

SUBMISSION TO

THE IRISH CATHOLIC BISHOPS

**REGARDING CURA AND THE CRISIS PREGNANCY
AGENCY**

FROM

THE MOTHER AND CHILD CAMPAIGN



LIFE INSTITUTE



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INTRODUCTION

Your Grace,

The *Life Institute* understands that the Bishops' Episcopal Conference in Maynooth will discuss the current controversy surrounding the decision taken by the National Executive of CURA to direct its members to make Crisis Pregnancy Agency (CPA) leaflets available to women seeking its assistance.

The Bishops will be aware that many issues have been raised by this controversy, not least the right of Catholic volunteers to offer pro-life services, and that attempts by the CPA to bully CURA will not be favourably met by the public at large.

We have prepared this short report for your consideration, and hope it will be of assistance to you in your discussions on this matter in Conference. We join with many others in trusting that CURA's Catholic ethos will be protected by the Catholic Hierarchy and that the robust stance of Holy Mother Church in defence of unborn children will be continued.

Pope John Paul II, *Dia lena anam dilis*, described the Irish people as *Semper Fidelis* – Always Faithful. One of the more visible signs of the faith, which still endures in Ireland, is our continued protection of the unborn child. This protection, as you will be aware, is under persistent and forceful attack from many quarters and must be defended with great energy and vigilance.

It is a measure of our compassion and of our regard for human rights that we grant legal protection to the most helpless of all our citizens. Abortion providers which make considerable profits from the destruction of children, and the vulnerability of their mothers, should not be given a free rein to tout their business. Pro-life pregnancy counselling services provide invaluable and compassionate assistance to women in need. CURA is held in high regard by the Irish people and it should not allow its work to be tainted by unethical directives from the CPA

THE CURRENT CONTROVERSY

The National Executive Council of Cura made a decision on September 22nd 2004 to send a directive to its volunteers regarding the Positive Options leaflet produced by the CPA. That directive stated that:

- The leaflet was to be available in Cura centres and
- The leaflet must be given to clients requiring information additional to information which can be provided by Cura.

This directive was obviously met with dismay by some, if not many, Cura volunteers. Anne Farren, a Donegal member, wrote that it was regarded as a contradiction of Cura's constitution which members had signed and agreed to abide by. She added that this directive had caused great upset – a factor which has gone almost without consideration and which merits some appreciation.

Cura receives 600,000 Euros in State funding annually and the current controversy arises because the CPA now demands that all agencies in receipt of State funding must distribute CPA leaflets.

Cura is a Catholic organisation and it provides counselling for women and men while upholding the right to life of the unborn, an ethos which separates this worthy organisation from others with financial or immoral objectives. CPA officials have darkly warned that the funding Cura receives could be in jeopardy if Cura refuses to hand these leaflets out.

This threat should be met with a strong defence of Cura's right not to engage in assisting abortion procurement. In any case this funding comes from the taxpayer - the Irish citizens - who have shown their opposition to abortion in successive referenda and opinion polls; no CPA member or executive should feel free to act as an unaccountable and arbitrary distributor of taxpayers monies.

Archbishop Martin has rightly expressed concern and said that the matter will be raised at your meeting next week in June. It is possible that the leaflets could be withdrawn if the Bishops insist on it, but even if the CPA money dries up as a result, the Bishops need to take a strong moral stand in defending the right to life of unborn children against the bullying of moral relativists.

CURA'S WORK AND THEIR LEGAL AND CONTRACTUAL POSITION

Cura is a voluntary organisation offering free pregnancy counseling services to mothers in 16 centres across the country.

The Centres are supported by the Cura National Office team which comprises a National Coordinator, Administrator, two Regional Officers and two National Public Relations Officers.

Over 400 volunteers work with Cura all of whom have undertaken training in crisis pregnancy counselling. A number of volunteers have also undertaken training in post abortion counselling.

Cura offers a range of services and supports to women dealing with an unplanned, crisis pregnancy

Cura volunteers and counselors commit many hours on a weekly basis to provide these essential services. There can be little doubt that many of them are motivated by a desire to protect both mothers and babies from the horror of abortion. Cura and other counseling services, are to be admired for their pro-life ethos, which recognizes the right to life of the unborn child. They offer a truly pro-life alternative to other agencies which charge for counseling services, receive commission for referrals, do not provide pregnant women with any information regarding their unborn child, but charge a hefty fee for post-abortion counseling.

Cura's role as an ethical provider of counselling to Irish mothers has earned it the respect of the Catholic community. That role, and its underlying ethos, is being undermined by the directive of Cura's National Executive Council and by the browbeating tactics of the CPA.

The Legal and Contractual position

Two factors regarding the relationship between Cura and CPA should be considered by the bishops in dealing with this issue:

(a) The Regulation of Information (Services outside the State for Termination of Pregnancies) Act 1995 permitted organisations and persons to distribute certain information on abortion. While the *Life Institute* hold that any assistance in abortion procurement is morally wrong, this Act was restricted by the Constitutional amendment on which it was based, which in turn promised to be restrictive, or it would have been rejected by the electorate.

Information was defined in the Act as being the names and addresses of abortion clinics, and could be provided by doctors, agencies and counsellors. No obligation is imposed on those counselling women to provide such information. Indeed Section 15 of that legislation is unequivocal in allowing conscientious objection to abortion when it states, "nothing in this Act shall be construed as obliging any person to give Act information". The CPA is therefore acting illegally if it seeks to impose this obligation on the groups which it funds.

(b) The service agreement which the CPA enters into with the various organisations it funds clearly states that the CPA undertakes to respect the "independent identity, operational autonomy and ethos" of each organisation, and any undertakings given by counselling groups to the CPA are to be in accordance with the service provider's ethos and the law. Therefore, there is absolutely no contractual obligation on counselling groups to make abortion referrals, even if it were legally permitted.

Sharon Foley, Director of the CPA, has stated (*Irish Catholic May 12th 2005*) that the service level agreement between the CPA and Cura requires Cura, as a condition for funding, to implement a referral process to other bona fide service providers where the information or service requested by the client is not available to them. If the service level agreement is thus interpreted to force Cura to contradict their ethos, this contradicts the undertaking by the CPA to above, and makes a contractual nonsense of the agreement. In any case, as previously stated, the relevant Act provides legal protection for conscientious objection.

Another pro-life counseling group, LIFE, has made it clear that under no circumstances do they compromise their ethos and hand out the Positive Options leaflet, although they are part funded by the CPA.

Cura's National Co-ordinator, Louise Graham, made the argument that by providing the number for another CPA agency, the woman being referred is actually delayed by that other agency's legal requirement to bring her through the whole counseling process again before giving any details about abortion services. The *Life Institute* do not find this argument convincing.

Other factors

We also note with concern, a report in the Irish Independent, (*June 4th 2005*) which claims that the four Cura volunteers who made public their concerns regarding the CPA leaflet have been expelled by the National Executive of Cura. These four volunteers who were reported to have

counselled women in a crisis pregnancy situation for a combined period of more than 70 years, acted in accordance with their Catholic principles and should not be punished for doing so.

Finally, it is worth restating the fundamental point. Cura is highly respected for providing an essential service which best serves mothers and babies. They should not be forced to engage in a process that will result in mothers with crisis pregnancies opting to kill their babies.

THE CRISIS PREGNANCY AGENCY

The Crisis Pregnancy Agency (CPA) is a Statutory Body established in Ireland in October 2001. It states that it is “a planning and co-ordinating body which has the task of formulating and implementing a strategy to address the issue of crisis pregnancy in Ireland.” At the November 2003 launch of its “Strategy to address the Issue of Crisis Pregnancy”, the then Minister for Health, Mr Micheal Martin reiterated that the agency would deal with rising rates of crisis pregnancy by:

- a) A reduction in the number of crisis pregnancies by the provision of education, advice and contraceptive services.
- b) A reduction in the number of women with crisis pregnancies who opt for abortion by offering services and supports which make other options more attractive.
- c) The provision of counselling and medical services after crisis pregnancy.

Minister Martin referred again in that speech to the role of the CPA in promoting “options other than abortion where a crisis pregnancy occurs”. Many commentators have noted that this commitment has not been met, since abortion is promoted as an option by a large majority of CPA listed and funded agencies.

The CPA does not recognise the right to life of the unborn child, nor, despite urgings from the Life Institute and other organisations, does it highlight the adverse effects, both psychological and physical, of induced abortion on women.

The CPA makes available to the general public the contact details of agencies which will provide assistance in arranging an abortion. The CPA Director Sharon Foley states in the Annual Report 2003, that the Agency planned, implemented and funded a 44% expansion of Crisis Pregnancy counselling nationwide. Much of that funding went towards the CPS – Crisis Pregnancy Services – which are locally based counselling services. All of these newly founded agencies offer information which will assist in procuring an abortion.

The CPA receives funding of 6.5 million Euros from the State each year. It has been given charge of distributing approved State funding to bodies which provide crisis pregnancy counselling, including CURA, who receive 600,000 Euros in State funding annually.

CPA FUNDING RECIPIENTS

The CPA Annual Report 2003 gives the latest available list of funding recipients. It shows the following:

	<u>Euros</u>	<u>% of Total</u>
Total funding granted	2,173,077	100%
Total funding provided to organisations not providing abortion information (Life and Cura)	144,940	7%
Total funding given to organisations which provide abortion information	1,396,153	64%
Total funding to other projects	631,984	29%

This is an astonishing distribution. How can an agency be committed to making “options other than abortion more attractive” when funding is given so disproportionately to agencies who provide abortion information? Agencies such as the Irish Family Planning Association have long been involved in political campaigns calling for abortion legislation, yet receive funding from a State body which purports to follow a strategy which reduces the number of abortions.

As stated, no Annual Report for 2004 is yet available, and funding to Cura has been reported as having increased to 600,000 Euros for 2005. The percentages may have changed from those calculated above but it is clear that priority is not given to agencies whose ethos seeks to protect human life in the womb.

THE “POSITIVE OPTIONS” LEAFLETS AND OTHER CPA PRODUCTIONS

The current controversy arises because the CPA now demands that all agencies in receipt of State funding must distribute CPA leaflets, which are part of their Positive Options programme.

The Positive Options programme has been widely advertised on TV and radio and in many other advertising mediums. It lists what it calls “a directory of agencies who offer advice and counselling to women who find themselves with an unexpected pregnancy”.

The Positive Options leaflet currently lists nine organisations and groups, including several Health Board bodies which are CPA assisted. Seven of those listed include abortion as a “positive option” and only two – Life and CURA – do not give assistance in obtaining an abortion.

This leaflet, part of a broader campaign disseminating the same information, contravenes a stated primary objective of the CPA since giving contact numbers of abortion arrangers to women with crisis pregnancies will do nothing towards obtaining “a reduction in the number of women with crisis pregnancies who opt for abortion by offering services and supports which make other options more attractive”.

What the Positive Options leaflet sets out to do is to create a level playing field amongst all the pregnancy counselling services. Abortion is simply seen as an option – and a Positive option at that. Where volunteers work with LIFE and Cura to preserve the life and dignity of both mother and baby, unborn childrens’ lives are ultimately disposable under this programme.

As we have previously noted, pregnancy counselling services which have been newly created with the assistance of the CPA, in regions such as Ballinasloe and Castlebar, all offer abortion information.

Other CPA Campaigns

The Positive Options Campaign aside, most of the CPA’s projects to date have either undertaken research or aggressively promoted contraceptives as a preventative to crisis pregnancy.

Research

Title: Understanding Teenage Sexuality in Ireland

The CPA study which involved a relatively small sample of 226 post primary students aged between 14-19 years, concluded that “The teachings of the Catholic Church are increasingly irrelevant to the attitudes of Irish adolescents towards sex”

Campaigns

Name: Don't be late Campaign (2003)

A collaboration between the Irish Family Planning association, the CPA and Durex which distributed over 19,000 condoms with user guides to young people attending the Witness festival.

Name: Think Contraception:

This campaign “is primarily designed to support people in choosing a contraceptive method that suits their lifestyle.” An accompanying leaflet, entitled *Baby*, urges girls to “carry condoms; you never know who you might meet or where your night out might end”. The *Life Institute* believes this message, not only to be lacking any moral dimension, but to encourage young women to engage in dangerous behaviour.

THE ROLE OF THE BISHOPS

The role of the Bishops in resolving this controversy is of paramount importance given that Cura is a Catholic crisis pregnancy counselling service.

The Catholic Church teaches that the act of abortion is always gravely wrong. In no way may one facilitate, co-operate with or condone it. Nor may one give scandal by appearing to do so. In *Evangelium Vitae*, Pope John Paul II condemns any formal co-operation with abortion.

“Such co-operation occurs when an action, either by its very nature or by the form it takes in a concrete situation, can be defined as a direct participation in an act against innocent human life or a sharing in the immoral intention of the person committing it. The opportunity to refuse to take part in the consultation, preparation and execution of these acts against life should be guaranteed.”

The immoral intention of agencies providing assistance in procuring abortion is clear. The role of the Bishops as shepherds of the faithful requires a clear and unequivocal rejection of a situation which conflicts with the basic Catholic belief regarding the defence of life and the purpose of Catholic crisis pregnancy counseling. It is clear that Cura requires advocates to ensure that they are not forced, by threat of withdrawal of funds, to engage in immoral and unethical practices. The Life Institute urges the Bishops to be that strong advocate.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Here we have two organisations dealing with crisis pregnancy, CURA and the CPA. Each has a radically different moral standpoint. CURA believes in the objective right of each person to life, no matter at what stage, because CURA is a Catholic organisation which believes that life is a gift from God, and not man's to dispose of as he pleases. The CPA, on the other hand, takes what you might call a utilitarian view. For the CPA, abortion is not so much "morally wrong" as "socially undesirable".

The CPA funds both pro-life and pro-abortion groups in the hope of allowing people to shop around for the option that will most benefit them and society. Hence, if a woman really wants to have an abortion, and there is a reasonable certainty that she isn't going to do anything troublesome like suffer trauma afterwards, well then she should have one. Of course, since this "safe, legal and rare" position is entirely man-centred and does not recognise any objective morality, it follows that the CPA approach to preventing crisis pregnancy relies more on human ingenuity than on adherence to moral values.

It is certain that the majority of Catholics accept that the CPA is being unreasonable in attempting to bully CURA into distributing leaflets which are contrary to its core beliefs. The CPA must not be allowed to impose conditions which promote abortion as a positive option. The Irish people will respect and admire our bishops if they refuse to kowtow to CPA bullying and continue the most honourable Catholic tradition and duty of defending human life.

We recommend that:

- The decision of the National Executive Council to distribute CPA leaflets containing details of agencies which assist in the procurement of an abortion, be immediately reversed
- The CPA be instructed that no Catholic agency can partake in a programme which does not contain a pro-life ethos
- The Department of Health receive a formal complaint as to the threat of withdrawal of State funds from Cura by the CPA.

This report is sent with all our good wishes and prayers.

WHO WE ARE

The *Life Institute* is a voluntary organisation of Irish citizens with a long standing concern in the area that has become by common usage referred to as crisis pregnancy. We share with the Catholic Bishops a desire to afford protection to human life from the moment of conception. With a membership drawn from all walks of life we are perhaps best known for our efforts to have the right to life of both Mother and Child recognised in law, and our educational campaigns which have incorporated print, advertising and internet mediums. Our objective is to keep Ireland abortion free.

Our campaigns are designed, organised and administered by volunteers who believe that the defence of human life and the traditional family are crucial to Ireland and her future.

We understand that information is a key factor in ensuring a pro-life future. Important developments in the legal, medical and political fields are sent by the Life Institute to a growing number of people. Research is given a priority and data from every field is collected on all aspects of life issues and high-quality reports are produced and widely distributed.

Our most recent medical report: *Women Have the Right to Know – Adverse Effects of Induced Abortion*, with a foreword by Professor Eamon O'Dwyer, was sent to every doctor in Ireland and gathered evidence from more than 200 pieces of published medical research.

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