

The Pittsburgh Presbytery Task Force to Study Abortion

Introduction: Leaving the Bumper Stickers Behind

It's one of those "bumper sticker" issues. You know, the kind of controversial subjects that are forbidden at the family dinner table, or from the pulpit, and yet, we somehow proclaim our views on this topic, and others like it, from the backs of our cars. And unfortunately, we are left with only the pithy statements about this subject that can fit on a six inch sticker. If your sticker says "pro-life," then you are looked upon as someone who is against women's rights, a biblical fundamentalist, and someone who is intolerant of anyone who would make mistakes. If your sticker says "pro-choice," then you are a murderous baby killer, or worse, one of those "feminists." These sound bites have only divided us further, and cemented us into our status quo.

It was with this in mind that I volunteered to be a part of a task force set up by the Pittsburgh Presbytery to readdress this issue of abortion, and to reexamine the Presbyterian Church's stance on the issue in light of new technologies and new spiritual insights that may have arisen concerning this subject since the Presbytery formally addressed this issue in 1992. This task force was made up of four women who met every other week for four plus months to examine this issue through the lenses of Scripture, faith, and social justice.

We were, and in some cases, still are, a divided group. Some of us saw how very complex this issue can be in light of poverty, patriarchy, and moral ambiguity. Others of us were guided by the light of our convictions that life is something that cannot be compromised, no matter what the situation may be. And some of us were still trying to determine our place in the issue. The first few weeks we met, we tried to hide our "sound bites" and "bumper stickers" close to our chests, our hackles raised for the moment when we felt our positions threatened. But eventually, we were able to lower our defenses, and, without compromising ourselves, actually talk about our perspectives on the issue. And strangely, even with the voices of the pro-lifers or the pro-choicers still screaming loudly in our heads, we were able to see spaces opening where the other side just might have a point. We found ourselves saying things like, "I can see where you're coming from, and although it would make members of my pro-life/choice side of the issue cringe if they heard this language used, I can accept it." We could accept it because we were in true dialogue, with true care for the other. We had left the bumper stickers at home, and when we actually looked each other in the eye, we realized the commonality between us, and that we all, no matter on what side of the issue we fell, were striving for God's truth in sincere, honest, non-manipulative ways.

As a result, we all accepted that abortion, in addition to many other things, is, firstly, a *corporate* sin. And Jesus is *more* concerned with this kind of sin than any other, for it is from this kind of sin that smaller sins arise. Consider the story of the woman caught in the act of adultery. These men were willing to stone a woman based upon what they saw as a personal sin. But Jesus turns it back on them. He forces them to see where they have been participants in the greater sins of prejudice, neglect, and apathy that may have created a world where others feel that they have no options.

We accepted that, in a perfect world, in the Kingdom of God, there would be no abortion. We acknowledged that, to some extent, abortion is a harmful and traumatic experience for all involved,

including the woman who feels like this is her only option. And we realized that we are all complicit in a greater Sin: the sin of not providing women the resources they need in order to feel supported in their pregnancies, the sin of ignoring this issue and isolating women in the decision-making process, the sin of pretending that there are not women who are struggling and hurting with the scars of abortion (no matter if they decided to continue the pregnancy or not) sitting in our pews today. We all acknowledged that if we put down our stones and were more supportive of our families, especially those in financial, spiritual, and emotional need, there would be fewer women who would feel that abortion was their only option.

And, it seems, that options are what the pro-choice movement, when it is at its best, is truly all about. Can we truly be “pro-choice,” as our denomination claims it is, if women feel like abortion is their only option? What would happen if we were to follow through with the baptismal promises that we, as a church, offer to our children and their parents? *What if we, as a church family, were truly to receive children (born and pre-born) as a blessing from God?* What if we were to show that we are a supportive community, no matter what *an individual’s* decisions may be or have been? Could we see a glimpse of the Kingdom here on earth?

Does this mean that we feel like abortion should be illegal, or that our denomination should take an official pro-life stance? Our group, as a whole, did not come to this conclusion. But, from our different perspectives on this divisive issue, we came together to say that abortions *can* be reduced, that the Church can do more to support women, whatever their decisions may be, and that we *can* talk about this issue further, looking at all of its complexities, without resorting to assumptions, attacks, and pithy arguments set out just for the sake of winning. What if we were to become a denomination that stood together, somehow, impossibly, to say “neither do I condemn you,” and now “we will go, and strive to sin no more”?

Background

The session of Covenant Presbyterian Church in Jackson, Mississippi appointed a task force to study the topic of abortion in 2005. Task force members used a process of discernment combining prayer and study of Scripture with other resources: guest speakers, medical personnel, books, and one another. The truth they discovered through their study prompted them to write an overture to the 217th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Birmingham, AL, June 2006. In response to the overture the General Assembly approved an alternate resolution from the Health Issues Committee recommending that:

... all presbyteries create task forces to replicate their process of prayer and study, that hearts and minds may be open to God’s wisdom through Scripture, other resources, and one another, and to direct the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly to communicate this action to the presbyteries.

Our Purpose

To comply with the alternative resolution recommended by the Health Issues Committee of the 217th General Assembly (2006) by establishing a task force in the Pittsburgh Presbytery to study abortion using a similar process of discernment.

Our Mission

To study abortion with hearts and minds open to God's wisdom through Scripture, other resources, and one another in order to discern how God would lead us to act as a church community in dealing with the issue of abortion and pregnancies that involve problems.

Our Ministry

To serve the great ends of the Church through spiritual fellowship with one another, promote social justice and righteousness, and exhibit the Kingdom of Heaven by proclaiming, with our lips and our lives, the truth set forth in God's Holy Word.

As followers of Christ in a church always reforming, we expect to maintain open dialogue, discussion, and debate regarding the social concerns that are impacting our society and the effects they have on the ministries of the church.

While understanding that the church may be divided on the issue of abortion, we do not believe it is divided in its willingness to seek the truth on moral issues through prayer, education, and discernment of God's word. When the church is divided on any issue, it is imperative that we come together to study God's Word with humility and mutual respect, acknowledging the diversity of our convictions, thereby demonstrating our unity in Christ.

Our Process

The Task Force met 11 times from September 2008 – April 2009, each time for a 2-hour session. Components of each study time have been prayer, study of Scripture and other resources, and dialogue and deliberation. In addition to reading Scripture together and sharing our insights and reflections, we sought help from books, documents, and one guest theological ethicist. We have focused mostly on the following areas of discussion and learning together:

- God's role in creating and sustaining life, and the contrasting destruction of life by Satan and sin, both personal and institutional
- The value and identity of human life, born and pre-born as reflected in the Old and New Testaments
- Principles of human decision-making in the complexities surrounding pregnancy
- The role of faith and trust in God when faced with difficult circumstances
- Historic church pronouncements on abortion and current PC(USA) policies
- How the church may reduce abortions by making alternatives to abortion practical

We have attempted to address in our time together the following goals:

1. Through prayer and study of the scriptures, determine the Bible's relevant teaching on:

- when human life begins
- the meaning of being human
- prohibitions against the deliberate taking of a human life
- the Christian obligation to “Love our neighbor as our self”
- God’s concern for the most vulnerable in society
- how Jesus responded to difficult issues of law and grace

and to discern:

- what principles found in scripture relate to abortion
- if abortion could be considered morally acceptable in the overall context of God’s Word

2. Examine national and presbytery policies
3. Summarize and critique the GA’s policy on abortion based on the above study
4. Share the conclusions we have drawn from Scripture about abortion
5. Recommend actions we believe Scripture calls us to take as a result of what we have learned

As a result, we began to narrow our goals to those areas where we were able to move forward in unity. We have not always been of the same mind, but have found significant areas around which we can agree. We share a concern that the church hold a greater sense of awe and reverence for human life in the womb, that we find ways to build a sense of value and esteem in our children and young adults through church ministry, and that the church find ways for practical and tangible caring that offer real alternatives to abortion and help address the reasons that women choose abortion.

Conclusions

We are grateful for the overture brought to the 217th General Assembly that resulted in the creation of this task force. We have found the process to be an experience of honest communication (communion) between people of faith who disagree – and a “foretaste” of what God intends for all of us.

We have not resolved all the questions. Perhaps that is the point. A living faith requires our on-going personal and communal struggle as the church to “grow up into ... the full measure of the stature of Christ” (*cf Eph. 4:11-16*) as the church.

While we found much consensus regarding the narrative portion of the PCUSA statement, that consensus did not extend to how we advocate social policy (with senators and congressmen), because matters of conscience cannot be dictated. When the church advocates publicly for a position that offends the conscience of some of its members, it creates an untenable position for those members. The result is a deepening of disagreement and tension which harms the peace and unity of the whole body. Those whose conscience is assaulted must either voice their disagreement or leave the denomination (as many have over the years on the issue of abortion). Those who speak out against

abortion are often accused of being ‘one issue’ Christians, harsh, disagreeable, and even sometimes encouraged to leave. Those on the pro-choice side of the spectrum in the church are often accused of being pro-abortion and would probably be offended if the church were pro-life as that position is politically assumed.

And so, perhaps, we lobby the government to do what the church ought to be doing – it’s easier. But in doing so, we hand over the church’s purpose of being a *redemptive* community.

From the report of the Special Committee on Problem Pregnancies and Abortion (1992) we re-emphasize these points to highlight our conviction that abortion is a church issue, not just a socio-political one:

- d. We call upon Presbyterians to work for a decrease in the number of problem pregnancies, thereby decreasing the number of abortions.
- f. We are disturbed by abortions that seem to be elected only as a convenience or to ease embarrassment. We affirm that abortion should not be used as a method of birth control.
- l. The strong Christian presumption is that since all life is precious to God, we are to preserve and protect it. Abortion ought to be an option of last resort. The large number of abortions in this society is a grave concern to the church.
- m. The Christian community must be concerned about and address the circumstances that bring a woman to consider abortion as the best available option. Poverty, unjust societal realities, sexism, racism, and inadequate supportive relationships may render a woman virtually powerless to choose freely.^[1]

These led us to ask: Has the PCUSA gone beyond saying, “abortion is complex, personal, we will walk with you” to saying, “abortion can be a good decision”?

From the Minority Report of the same Committee:

But there are also situations, although they are in the minority, when women feel that their economic or psychological or family situation makes it impossible for them to bear and care for a child. Some such mothers may have a high sense of responsibility toward the life in their womb, and it seems to us that it is in these cases that the church has failed in its ministry. Rather than supporting such women, rather than opening multiple centers throughout the country that can minister to such women by giving them health care and financial support and adoption options or continuing nurture after the child is born, the church has far too often, by its indifference and implied attitudes, said to such women, “Abort your child.” We Presbyterians stand guilty, along with many other denominations, of such sin before our God, and we should, beginning now, repent and start to correct such a situation.^[2]

We are convinced we could reduce the number of abortions simply by acknowledging the pain – listening to the stories and voices of the women who have personally struggled with problem or unwanted pregnancy, coming alongside them and sharing their pain, bringing the suffering to the light (asking God to redeem it) and walking with one another through the valley of the shadow...

Too many of us in the church avoid the hard conversations about difficult issues, and so inhibit (cripple?) our ability to be the community of Christ. How can we journey with one another through such a complicated and difficult and painful choice if we cannot even talk with one another about it? And if we leave the decision-making to the individual – as if it were a private issue – we fail,

miserably, to count the full cost of the decision's impact on society and the corporate nature of the church. And we heap up the hurt and anger and sorrow that perpetuates violence in the world and bears false witness to our God.

We cannot simply take a stand. We have to make a difference.

From Bumper Sticker to Real Conversation – A Resource for beginning the conversation in our congregations

We strive to be a redemptive community in our churches, working towards meeting those baptismal promises that our congregations pledge towards each member. We believe that in order to be a redemptive community in the difficult and emotional issues concerning abortion, we must have hard conversations where faith and life really meet. It is through breaking the conspiracy of silence that revolves around abortion that we, as a church community, can begin to acknowledge the difficulties surrounding this issue, and begin to address them. We feel that if each community were to lay out a vision for a kind of Christian community where there is a sense of corporate responsibility for the pain and suffering caused by abortion, we could begin a healing process that would acknowledge the pain, admit the moral difficulties, and begin to break the silence that has left individuals suffering alone. This issue has been set aside in church communities so that people are left with a sense that they may only deal with these issues in the detached, public, and political realm of governmental affairs. This privatization prohibits us from being able to discuss the issue beyond the realm of the political. To break this cycle of silence and dismissal, we propose that every church community begin the difficult, but necessary conversation about the topic of abortion. A conversation can only work, however, when differences of opinion are invited, acknowledged and heard. To this end, we suggest the following questions as a tool to guide conversation:

1. Although the Bible doesn't discuss abortion per se, it does speak volumes to God's relationship to all life, including the unborn. With humility in realizing the complexity of our church's cannon, discuss what the Bible says is God's view of human life, and how we should treat it. Does your church community believe that the Bible has anything to say about abortion in our present day? Read together *Presbyterian Understanding and Use of Holy Scripture*, and talk together about your individual perspective of reading Scripture. The scripture attached to this report can be an interesting starting point for discussion.
2. Discuss the possible tension between upholding Christian moral standards and embodying God's grace. What are our Christian moral standards, and to what extent should we try to emphasize those standards to our community? When and where does God's grace come into play when thinking about and enacting, or failing to enact, those standards?
3. In the midst of a broken, fallen world, we are called to "exhibit the Kingdom of Heaven to the world." Are our eyes open to the ways in which the church actually participates in preventing true Christian community? How can we create a community where those who struggle feel safe enough to share freely? Work together to give examples that are as specific as possible. What are some concrete ways that your church community can further encourage living in the fullness of Christ concerning this issue?

4. Study the current PCUSA standards and recommendations concerning abortion. Use both the majority as well as the minority reports presented to the 1992 General Assembly of the PCUSA. For more information, see appendix. What is your community's view on these present stances?
5. Study the scientific perspective on the issue of abortion. With humility and openness, discuss together each individual's point of view about when life begins, and to what extent God orchestrates this life. Have medical technology, genetic/embryonic testing, and infertility advancements changed the landscape with which we make these decisions on abortion? If so, how?
6. Discuss the private versus public elements of this issue. To what extent is abortion a private decision, and to what extent does it affect others in our church and in our society as a whole? To what extent is God affected by our decisions about abortion?
7. Acknowledge that one in four people in our pews has been affected by an abortion to one extent or another. How can we de-privatize the issue of abortion so that we can talk about it, and therefore walk with those who are struggling? How can we do this while reflecting the loving grace of God?
8. Listen to the voices and stories of women who have struggled with the choice of abortion. What can we hear from these stories, and to what extent do they complicate or simplify the issue of abortion?
9. In what ways has the church community been complicit in the suffering of those who have struggled with the issue of abortion? Examine how Jesus dealt with social issues, and the issue of institutionalized sin, that is, sin that has come about due to the inability of the whole community to respond to social issues in a way that values "the least of these."
10. What are concrete ways that your community can stand up for, or against, this issue of abortion? What ways can you do this without alienating those on either side of the issue?
11. Read John 8 together, specifically the story of the "Woman Caught in Adultery." Imagine that instead of being caught in adultery, this woman has had an abortion. What do you think Jesus would say to her and to those protesting around her? How should our church respond in light of your conclusions?

A Resource for Practical & Tangible Congregational Ministry

There are many concrete and tangible ways a congregation may make parenting or planning an adoption more accessible to a woman who is pregnant and in need of help. The following ideas are just some of the ways your church might provide the love, support, and encouragement needed by a woman who finds herself in an unexpected pregnancy. She may be troubled about her own lack of spiritual, emotional, and material resources to meet her needs and those of the child in her womb. Your congregation may have more and better ideas. It is not so important what resources you have or exactly how you offer ministry and support, but that you do something to show love & care!

1. **Send a clear visual community message that children are valued and human life**, at every stage of development and every level of ability, is cherished. When a congregation visibly supports and cares for its young, old, sick, and limited, men and women will be better

encouraged to attempt the task of parenting. This is especially true in situations where a child may be diagnosed *in utero* with special needs or health issues.

- ❖ Place pictures of congregation members representing all ages, sizes, special needs, ethnicities, disabilities, even sonograms of those yet unborn, in a prominent foyer or hallway. Refresh the pictures often, adding new members.
 - ❖ Include the very young and the very old in the regular life and worship of the church.
 - Include children in worship leadership as readers of scripture, leaders of prayer, and participants in music.
 - Invite children up front for a children’s sermon. During baptisms or the welcoming of new members, let them sit on the floor with their teachers/parents close to the action.
 - Be attentive to children at fellowship gatherings, including them in the life of the church family and not off in a separate room.
 - ❖ Develop relationships between those with special needs and the church community. Some churches do this through a special needs ministry (Special Friends) that builds friendships and provides links to the church family.
 - ❖ Provide support for parents of those with special needs and offer opportunities for relief from their duties of care.
 - ❖ Provide ministries that offer targeted support to parents.
 - Plan for childcare during regular activities of the church including service opportunities such as choir rehearsal or session meetings.
 - Offer parenting classes, support groups, Parent’s night out, and MOPS (Mother’s of Pre-Schoolers).
 - Sponsor family fun nights with movies, popcorn, and games for all ages. Engage youth groups and seniors ministries in the planning & preparation.
 - ❖ Educate your congregation about the benefits of adoption. Provide opportunities for those on all sides of the adoption issue to share their stories. Allow representatives from an adoption agency to educate your congregation and remove prejudices against adoption.
2. **Prepare and train volunteers as a pregnancy response team**, who are committed to “wrap-around” care for a woman in an unintended pregnancy. As many as 80% of women who choose abortion do so because they feel it is their only option. What they often feel is that they are unable or inadequate to parent or go through the pregnancy alone. If even one person makes a commitment to help, a woman will often find the courage to carry the pregnancy to term.

A word about training: This need not be a group of experts, although congregation members with legal, medical, and social work expertise may find this a place they will want to use their skills in ministry. It is important that this group take responsibility to become informed about

services in your area and the particular needs that are present in a “crisis pregnancy.” It is wise to invite speakers with counseling experience (your local pregnancy care center may help with this) to advise you on how to best assist those who are emotionally troubled by their circumstance of pregnancy. Local ob-gyns, social service workers, and adoption agencies can help to educate your group of volunteers. When these resources are not available, however, offering simple love and care can make a tremendous difference. Your team should do all they are able to become prepared, but what is most important is availability and commitment to care. Your pastoral staff should be involved in providing spiritual leadership and care for the response team as well as those to whom you minister.

- ❖ Appoint a contact whose first name and phone number are prominently displayed in the Sunday bulletin, newsletters, on bulletin boards, etc. She will be the one who will act as liaison between the woman and the response team and other area resources.
- ❖ The team of volunteers-at-the-ready may include any or all of the following:
 - Drivers who will provide transportation to doctor’s & counseling appointments
 - Christian counselors
 - Parish nurses or medical providers willing to provide free or reduced fee services
 - Lawyers willing to assist with adoption plans
 - Those willing to make calls and compile a list of area resources, services, and named contacts (*Note: it is important to choose services and providers that share the views of your congregation on the value of human life. ‘Pro-Life’ churches, for example, will want to choose services that will not refer for or provide abortion.*)
 - Someone will act as a liaison with local pregnancy care services
 - Thrift store shoppers who will find gently used baby & maternity clothing, cribs and other baby furniture and items as needed.
 - A host who will provide a room in their home as needed. This can be renovated, furnished, and decorated by the whole church and kept specifically for a woman who is pregnant and needs housing. Policies that protect both the woman and the host family should be pre-determined and agreed to in writing.
 - A gifted hostess who will plan a baby shower for the woman, or if that is uncomfortable, will put a crib in the foyer of the church and request gifts for an anonymous woman in need.

3. Establish auxiliary ministries of help that ease the burden of single parenting. When ministries like the following exist in a church they send a message to unexpected parents that this is a church that will provide assistance that I may need in raising this child for the next 18 years.

- ❖ Education – Provide tutoring, childcare, literacy programs or other assistance that will help single moms continue their education during and following pregnancy.

- ❖ Child care – Many congregations already offer preschool programs and might be able to incorporate infant care and a need-based sliding payment scale to help single parents.
 - ❖ Parenting classes – Often those who become pregnant unexpectedly are from homes where they did not have a good parent model. The church has a great opportunity to affect society and families by offering classes on becoming a good parent.
 - ❖ After school programs – If a church has the resources, providing an after school program with homework helpers and safe activities can be a wonderful aid to those struggling to make ends meet and parent alone.
 - ❖ Job training – For those women who become pregnant before they have an established income, one of the greatest gifts they can receive is training in a skill that enables them to find steady work.
 - ❖ Parish nurses – Parish nurses can be a wonderful resource for the entire congregation, but are particularly important to young families who may not have health insurance or the means to see a doctor for every sniffle.
4. **Support and care for those grieving pregnancy loss and stillbirth.** When a child dies in the womb, or is diagnosed with an illness or genetic disorder incompatible with life, or is born and does not live, congregations often are uncertain how to respond. The parents of the child may feel isolated, some experience feelings of inadequacy or guilt, many do not sense permission to grieve publicly although they have a tremendous sense of loss.
- ❖ When a child is diagnosed *in utero* with a disability or disease that is incompatible with life, parents need not automatically choose abortion. Groups like Alexandra’s House (<http://www.alexandrashouse.com/>) provide perinatal hospice, helping parents through emotional and spiritual support, honoring the life of their baby by taking family pictures at birth, and planning a memorial service. Parents who are able to treasure even a few minutes or hours of a child’s life tend to find meaning and a sense of purpose for the child’s life and a cherished memory.
 - ❖ It is important for the church to provide support and allow room for grieving the loss of a child through miscarriage or abortion. These are two very different experiences and the needs for healing will be experienced in different ways. What is least helpful is silence. Offering an annual memorial service for pregnancy loss is one way to begin to break the silence and offer a place for spiritual and emotional healing. See the attached resources which may help you in planning a memorial service.
 - ❖ What would happen if the church were to respond to pregnancy loss as we do when any other beloved member of the congregation dies: by bringing casseroles, expressions of shared sorrow, and warm hugs? By responding in the same way to miscarriage, abortion, and stillbirth, we communicate that something tragic has happened and that the church family cares about it. We affirm the value of the life lost, even when that life was yet unseen by the community.

References Used by the Task Force

Scripture (see bibliography for specific references)

The Book of Confessions

The Being and Nature of the Unborn Child, by Thomas F. Torrance

Not My Own: Abortion & the Marks of the Church, by Terry Schlossberg & Elizabeth Achtemeier

A Love for Life, by Dennis Di Mauro

Problem Pregnancies and Abortion, Majority Report of the 204th General Assembly (1992)

The Minority Report of the Special Committee on Problem Pregnancies and Abortion (1992)

Presbyterian Understanding and Use of Holy Scripture: Biblical Authority and Interpretation, Office of the General Assembly

Abortion in Good Faith: A Reformed Approach to Reproductive Options, by Gloria Albrecht

Responsibility and Respect: A Presbyterian Perspective on Problem Pregnancies, by Clara & George Morgan

Guest Speaker on Genetics & Abortion Ethics: Dr. Ronald Cole-Turner, Professor of Theology & Ethics, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

Pittsburgh Presbytery Task Force Members

Marie Bowen, Chair - Elder, Elfinwild Presbyterian Church

Jenn Frayer-Griggs - Director of Child & Youth Ministries, Sixth Presbyterian Church

Rev. Laurie Milligan – Recently Interim Pastor, Beulah Presbyterian Church

Rev. Karen L. Battle - Director, Justice Ministries & Mission, Pittsburgh Presbytery

^[1] *Problem Pregnancies and Abortion*, I. E, 1. d,f,l,m., (p. 11), Office of the General Assembly, PC(USA).

^[2] Minutes of the 204th General Assembly, Part 1, 27.206, p. 385, PC(USA), 1992.

^[3] Cochrane, Linda, *Forgiven & Set Free*, and *Healing a Father's Heart*, Baker Book House Co, 2003. This resource leads men and women through a Bible Study focused on the character of God and leading to forgiveness and healing for the pain and guilt resulting from abortion.

Appendix A

Where can I find information on current PC(USA) social witness policy on abortion?

PC(USA) website (www.pcusa.org)

- Abortion 101 (<http://www.pcusa.org/101/101-abortion.htm>)
- Report of the Special Committee on *Problem Pregnancies & Abortion* (1992)
 - Majority Report: <http://www.pcusa.org/oga/publications/problem-pregnancies.pdf>
 - GA Action with Majority & Minority Reports: Minutes of the 204th General Assembly, PC(USA), Part 1, Journal pp. 65-73, 357-390
- Social Witness Policy Compilation online ([http://index.pcusa.org/NXT/gateway.dll?fn=default.htm\\$f=templates\\$vid=default\\$3.0](http://index.pcusa.org/NXT/gateway.dll?fn=default.htm$f=templates$vid=default$3.0))

Actions of the General Assembly since 1992 related to problem pregnancy & Abortion

1997

Partial birth abortion declared to be of grave moral concern. (vote 390 yes to 217 no)

That the 209th General Assembly (1997) offer a word of counsel to the church and our culture that the procedure known as intact dilation and extraction (commonly called “partial birth” abortion) of a baby who could live outside the womb is of grave moral concern and should be considered only if the mother’s physical life is endangered by the pregnancy.

1999

- Approved an amended overture to support adoption (amendments moved it from active to passive mode). The amended version overtures the PC(USA):

To take specific steps to encourage Presbyterians to become more involved in providing foster care and/or adoption of children with special needs who currently reside in Presbyterian-related children’s homes or other foster care facilities and to provide support for foster and adoptive families, taking at least the following measures:

1. *Direct and equip with the necessary resources already existing entities within the denomination, namely the Child Advocacy Office and the Presbyterian Child Advocacy Network to:*
 - a. *Make available a list of Presbyterian-affiliated children’s homes with populations of children eligible for adoption;*
 - b. *Assist in making known to Presbyterians the availability of those children for adoption and the needs of older and special needs children in foster care through presbytery newsletters, Internet pages, and local church communication networks.*
 - c. *Assist in bringing prospective parents together with children eligible for adoption;*
 - d. *Encourage local churches and presbyteries to offer support for church members building their families through adoption of older and special needs children;*

- e. *Make known the availability and the process for obtaining a Shared Grant offered through the presbytery and the Board of Pensions in cases where financial needs can be relieved.*
 - f. *Develop and cultivate resources within the PCUSA to support and prepare families receiving older or special needs children into their families.*
2. *Direct the already existing entities within the PCUSA to share information with special organizations or groups of Presbyterians that have a ministry commitment to adoption and that Presbyterians be encouraged to establish programs to encourage adoption in cooperation with local social services.*

Recognize that Presbyterian-affiliated children's homes have served and continue to serve many children who are not appropriate for adoption or who are in need of temporary placement outside of their homes, and that the PCUSA continue to financially support these important ministries of the church.

2001

- Approved a voluntary adoption fund

"1. Direct the General Assembly Council to establish within two years a special fund for adoption to which voluntary contributions may be made by churches, individuals, and others, for the purpose of providing needs-based financial assistance to Presbyterians who are pursuing adoption, and to report back to the 215th General Assembly (2003)."

2. *Make know to synods, presbyteries, and churches of the PCUSA the existence of such adoption fund in a timely and regular manner.*
3. *Distribute moneys from such an adoption fund in the form of grants and/or interest-free loans to applicants who are pursuing adoptions, through a confidential application process.*

2002

- Responded to an overture asking Theology and Worship to develop resources for women who have experienced abortion by referring it to ACWC and ACSWP with the following comment:

Instruct the Office of Theology and Worship to prepare, in conversation with ACWSWP and ACWC and other PCUSA related groups including Presbyterians Affirming Reproductive Options (PARO) PASPM, PPL and other resource groups, pastoral resources for our Presbyterian congregations that are based on the knowledge that there are women and men in our local churches who suffer from adverse spiritual, emotional, psychological, and physical effects of abortion and are in need of the compassionate and restorative ministry of the gospel.

2006

- An overture from Redstone Presbytery was amended to add some of the "nuanced" language from the 2004 statement on late-term abortion. Another amendment clarified that this statement would supersede only the 2002 & 2003 statements on late-term pregnancy and not the 1992 policy. The amended overture was approved by a vote of 381/17/6. The following paragraph is a significant change from previous policy on late-term abortion:

"We affirm that the lives of viable unborn babies---those well-developed enough to survive outside the womb if delivered ought to be preserved and cared for and not aborted. In cases

where problems of life or health of the mother arise in a pregnancy, the church supports efforts to protect the life and health of both the mother and the baby. When late-term pregnancies must be terminated, we urge decisions intended to deliver the baby alive. We look to our churches to provide pastoral and tangible support to women in problem pregnancies and to surround these families with a community of care. We affirm adoption as a provision for women who deliver children they are not able to care for, and ask our churches to assist in seeking loving, Christian, adoptive families.”

Appendix B – Partial Scriptural Bibliography

<u>Scripture</u>	<u>Book of Confessions</u>
God as Creator, Source of life, Sustainer, Owner	
Genesis 1:1	Nicene 1.1
John 1:3; 3:3-7	Apostles' Creed 2.1
2 Corinthians 5:17	Scots 3.01
Revelation 21:1-2, 5	Shorter Catechism 7.009, 7.010
Isaiah 45:9-11, 18	Larger Catechism 7.125
Acts 4:24	Nicene 1.2
Ecclesiastes 11:5	Apostles' 2.2
Job 10:8-12; 31:15	Scots 3.03, 3.09
Psalms 119:73	Scots 3.12
Exodus 4:11	Apostles' Creed 2.3
	Nicene 1.3
	Second Helvetic 5.032
	Westminster 6.022
	1967 9.15-17
	Brief Statement of Faith 10.3
God's ownership of life	
Psalms 24:1; 50:11; 100:3	
1Cor. 6:19-20; 10:26	
Ezekiel 18:4	
Contrasting Satan as Destroyer of life	
John 3:16-17, 8:44, 10:10	Scots 3.03; 3.10
Revelation 12:1-17	Second Helvetic 5.033
Jeremiah 19:4-5	
Psalms 106:34-39	
Ezekiel 16:20-22	
Exodus 1:15-16	
Matthew 2:13-18	
Proverbs 8:36	
The value of human life, Created in God's image	
Genesis 1:26-30; 2:19, 20; & 9:6	Scots 3.02
Psalms 8:4-8	Heidelberg 4.006
Job 10:8-12 & 31:13-15	Second Helvetic 5.034
Matthew 6:26, 10:29-31	Westminster 6.023
1 Corinthians 15:39	Smaller Catechism 7.010

I Corinthians 3:16-17	Larger Catechism 7.127
<u>Scripture</u>	<u>Book of Confessions</u>
The value of human life, cont.	
John 3:16	
Matthew 18:2-4	
James 2:5-9	
Ephesians 4:24	
Prohibitions against taking of human life	
Exodus 20:13; 21:12; 23:7	Scots 3.14
Leviticus 18:21 & 20:2,4,5	Heidelberg 4.105 - 4.107
Genesis 9:5-6	Shorter Catechism 7.067 - 7.069
Exodus 21:22-25	Larger Catechism 7.244 – 7.246
Numbers 35:33-34	
Proverbs 24:11-12	
Proverbs 6:17	
Deuteronomy 27:25	
Amos 1:13	
2 Samuel 4:11	
Ezekiel 20:31	
Jeremiah 32:35	
The treatment of the pre-born in Scripture	
OT references to pre-born	
Genesis 4:1; 16:11,12 ; 25:22-28; 29:33-35; 30:7	
Judges 13:2-5	
I Samuel 1:20	
Job 31:15	
Psalms 22:9-10; 51:5; 139:13-16;	
Ecclesiastes 11:5	
Isaiah 46:3,4; 49:1,5	
Jeremiah 1:4-5	
NT references to pre-born	
Matthew 1:18-25	
Luke 1:5-17, 39-44; 18:15; 2:12	BOC 5.064
Acts 7:19	
Galatians 1:15-16	
II Timothy 3:15	
I Peter 2:2;	

Scripture

View of children in Scripture

Genesis 1:27-28

Deuteronomy 7:12-14

Psalms 113:9; 127:3

Matthew 18:1-6, 10-14; 19:13-15

Romans 8:15, 9:4-8

Galatians 4:4-7

Ephesians 1:4-6

Christian obligation to nurture and protect life

Psalms 10:17,18; 41:1

Proverbs 24:11,12

Isaiah 1:16-17;

Jeremiah 22:13-17

Micah 6:6-8

Matthew 14:13-21, 29-39; 18:10; 22:36-40

Mark 10:13-21

James 2:14-16

Matters of human decision-making

Genesis 1:28-30

Deut 28; 30:19-20

Joshua 24:14-28

Psalms 8

Isaiah 65:8-16

Romans 12:1-2

Philippians 1:19-30

Heb 2:5-9

James 4:7

John 5:19-46; 6:38-40

I Peter 4:11

Appendix C – Sample bulletin for Service of Remembrance

A Memorial Service for Our Preborn Children

“Permit the children to come to me...for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.” Luke 18:16

“Peace I leave with you; My peace I give you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.” John 14:27

Worship Service to Celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus Christ and Give Thanks for the Lives of our Preborn Children

Prelude

Call to Worship: Romans 6:23, John 17:1-3

Hymn: *Great is Thy Faithfulness*

Old Testament: Psalm 139:1-18
Revelation 21:1-6

Personal Testimony

New Testament: John 11:17-45

Meditation: *I Have Called You By Name: You are Mine*

Litany:

Blessed Jesus, lover of children, in lowliness of heart we cry to you for help. Expecting the life of a child, we have witnessed its death. Our despair is profound, and we know you weep with us in our loss. Help us to hear your consoling voice.

Pour out upon us your gracious healing.

Life-giving God, your love surrounded each of us in our mothers' wombs, and from that secret place you called us forth to life. Our hearts are heavy with the loss of promise. We grieve the death of the hope we anticipated, the dreams we envisioned, the relationship we desired.

Pour out upon us your gracious healing.

All-loving and caring God, Father of us all, you know our grief in our loss, for you too suffered the death of your child. Give us strength to go forward from this day, trusting where we do not understand, that your love never ends.

Pour out upon us your gracious healing.

Give us the courage to admit our pain and confusion. Allow us to grieve, and then to accept this loss. Warm is the embrace of your arms. Knit together our frayed emotions, and bind our hearts with the fabric of your love for us.

Pour out upon us your gracious healing.

Sometimes the burdens of life almost overwhelm us; yet, we put our full trust in you, knowing that through your Son Jesus Christ, you are with us always. Let not our limited understanding confine our faith, but may our faith be renewed in the days ahead. Draw us closer to you and closer to one another.

Pour out upon us your gracious healing.

Help us to accept what we cannot understand, to have faith where reason fails, to have courage in the midst of disappointment. Help us to see the hope of life beyond grief. Let us feel that presence now as we seek to live in faith.

Pour out upon us your gracious healing.

We thank you for the life and hope that you give through the resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ. Keep true in us the love with which we hold one another. And to you, with your Church on earth and in heaven, we offer honor and praise, now and forever.

Our God, we give you praise. Amen.

Lighting of Candles and Writing of Prayer

Solo: I Have Called You By Your Name

Prayer

Hymn: Jesus Loves Me, This I Know

Benediction

Postlude

***The litany is from Falling Spring Presbyterian Church, Chambersburg, PA.
Used with permission.***

***The memorial service is adapted from the May/June issue of Theology Matters,
with permission.***

***Permission is granted to further use and adapt this service
to meet the needs of congregations.***

Bulletin Insert may be used to write personal prayer
(5½ x 8½ inches, 2-sided)

Dear Heavenly Father,

Thank you for the life of

whom we remember this day:

*“Permit the children to come to Me...for the kingdom of
God belongs to such as these.”* Luke 18:16

*“Peace I leave with you; My peace I give you;
not as the world gives do I give to you.
Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.”*
John 14:27

Prayers for children who die before birth

*Life-giving God,
your love surrounded each of us in our mothers' wombs,
and from that secret place you called us forth to life.
Pour out your compassion upon [Mother's name],
Her heart is heavy with the loss of the promise that once took
form in her womb....*

*In our pain and confusion we look to you, Lord,
in whom no life is without meaning, however small or brief.
Let not our limited understanding confine our faith.
Draw us closer to you and closer to each other.
Lay our broken hearts open in faith to you
and in ever greater compassion to one another.
So raise us from death to life; we pray in Christ's name. Amen.*

*Prayers are from The Book of Worship of the
United Methodist Church, 1989.*