justices were appointed by presidents who lost the popular vote. In the Senate, the 50 Republican senators represent 41 million fewer people than the 50 Democrats. The GOP controls state legislatures and congressional delegations through an absurd degree of gerrymandering: In Wisconsin, 75 percent of districts are heavily Republican, even though Joe Biden won the state in 2020. In Texas, just under 40 percent of the population is white, but white voters are the majority in 60 percent of state legislative seats. (It took me a minute to wrap my head around that math.) The Texas legislature that passed a "heartbeat" bill,

which forces women to leave the state for abortion care, is 73 percent male and 61 percent white. It's hard not to think of apartheid-era South Africa when you look at numbers like that.

Tough words? Maybe—but these are tough facts, and sugarcoating them doesn't serve anyone. In fact, there's an argument that sugarcoating the abortion debate is part of what got us here. As the journalist Farai Chideya, who hosts the podcast *Our Body Politic*, wrote on Twitter, "Too many times I've been in newsrooms where a post-Roe and post-Voting Rights Act future was dismissed summarily as a possibility. So we as a profession created a dangerous filter bubble, dismissing individuals and groups as fringe when they were the tip of the spear."

I don't need to tell you that at MoJo, these possibilities were not dismissed: They were investigated. Seven years ago, Molly Redden documented how, in many places, "the war on women is over, and women lost." Three years ago, Becca Andrews showed how women in Mississippi were already living in a post-Roe world, and Nina Liss-Schultz outlined how abortion rights defenders were preparing for worse yet to come. Stephanie Mencimer laid out what Sam Alito is all about back in 2016. ("If you want to know his judicial philosophy," one legal expert summarized, "just look at the Republican Party platform.") Just a few weeks ago Arianna Coghill chronicled how states were tripping over each other to pass anti-abortion laws, and Lil Kalish showed how technology may help states that want to force people to stay pregnant.

These journalists in our newsroom, and many others, were not chronicling the battle over abortion as a he-said-she-said political fight. They were illuminating the visceral stakes for people's lives. All of our lives. Something else I've been thinking about is how different my life has been from my great-grandmother's Therese's. She gave birth 17 times and had to bury six of her children. I'm grateful that my grandfather was one of the survivors. But what if Therese had been able to choose motherhood rather than endure it? We're not far removed from these times.

The story of abortion is about whether people get to make profoundly personal decisions themselves. It's about whether parents are allowed to love and support their children; whether people can get life-saving medical care without fear of imprisonment; whether sexual harassment and sexual assault are condoned or confronted; whether women should be more harshly punished for confronting an abuser than the abusers themselves. All of these issues are connected, and all are connected with the fundamental question of whether our democracy works for all, or is hijacked to serve a minority's last-chance grasp for power.

And that story is at the heart of what Mother Jones does. "Two days out from the news and I'm still reeling," my colleague Inae Oh, MoJo's senior news and engagement editor, wrote in our newsletter. "But the initial shock has also given way to a kind of mobilization in the newsroom that, at least for me, echoes the emergency of election night in 2016, when it became clear that the unthinkable had actually happened."

"I'll never forget the all-hands-on-deck feeling," Inae writes. "Despite the anger and despair, everyone wanted to pitch in, plan the fight. Something similar is happening now as abortion rights hang in the balance. The pages of Mother Jones are making sure to call it like it is."

And calling it like it is can make a big difference. This week I found myself thinking way back to 2010, when Republicans took over Congress in a backlash to the first Black president. Many in the media were covering the tea party as if it were a brand new phenomenon, but it wasn't hard to see that its agenda was very familiar. Within weeks the new majority was trying to redefine rape so as to deny

abortions to women who needed federal funds. MoJo's reporting on this change, buried deep in an amendment, spurred a backlash and "Dear John" letter-writing campaign to then-House Speaker John Boehner, and the legislation died.

That was when Republicans still thought of themselves as a potential majority party that needed to be careful about offending the majority of the country. Today's GOP has fewer qualms, because it has bet on minority rule, and Trump has shown them that when you're appealing to a minority of the population, cruelty can be a winner. Alito's draft Supreme Court opinion recognizes no exception for the pregnant person's life or health, or for rape or incest—even though overwhelming majorities, including four in five Republicans, support those exceptions. It takes aim at same-sex marriage, which a majority of Republicans support. And Texas Gov. Greg Abbott chose this moment to talk about challenging a Court decision affirming public education for all.

That's the bigger picture of what happened this week, and that's what MoJo has been covering—to the point where now, others are starting to recognize the patterns too. This week I saw the term "minority rule" in a lot of other media as they covered the decision. It took long enough.

So as we start the first full week of this new reality, I'm also reminding myself that by no means all is lost. So many people—including so many of you—are gearing up to protect your rights and those of others. Some are donating to abortion funds and signing up as clinic volunteers, some are clearing their calendars for canvassing, or running, in the elections this fall. Some are thinking of new ways to ensure access to reproductive care. Some are committing themselves to the long, hard, yet hopeful work of organizing the majority of Americans who want a democratic government that respects their private choices.

As we see over and over around the world, minority rule is both oppressive and, ultimately, fragile. Over the long haul, it is always on the defensive against the collective power of a determined majority.

And it's always on the defensive against the power of facts. It's telling that shortly after the decision was leaked, the National Republican Senatorial Committee pleaded with conservatives to position themselves as "compassionate consensus builders" and emphasizing that "Republicans DO NOT want to take away contraception" and "DO NOT want to throw doctors and women in jail." In fact, Republicans cheerfully kept saying that they wanted to do exactly that.

Exposing lies and undermining talking points is what Mother Jones exists to do, and it showed last week. In just one day while I was writing this, here's what my colleagues published: A story from Kiera Butler, who is based in Georgia, about how social media has become a breeding ground for anti-birth control disinformation covertly promoted by anti-abortion groups. A powerful dispatch from Florida, where Laura C. Morel investigated the increasingly aggressive tactics that protesters are using to harass. An analysis by Jackie Mogensen, who read through the entirety of Justice Alito's 98-page **opinion and tallied all of its footnotes to see how often Alito cited scholarship and judicial opinions** from men vs women. (Do yourself a favor and watch her share the results in just one fact-packed minute!)

When the Supreme Court news hit last week, Mother Jones was in the middle of a spring fundraising drive that is critical to keeping these reporters and others on the beat—thank you to all of you who have already pitched in. We put all of that on hold because, as Inae said, it was an all-hands-on-deck moment. But if you think that deeply reported, honest journalism that gives you context and

perspective (and doesn't sugarcoat) is important, and you haven't yet, please consider supporting our work.

And whether you can or not, we'd love to hear what you are thinking about at this moment. Are you fired up to get involved, or taking time to grapple with the new reality? What are the stories you would like to know more about as you process the news? Let us know here.

Thanks for reading, and for everything you do to make Mother Jones what it is.

Faith in Women: Pastor vows to stand with those making life's most intimate decision

<https://www.journalgazette.net/opinion/columns/20220511/faith-in-women>

Wednesday, May 11, 2022

By Anne B. Epling

Fourteen years ago around this time of year, my husband and I went in for what we thought was a routine ultrasound.

I was about 18 weeks pregnant at the time, and we were excited to welcome our fourth child. Our older three children, a daughter and two sons, were also eager to find out whether they were going to have a little sister or a little brother. We promised them that when they got home from school, we'd have an answer for them.

After hearing from the ultrasound tech that we were going to have a girl, we settled in for the "routine stuff" that turned out to be anything but routine.

The ultrasound showed there was an abnormal white spot on the fetus' heart which could be Trisomy 13, a condition with which most infants don't live more than a week. We needed to schedule a higher-level ultrasound and amniocentesis quickly because if we chose to terminate the pregnancy we only had a few days to decide. This was in Missouri, and the state mandated such things. We left devastated, worried and anxious. We started to grieve what could have been.

As a minister of the word and sacrament, I've spoken on a number of difficult subjects when I have felt God move me to do so. I've advocated for marriage equality and the full inclusion of LGBTQ-UIA+ individuals, demanded gun reform and asked hard theological questions about the place of faith in the public sphere.

But the one issue I have remained silent on is reproductive rights. By doing so, I have allowed the religious right to dominate the discussion and thus given the impression that there is only one religious view when it comes to abortion.

Given the news of the Supreme Court leak, I will not allow this to happen again.

I am supportive of reproductive rights, access to health care and a woman's right to choose. I am pro-choice, not in spite of my faith but because of my faith.

I believe in a woman's sacred worth, and that the creator has given her the capacity to make choices. I believe that when a woman faces the decision whether to terminate a pregnancy, this is an intensely personal decision that often doesn't fit into neat medical, legal or policy guidelines.

Women are empowered by the creator to make significant choices, including the choice to continue or end a pregnancy. I believe when a woman faces the difficult decision to end a pregnancy, God stands by her side, holds her hand and loves her through it. I believe her faith community, if she is a part of one, should do the same.

I am grateful that 14 years ago I did not have to make the heart-wrenching choice to end my pregnancy or not, and I can't say with certainty the decision my husband and I would have made had we faced such a situation. But I do know that not every woman's story ends like mine, and for too long the faith community has failed to hold space for them.

It is time to put an end to that and the shame that often accompanies it.

Whether to carry a pregnancy to term is an intensely personal decision to make and should be ours to make – not others. The last people who should make a decision about what happens to a woman's body are politicians and preachers.

Women can and should be trusted to make thoughtful and responsible decisions about their lives, and I vow to use my voice to advocate for us.

The Rev. Anne B. Epling is pastor/head of staff at First Presbyterian Church.