



# In New Legal Climate, Churches and Organizations Consider How to Help Those With Unwanted or Complicated Pregnancies

*The Wired Word for the Week of July 3, 2022*

**Editor's note:** Although the recent Supreme Court Ruling, *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, has significant effect on the availability and legality of abortions in the United States, this Wired Word lesson is not about abortion *per se*. That's because we addressed that topic just a few weeks ago at the time the leaked draft of the majority opinion in this case was in the news. Thus, if you wish your class to discuss abortion, we direct you to the first Wired Word lesson for the week of May 15, 2022, "*Supreme Court May Overturn Roe v. Wade, Leaked Draft Reveals*." It can be found in the "Choose a different lesson" list at [www.TheWiredWord.com](http://www.TheWiredWord.com).

## In the News

The Supreme Court ruling in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* on June 24, holds that the Constitution of the United States does not confer any right to abortion, and overrules both *Roe v. Wade* (1973) and *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* (1992). The majority opinion, which overturns nearly 50 years of precedent, does not itself do away with the right to an abortion, but does hold that abortion is not a constitutional right, and that, under our federal form of government, states have discretion in regulating abortion.

The result is that abortion laws are set by each state. These vary widely, with some states, such as New Mexico and Vermont, allowing abortions at any time up until delivery, while others, such as Oklahoma and Kentucky, completely ban elective abortions. Most state laws ban abortions at roughly the stage of fetal viability, sometime between 23 and 27 weeks after conception. This has left abortion providers, organizations that support a woman's right to abortion, as well as churches and other groups that assist women when they are weighing decisions about ending pregnancies, and that also support elective abortions, scrambling to reset their work to be within the confines of the new legal landscape within the states where they operate.

For example, before the high court issued its ruling, Fund Texas Choice (FTC), an organization that helps Texans with travel costs to abortion clinics, had this notice on its website: "We fund Texans' travel to abortion clinics. Abortion is still legal, and we are here to help."

Once the court's decision was issued, the notice was changed to read, "Fund Texas Choice is taking some time to evaluate its operations in light of the recent decision in *Jackson Women's Health v. Dobbs*, which has changed almost 50 years of settled law related to reproductive and constitutional rights. While continuing to be focused on reproductive justice and access to important care for Texans, we are also undertaking substantial consideration and effort to ensure the organization is in compliance with the law in a new landscape for abortion rights. We are committed to our mission and to accomplishing it through legal ends."

Anna Rupani, co-executive director of FTC, said, "We're working with our attorneys to figure out what we can and can't do because the opinion is complicated, and we're trying to figure out what is and isn't allowed at the moment. ... We want to get clarity so we can make sure we're following the law, and we're not doing anything to risk our team, we're not doing anything to risk the pregnant people that are traveling, so we can stay in existence long-term so we can continue to do this fight the right way."

Many Christians and several Christian denominations have wholeheartedly welcomed and even celebrated the Supreme Court's ruling. For example, The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod (LCMS) teaches that, except to prevent the death of another person (the mother), elective abortion is a sinful act and contrary to the will of God.

Speaking of the Supreme Court decision, the LCMS president, the Rev. Dr. Matthew Harrison, said, "Today is a monumental day, a day on which we simultaneously rejoice, pray, give thanks, lament, repent and weep. The Supreme Court reversed *Roe v. Wade* and returned the responsibility for protecting life to the states.

Harrison added, "Today we pray for unborn children who remain unprotected in many states. ... Today we repent of our own lack of love for the least, the last and the lost, for mothers in need and families facing crises. ... We pray that today's decision points ahead to the day when every state advances the cause of life and expands protections for unborn children."

But not all Christians agree, and some denominations take a different tack.

For example, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) is?a denomination that while not encouraging abortions, does maintain that in some circumstances they should be permitted. In a pastoral message to the denomination, the Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton, the presiding bishop of the ELCA, urged her denomination to "live into this new legal framework" while responding to "the current situation."

As examples of what such responding might entail, Eaton spoke of "ministering to individuals who seek abortions; advocating for laws that provide free or affordable health care, child care and education; providing and promoting sex education; continuing to be a community of discernment where thoughtful and diverse perspectives can be shared and heard; and advocating for state laws that provide legal, safe and affordable abortions, and against legislation that would outlaw abortion in all circumstances."

In her message, Bishop Eaton also reminded her readers that, "despite this new legal landscape, we continue to depend on our social teaching for guidance. Our social statement provides the moral framework for our church's communal discernment and ministry, holding in tension both the strong Christian presumption to preserve and protect all life as well as the complex moral situations in which pregnancy sometimes occurs. Our social teaching is complex and does not hew to clear categories or labels such as 'pro-abortion' or 'anti-abortion.'"

In her concluding paragraph, Eaton said, "I wish to remind everyone that this church supports peaceful means of expression within a diverse society. Peaceful protest is a crucial element of civic engagement; violent protest is not, and this church reproves it."

Eaton's comment regarding violent protest may reflect on the attacks on both abortion clinics, which provide abortions, and crisis pregnancy centers, which counsel against abortion, as well as the arrest of a man who had planned to assassinate Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh.

More on this story can be found at these links:

[With \*Roe v. Wade\* Overturned, Which States Would Restrict or Protect Abortion Rights? CBS News](#)  
[\*Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization\*, Supreme Court of the United States](#)

[\*Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization\*, Wikipedia](#)

[Bishop Eaton Issues Pastoral Message on SCOTUS Ruling Regarding \*Roe v. Wade\*, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America](#)

[LCMS President Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison addresses SCOTUS decision, Reporter](#)

## **The Big Questions**

1. Regardless of your feelings about the new Supreme Court decision, what are your *Christian* responsibilities toward women who may be struggling with an unwanted or complicated pregnancy?
2. Regarding abortion, what should living with the new legal landscape and moral framework look like?
3. How should we now minister to women who become pregnant through rape or incest and do not wish to proceed with the pregnancy? How should we now minister to women whose pregnancies are complicated by dire medical concerns, domestic violence or something else? How, if at all, might your answer to this change if the woman was a member of your own family? How does the value of the life of the unborn child enter into your thoughts?
4. If you agree with the Supreme Court decision, how ought that agreement be expressed publicly? If you disagree with the decision, how ought that disagreement be expressed publicly?
5. What rules about abortion do you want your state to adopt, and why?

### **Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope**

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

#### **Proverbs 31:8-9**

*Speak out for those who cannot speak,  
for the rights of all the destitute.  
Speak out; judge righteously;  
defend the rights of the poor and needy.*

(For context, read [Proverbs 31:1-9](#).)

Proverbs 31:1-9, the "Words of King Lemuel," are really the words of his mother. We don't know who he was or where he ruled, but his mom's advice is good. A king can be a symbol of absolute freedom in the worst sense. Lemuel's mother insists that "wine, women and song" (to use the common phrase) are not the key to happiness, nor do they make for a good king. Kings must never "pervert [violate] the rights of all the afflicted" (v. 5) because it is their duty to speak out on behalf of the voiceless, which the verses above say, including defending their rights.

**Questions:** Who should be able to decide what rights should be available to everyone, including the unborn? Who, if anyone or any branch of government, should be able to decide to remove rights from some? Who, if anyone or any branch of government, should decide that the rights of some should override the rights of others?

#### **Matthew 22:21**

*Give therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's.* (For context, read [Matthew 22:15-22](#).)

This is Jesus' answer to opponents who were trying to trap him into speaking against the Roman taxes they were all obligated by law to pay. Jesus' reply, which avoided the trap, differentiated between what was owed to Caesar and what is owed to God. While there are many situations today to which the spirit of Jesus' answer can be applied, one way to hear it is to consider how to do the work of God under the strictures of existing civil law, whether or not the law best serves those purposes.

**Questions:** What should be given to God in your life? What should be given to "Caesar" in your life? How should you behave when you perceive Caesar's requirement as unfair? How should you behave when you perceive God's requirement as unfair?

### **Matthew 1:18-19**

*... Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be pregnant from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to divorce her quietly. (For context read [Matthew 1:18-25](#).)*

The verses above speak of Joseph's plan before he had been visited by an angel who explained the source of Mary's pregnancy. At this point, Joseph assumed she had been with another man.

The Law of Moses required capital punishment in such cases ([Deuteronomy 22:23-27](#)). By Joseph's time, this had been mitigated by rabbinic practice, but the penalty was still severe and humiliating. The first thing said about Joseph's character is that he is "righteous" (the underlying Greek word can also mean "just"). In the setting of Joseph's story, to be righteous and just meant to live by the Law of Moses. But Joseph, contrary to the behavior expected of one who is righteous, had already decided not to go by the letter of the law, but chose out of consideration for Mary to shield her from public accusations and divorce her quietly.

It's probable that in the small village where Joseph and Mary lived, keeping her circumstances quiet would be almost impossible, but Joseph was willing to do what he could to protect Mary's privacy.

Of course, the angel's visit changed everything for Joseph, but his respect for Mary's privacy before he knew the whole story is commendable.

**Question:** To what degree, if at all, should the state regulate matters surrounding conception and pregnancy that are essentially private? Explain your answer.

### **Romans 13:1**

*Let every person be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. (For context, read [Romans 13:1-7](#).)*

A lot of people find this verse and its context difficult to reconcile as scripture, particularly in light of dictatorships and other forms of government that don't serve the people well. Bible scholars suggest that Paul's comments here may have been primarily about the Roman Empire, based on (a) Paul's belief that it was in some sense God-given, and (b) his experience of sensible magistrates protecting him from persecution, and looking (c) for the safety of the Jewish and/or Christian community in Rome at this historical moment.

In any case, the passage does highlight what an ideal government might be like. Of course, no decision issued by a human government, regardless of its type, will be welcomed by the whole population.

**Questions:** How has the Supreme Court ruling affected your outlook toward our government? Why?

### **For Further Discussion**

1. Respond to this, from TWW team member Frank Ramirez: "One thing that occurs to me is the whole matter of what is protected by the Constitution spelled out literally, and what we decide is implicit but not spelled out.

"We wrestle with both the Constitution and the Bible, whether we think we are literalists or not. Most of us aren't willing to shove all our money into the middle of the table to be shared as needed by fellow believers, as in [Acts 4:32-37](#). And generally throw out all the stuff that precedes "love your neighbor as yourself" in Leviticus 19:18, talking about the need for a civil society, and of course Jesus reinterprets the clause to include Samaritans in dialog with folks who would have said the only good Samaritan is a dead Samaritan.

"I hope constitutional originalists don't want us to go back to considering African-Americans as 3/5th of a person for purposes of apportionment, nor to allow only white property-owning men to vote. Scripture reinterprets itself, overturning [clauses that forbid marriage to Moabites](#) with what I would call the [Ruth](#)

## Amendment.

"How we reinterpret the Constitution and scripture and insist in all cases we're getting back to the original intention regardless of where we end up is worth discussion."

2. Discuss this, from TWW team member Heidi Mann: "I'm offended because, by and large, the Supreme Court has previously been in the business of bestowing rights, not taking them away. It took far too long to give women and people of color the rights they now do have, but at least once they were given, they have not been retracted. Until now. Our country has turned a bad corner, and I am deeply afraid of what will come next. It might not be this summer, or this year, or even this decade (though I bet some of the change will be sooner than later). But I fear we're headed in the direction of many more human-rights losses to come."

3. React to this statement, seen in an editorial: "People who have an abortion often need help; they never need punishment."

4. Discuss the following by TWW consultant James Gruetzner: "There are at least two separate issues in the Supreme Court decision that should be kept distinct. The first is the question of how federal-government-protected 'rights' should be established. Constitutionalists point to the document itself, and how it is capable of being amended, as being the way to make these decisions. They would say that these decisions should be made by the established process of legislation, amendment and ratification. That was how slavery became illegal in the United States, and that is how a federal income tax became legal. The justices deciding *Roe v. Wade* effectively declared that, no, *they* could decide things regardless of the text of the Constitution, and take powers away from the states that had been guaranteed by the Tenth Amendment. The recent Supreme Court decision now corrects that particular error, declaring that, at least in the realm of abortion, the states still have their legitimate authority and that changes should be made through the legislative process, not by the Supreme Court arrogating authority to itself.

"The second issue relates to 'rights.' Much of the discussion from those who oppose the Supreme Court decision puts forth the rights of the mother over her body, not to be forced to carry a child to term. What is often left out is a discussion of the rights of the unborn child to be born and not to be killed even in cases where his or her mother is only inconvenienced. A discussion of abortion needs to consider the rights of both -- unless one believes that the mother or the child is subhuman and not worthy of human dignity. (I've long thought that the bumper sticker 'Against abortion? Don't have one!' was a variation of 'Against slavery? Don't own one!' in that both deny the full humanity of a person.) Perhaps the application of child-neglect analysis would be helpful. A person in charge who neglects the nutrition or proper care of a child -- and the child therefore dies -- is normally guilty of murder (or, at least, negligent homicide). The abortion analogy is strong. In any event, it is not a matter of 'rights,' but of a *conflict* of 'rights.'"

5. Consider this, from TWW team member Malia Miller, who is a school counselor: "When I think about the many families, individuals and medical professionals who will now have to navigate challenging situations with this restriction, I am heartbroken. As a school counselor, I have been involved with many young girls who were the victims of incest, date rape, etc., who were too young to have any idea what was happening with their bodies early in their pregnancies. To be fair, I have also been involved with young girls who were careless with their sexual activity and relied on abortion to take care of their irresponsibility. There are no easy answers, but limiting choices and rights by government regulation does not seem the appropriate way to manage this dilemma."

## **Responding to the News**

(We've borrowed this statement, with slight adaptation, from our May 15 TWW. It's still right on target.) Now that the Supreme Court has overturned *Roe v. Wade*, and some U.S. states are making abortions for almost any reason illegal, while others are making abortions for almost any reason legal, there will still be women seeking abortions who cannot travel to states where abortions are legal. This is a good reason to consider the mission work we support. How do our missions help women who are victims of coerced sex? How do our missions

provide help for women in low-income situations who decide to keep and raise children they bear? How do our missions help connect women who don't want or are unable to keep their newborn with couples eager to adopt a child? How do we function as pro-life for children after they are born?

## **Prayer**

O God, be with all those who must make hard decisions about pregnancies, that they find your will and receive your help. Show us how to be channels through which your help may flow. In Jesus' name. Amen.

## **Other News This Week**

# **U.N. Reports Noise Pollution Poses Significant Risks to Human Health and Earth's Ecosystems**

*The Wired Word for the Week of July 3, 2022*

## **In the News**

A recent report from the United Nations Environment Program has identified noise pollution as a serious threat to human mental and physical health as well as to ecosystems across the planet. In a chapter titled "Listening to Cities: From Noisy Environments to Positive Soundscapes," the [Frontiers 2022: Noise, Blazes and Mismatches](#) research defines noise pollution as unwelcome, prolonged noise levels exceeding the limit of 70 decibels (dB) that the World Health Organization (WHO) says is acceptable.

In New York City, nine out of 10 of the two million commuters who use mass transit are exposed to noise levels exceeding the limit recommended by the WHO. Noise pollution affects 20% of Europe's citizens and contributes to some 16,000 deaths on that continent annually, according to WHO. Sasha Komenko, who studies noise at the Barcelona Institute for Global Health, said that around 60 million European adults are exposed to noise that's harmful to health. She clarifies that WHO recommends that people not be exposed to noise that exceeds "53 decibels in a 24-hour period."

Noise pollution can cause and exacerbate chronic stress, sleep disturbance, loss of concentration, severe heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, hearing impairment and poor mental health. Called a "silent killer," even so-called white noise, or background noise can be dangerous, because people tend to forget it is there.

"White noise, over time, can harden our arteries, or cause hypertension," researcher Maria Foraster said. "And little by little, this contributes also to changes in metabolism and cardiovascular disease."

Among the contributors to noise pollution are road traffic and other transportation (planes, trains, etc.), construction, security alarms, music, media, war and talkative people.

Noise pollution has a disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable: the poor, the elderly and the very young in marginalized communities who tend to live in poor-quality housing in high-traffic and industrial neighborhoods, near airports or landfills, with less access to green spaces.

In recent years, noise pollution caused by increased traffic, mining, fossil fuel extraction and the timber industry, has doubled in more than half of all U.S. national parks. Noise also impacts animal behavior, disturbing mating, migration patterns, the raising of offspring and location of prey, according to Thomas Myck, noise expert at the German Federal Environment Agency (UBA). This has a negative domino effect on plant life, because bird species confused by noise do not distribute seeds in areas they frequented in the past.

Researcher Sasha Komenko said all sound is not equal. Pleasant music or natural sounds such as gurgling brooks, leaves rustling in the breeze and birdsong, for example, can reduce stress, while the constant rumble of vehicles on the road can increase anxiety.

Scientists and urban planners around the world are studying ways to minimize noise pollution. Barcelona is creating more pedestrian-only zones and lower speed limits for vehicles where they are permitted. Along with Paris and other metropolitan centers, the Spanish city is utilizing noise radar to identify vehicles that emit too much noise. Berlin has added new cycle lanes and Pakistan has a 10 billion tree "tsunami" plan. Greater reliance on public means of transportation, rather than on individual vehicles, could reduce noise pollution over the long haul.

Tree belts, shrubbery, green walls and rooftop gardens can be used as natural sound barriers and provide more habitat options for wildlife, creating "restorative soundscapes" that can improve health outcomes for humans and other species.

More on this story can be found at these links:

[Barcelona is One of Europe's Loudest Cities. It's Trying to Turn Down the Volume.](#) *PRI*

[Scientists Sound Alarm Bells on Noise Pollution.](#) *Deutsche Welle*

[The World's Cities Must Take on the Cacophony of Noise Pollution.](#) *United Nations Environment Program*

## **The Big Questions**

1. Describe the noisiest place you have ever visited. The quietest place? What were the positive/negative aspects of your experience in those places?
2. When might using silence be a more effective way to make a point than using words?
3. According to Ecclesiastes 3:7, there is "a time to keep silent and a time to speak." How do you know whether it is time to be silent or time to speak?
4. When is it right to make a loud noise before the Lord, and when should we be silent in God's presence?
5. Habakkuk 2:20 says, "The LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him!" Why does God require humanity to be silent? For what should we listen in holy silence? How do we know we're not just hearing our own jumbled thoughts?

## **Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope**

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

### **Ecclesiastes 5:1-2**

*Guard your steps when you go to the house of God; to draw near to listen is better than the sacrifice offered by fools, for they do not know how to keep from doing evil. Never be rash with your mouth nor let your heart be quick to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven and you upon earth; therefore let your words be few.*  
(For context, read [Ecclesiastes 5:1-7.](#))

The writer of this text advises the reader to be cautious in God's presence, particularly about making careless promises to God. Far better to speak less and listen more! Too much talk can easily reveal how little we understand, and our loud pronouncements can lead us into sin (v. 6).

**Questions:** What Bible characters do you recall who would have benefited from heeding this advice?

How might human speech become a form of noise pollution at times? How can we guard against adding to this problem?

**Amos 5:15, 21-24**

*Hate evil and love good,  
and establish justice in the gate;  
it may be that the LORD, the God of hosts,  
will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.  
... I hate, I despise your festivals,  
and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.  
Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings,  
I will not accept them,  
and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals  
I will not look upon.  
Take away from me the noise of your songs;  
I will not listen to the melody of your harps.  
But let justice roll down like water  
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.  
(For context, read [Amos 5:10-24](#).)*

In this chapter, the prophet Amos described the devastating military losses Israel experienced and the futility of relying on human allies for help. He deplored the way the nation had turned "justice to wormwood" and brought "righteousness to the ground" (v. 7). Among their faults, he includes hatred of truth-tellers (v. 10) and building wealth on the backs of the poor (v. 11-12). At such a time, when they most needed to hear the words of the wise, "the prudent will keep silent" (v. 13).

Amos urges the people to love good and establish justice, which is far better, in God's eyes, than all the noisy sacrifices and loud, festive religious assemblies!

**Questions:** How does Amos' message in this text connect with Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 13:1, "If I speak in the tongues of humans and of angels but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal"?

How can you tell whether your worship is sound that pleases God, or noise that God finds offensive? What needs to happen in a community of faith to ensure that our worship is pleasing to God?

**1 Kings 19:11-13**

*He said, "Go out and stand on the mountain before the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by." Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind, and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake, and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire, and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" (For context, read [1 Kings 19:1-13](#).)*

Jezebel, wife of King Ahab, put out a contract on the life of the prophet Elijah, who fled in fear. Tired and anxious, he asked God to take his life (vv. 1-4). God's angel provided him with food and drink, and Elijah rested, gaining strength from God's provision (vv. 5-8).

After 40 days and nights, Elijah came to a cave, where God invited him to unburden his soul to him (vv. 9-10).

Then Elijah was instructed to stand on the mountain, since God was about to pass by. Several loud, bombastic natural events occurred, including a great wind, an earthquake and a raging fire, but only when there was "a sound of sheer silence," did Elijah rouse himself and go out to meet the Lord, who then spoke to him.

In Revelation 8, we read that "[w]hen the Lamb broke the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour." Afterward, an angel offered the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne of God, and the angel filled the censer "with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth, and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake." Then the seven angels got ready to blow seven trumpets ([Revelation 8:1-6](#)).

In both of these passages, the contrast between noise and silence is dramatic. If you've ever been to an orchestra or choral concert, you may have held your breath at a moment in a piece of music when the instruments or voices came to a rest in the composition. Perhaps you felt that the silence was actually "alive," almost as if it was creating space for you to hear whatever music would come next.

**Questions:** Why don't we always hear God in the noisy times of our lives? Why can silence be so startling? When has silence or quiet created space for you to listen more intently to whatever God was saying to you?

### **Luke 4:35**

*But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be quiet and come out of him!" Then the demon, throwing the man down before them, came out of him without doing him any harm. (For context, read [Luke 4:31-37](#).)*

### **Luke 18:39**

*Those who were in front sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he shouted even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" (For context, read [Luke 18:35-43](#).)*

We present these verses together to illustrate that Jesus did not treat all sound the same way. He rebuked the loud voices of those who were intent on causing harm to others, but listened to the loud cries of those desperate for help.

**Questions:** What guidance can you take from these verses about when to make a loud noise and when to be quiet in the presence of Jesus? What do you learn from these verses about the role we should play or not play in telling people to "shut up" about their concerns? When, if ever, might it be appropriate for us to rebuke loudmouths?

## **For Further Discussion**

1. Respond to this, from TWW team member, Frank Ramirez: "I grew up in a small house with eight children and two adults. I learned to study and sleep with noise. Silence is startling. I'm all in favor of legislation regulating noise pollution, but I notice that the command for us to keep silent as we approach the heavenly throne is somewhat negated by all the singing and praising that's going on with angels and creatures and multitudes.

"I live in a small town (Nappanee, Indiana). At this hour there is only light traffic, a few cars and the clip-clop of buggies with Amish passengers on their errands. But twice a day, around 5 a.m. and 3 p.m., there's the rush of traffic as County Road 7 turns into Interstate 7 for a half-hour. I should sit quietly and contemplate the benefits of silence, but instead, I'm thinking of putting a record on the turntable and listening to music for a while. It helps me think."

2. Salem International Christian Center, a church in Scotland founded by Nigerian Archbishop Sam Amaga, has received an eviction notice from the local government after neighbors filed a number of complaints about noisy worship services.

According to church representatives, the congregation responded to the concerns of members of the community by removing their drum kit and soundproofing their sanctuary. Sound experts say the church now meets community standards of acceptable noise levels, but the city council insists that the eviction should proceed.

A spokesperson for the church said: "We have had members of our congregation insulted when coming in for worship services and on some occasions children witnessed their parents being screamed at by

very hostile neighbors. This has made some families stay away from coming in for worship. ... We've now stopped using most things that enhanced our worship services."

When one person's worship is another person's noise, what should be done? What, if anything, could the church, the government and the community do to reach an agreement acceptable to all?

3. Think about this, from TWW team member, Mary Sells: "I'm thinking of Jesus going away to pray as one of the things we are meant to know about the value of silent, alone time with God.

"In Ignatian spirituality, one is meant to have a dedicated physical place of quiet every day to commune with God -- through prayer, scripture reading, etc. One retired priest I know has a recliner he calls his 'prayer chair' and he only uses it for that, and does so every morning.

"In contemplative prayer, one is taught to make peace with 'monkey brain' (the inability to totally shut all thoughts away), so that prayer can continue without the errant thoughts being a distraction, and to discern if any of those thoughts are meant to be brought into prayer."

Do you have a dedicated time and place for daily prayer, and, if so, is it a silent place to commune with God? Does silence or noise impact your ability to communicate to or receive communication from God?

4. Discuss this, from Delonte Gholston, Pastor of Peace Fellowship in Washington, D.C.:

"This past Sunday, rather than a time of teaching or preaching, I chose to moderate a conversation about the impact overturning *Roe v. Wade* is having in our church and community. I kept struggling with what to say and how to say it, and God kept saying, 'there is a time to speak, and a time to listen.' Then, out of the blue a sister showed up that morning in church who I had last seen in L.A. [when we worked on a] project ... called, 'Listen'. So I realized it would be best not to go on with 'business as usual' and truly take the time to hear from God's people.

"Like many congregations, we have people with various perspectives and interpretations of life and scripture. What transpired was truly God-honoring and holy. We actually held each other. We listened to each other. ... It was a rich and beautiful expression of God's kingdom here on earth. We did not all agree. Yet it was amazing to see how willing everyone was to walk together and to just be given the space to talk about something we don't normally just make space to talk about in church, on a Sunday morning."

5. Comment on this, from TWW team member Liz Antonson: "It is 1:30 a.m., so I am heading for bed. It is 'dead' silent in my apartment, no sounds of other residents, no sounds of traffic, no sounds of neighbors' dogs, not even the many crows with whom I share this little city. The noisiest place I have experienced? Church services featuring 'music' that resembled an unskilled garage band with the drum section so loud it could be used on an ancient military field for battle movements! I am very disturbed by the cacophony that is mistaken for worship music."

## Responding to the News

For more on this topic, click on the interactive webpage, ["Listening to Cities,"](#) to learn about noise pollution in four major global cities.

**Prayer** suggested by [Psalm 131:2](#); [Lamentations 3:26](#); [Mark 4:39](#); [Psalm 46](#)

O God, in turbulent times, help us to wait, quietly and unafraid, for your salvation. Give us the strength to calm ourselves and to quiet our souls as we lean on you as a satisfied, weaned child leans on its mother, confident in your faithful presence with us. You who silenced the howling wind and the raging sea, help us to be still, and in the stillness, to know that you are God, exalted among the nations, exalted in the earth. Amen.