

I read that having an abortion, or assisting in one (voting for abortion rights too?) automatically excommunicates you from the Church. Where is this written? Also, is that the same for any willful murder? (I heard a bishop has to hear your confession for absolution.)

The Church's regulations regarding the subject of excommunication are found in Canon Law. Canon Law, however, can be very difficult to read and interpret. It is sometimes more fruitful to go to the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) for our answers. The Catechism states: **“Formal cooperation in an abortion constitutes a grave offense. The Church attaches the canonical penalty of excommunication to this crime against human life. ‘A person who procures a completed abortion incurs excommunication *latae sententiae*,’ ‘by the very commission of the offense,’ and subject to the conditions provided by Canon Law.”** (CCC #2272) To be subject to this penalty, however, the person must be at least 16 years old, be aware that they were violating the precept of the law, and not be coerced by force or fear of violence.

Canon Law (Can. #1329) implies that this penalty extends to accomplices who, without their assistance, the abortion would not have been performed. One can wonder if this applies to a Catholic pro-choice politician who votes to enact laws which enable abortions to take place that otherwise wouldn't have been performed; or to a Catholic whose vote for a pro-choice candidate indirectly enables abortions to be performed. It is an interesting consideration, but I do not think that the law is clear in this regard.

Unlike our society, the Church treats abortion as a much more serious crime than other crimes against life, and the automatic penalty of excommunication is not incurred for other murders.

You are correct with regard to absolution. The Catechism states: **“Certain particularly grave sins incur excommunication, the most severe ecclesiastical penalty, which impedes the reception of the sacraments and the exercise of certain ecclesiastical acts, and for which absolution consequently cannot be granted, according to canon law, except by the Pope, the bishop of the place or priests authorized by them.”** (CCC #1463)

If you would like to see how these matters are addressed directly in Canon Law, you can find the complete Code of Canon Law on the Vatican's website at: <http://www.vatican.va/archive/cdc/index.htm>. Canons of particular interest on this issue are 1398, 1323, 1329, 1397, and 1370.

Deacon Joe