

## On baptism and the adoption of our children, both born and unborn

**Resolved**, that the presbytery of \_\_\_\_\_ overtures the 217<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (2006) to direct the Stated Clerk to send the following amendment to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative votes: Shall *Book of Order* W-2.3008b be amended to add the following language (addition in italics), so that the section reads as follows:

b. The Baptism of children witnesses to the truth that God's love claims people before they are able to respond in faith: "*God pronounces that he adopts our infants as his children, before they are born.*" (John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, IV:15:20)

### Rationale

It has been the presumption throughout the church's history that the unborn are human beings created by God in his image, and are therefore to be protected. Furthermore, John Calvin understood unborn children to be part of the covenant community and an example of God's grace. The unborn child illustrates that we do nothing to become a chosen child of God; God does everything. The particularly reformed idea of grace is expressed in the line from the *Institutes* that is proposed to be added. The line strengthens the understanding of Grace. In addition, early Christians were known and especially noted for resisting abortion and caring for the babies left to die by those in the societies in which they resided.

Our confessions teach that when infants are baptized, "the congregation, as well as the parents, has a special obligation to nurture them in the Christian life, leading them to make, by a public profession, a personal response to the love of God shown forth in their baptism." The line to be added is an aid to parents as they anticipate the arrival of their children, knowing that they already, before their births and before their baptisms, are part of the believing community.

This sentence to be added is consistent with Scripture's recognition of God's relationship with us before we are born:

Psalm 139:13-16 (ESV)

*For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb.*

*I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.*

*Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.*

*My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there were none of them.*

Jeremiah 1:5 (ESV)

*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,*

*and before you were born I consecrated you;*

*I appointed you a prophet to the nations.*

Galatians 1:15-16 (ESV)

*But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone;*

This sentence by Calvin to be added also reinforces the reformed teaching that "elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, who worketh when, and where, and how he pleaseth." (6.066) The sentence offers comfort and reassurance to parents whose children are still born or who die shortly after birth.

This sentence encourages members of the Church to seek the protection and care of all children, both born and unborn. Current General Assembly policy says, "The strong Christian presumption is that since all life is precious to God, we are to preserve and protect it." (Problem Pregnancies and Abortion, 1992, p. 11.)