

WE AFFIRM



Religious Organizations Support Reproductive Choice

Diverse religious denominations and traditions compassionately affirm a woman's moral right to make reproductive decisions according to her own conscience and religious principles. Major faith organizations representing millions of Americans have long supported a woman's right to choose. In keeping with our nation's constitutional guarantee of freedom of religion, they oppose civil laws that would impose specific religious views about abortion on all Americans.

Excerpts of official statements of some of these organizations are presented here. They were compiled by the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, the national interfaith organization of 40 religiously and theologically diverse groups committed to preserving reproductive choice as an integral part of religious freedom. To receive our complete booklet of official statements on reproductive choice, please contact us at the address on the reverse side.

Episcopal Church, 1988

The Book of Common Prayer affirms that "the birth of a child is a joyous and solemn occasion in the life of a family. It is also an occasion for rejoicing in the Christian community" (p.440). As Christians we also affirm responsible family planning.

We regard all abortion as having a tragic dimension, calling for the concern and compassion of all the Christian community....

In those cases where an abortion is being considered, members of this Church are urged to seek the dictates of their consciences in prayer, to seek the advice and counsel of members of the Christian community and where appropriate the sacramental life of this Church....

We believe that legislation concerning abortions will not address the root of the problem. We therefore express our deep conviction that any proposed legislation on the part of national or state governments regarding abortions must take special care to see that individual conscience is respected and that the responsibility of individuals to reach informed decisions in this matter is acknowledged and honored....

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), From "Problem Pregnancies and Abortion," 1992

Problem pregnancies are the result of, and influenced by, so many complicated and insolvable circumstances that we have neither the wisdom nor the authority to address or decide each situation....

We affirm the ability and responsibility of women, guided by the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit, to make good moral choices in regard to problem pregnancies.

The considered decision of a woman to terminate a pregnancy can be a morally acceptable, though certainly

not the only or required, decision. Possible justifying circumstances would include medical indications of severe physical or mental deformity, conception as a result of rape or incest, or conditions under which the physical or mental health of either woman or child would be gravely threatened.

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....

We do not wish to see laws enacted that would attach criminal penalties to those who seek abortions or to appropriately qualified and licensed persons who perform abortions in medically approved facilities....

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....

By affirming the ability and responsibility of a woman to make good moral choices regarding problem pregnancies, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) does not advocate abortion but instead acknowledges circumstances in a sinful world that may make abortion the least objectionable of difficult options....

United Methodist Church, 2004

The church's current position on abortion, approved by the 2004 General Conference, is found in the *Book of Discipline*, Social Principles. Text added in 2004 is in bold face type.

Abortion—"The beginning of life and the ending of life are the God-given boundaries of human existence. While individuals have always had some degree of control over when they would die, they now have the awesome power to determine when and even whether new individuals will

be born. Our belief in the sanctity of unborn human life makes us reluctant to approve abortion. But we are equally bound to respect the sacredness of the life and well-being of the mother, for whom devastating damage may result from an unacceptable pregnancy. In continuity with past Christian teaching, we recognize tragic conflicts of life with life that may justify abortion, and in such cases, we support the legal option of abortion under proper medical procedures. We cannot affirm abortion as an acceptable means of birth control, and we unconditionally reject it as a means of gender selection. We oppose the use of late-term abortion known as dilation and extraction (partial-birth abortion) and call for the end of this practice except when the physical life of the mother is in danger and no other medical procedure is available, or in the case of severe fetal anomalies incompatible with life. We call all Christians to a searching and prayerful inquiry into the sorts of conditions that may warrant abortion. We commit our Church to continue to provide nurturing ministries to those who terminate a pregnancy, to those in the midst of a crisis pregnancy, and to those who give birth. **We particularly encourage the Church, the government, and social service agencies to support and facilitate the option of adoption.** Governmental laws and regulations do not provide all the guidance required by the informed Christian conscience. Therefore, a decision concerning abortion should be made only after thoughtful and prayerful consideration by the parties involved, with medical, pastoral, and other appropriate counsel.”

When an unacceptable pregnancy occurs, a family, and most of all the pregnant woman, is confronted with the need to make a difficult decision. We believe that continuance of a pregnancy which endangers the life or health of the mother, or poses other serious problems concerning the life, health, or mental capability of the child to be, is not a moral necessity. In such a case, we believe the path of mature Christian judgment may indicate the advisability of abortion. We support the legal right to abortion as established by the 1973 Supreme Court decisions. We encourage women in counsel with husbands, doctors, and pastors to make their own responsible decisions concerning the personal or moral questions surrounding the issue of abortion. – *Resolution on Responsible Parenthood, Readopted, 2004*

Unitarian Universalist Association, 1963 (reaffirmed 1968, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1978, 1980, 1987)

Therefore be it resolved that the 1987 General Assembly of the Unitarian Universalist Association reaffirms its historic position, supporting the right to choose contraception and abortion as legitimate aspects of the right to privacy; and

Be it further resolved that individual Unitarian Universalists

- educate themselves, their congregation, and the public about the new moral understandings emergent in the works of feminist theologians and social ethicists; and

- oppose any move to deny or restrict the distribution of government funds as a means of restricting access to full contraceptive and abortion counseling and/or services, at home or abroad; and Unitarian Universalists actively oppose all legislation, regulations and administrative action, at any level of government intended to undermine or circumvent the *Roe v. Wade* decision; and
- communicate their opposition to such attempts to their legislative representatives and to the electorate; expose and oppose bogus clinics and other tactics that infringe on the free exercise of the right to choose; and promote legislation funding safe abortions for low-income women....

United Church of Christ, 1987

(Statements regarding freedom of choice were also passed in 1971, 1973, 1977, 1979, 1981, 1985, 1989, and 1991.)

Whereas, women and men must make decisions about unplanned or unwanted pregnancies that involve their physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being; and

...Whereas, abortion is a social justice issue, both for parents dealing with pregnancy and parenting under highly stressed circumstances, as well as for our society as a whole;

...Therefore, be it resolved, that the Sixteenth General Synod:

- affirms the sacredness of all life, and the need to protect and defend human life in particular;
- encourages persons facing unplanned pregnancies to consider giving birth and parenting the child, or releasing the child for adoption, before abortion;
- upholds the right of men and women to have access to adequately funded family planning services, and to safe, legal abortions as one option among others;
- urges the United Church of Christ, at all levels, to provide educational resources and programs to persons, especially young persons, to help reduce the incidence of unplanned and unwanted pregnancies, and to encourage responsible approaches to sexual behavior.

Union for Reform Judaism, 1975 (reaffirmed 1981, 1990)

- Affirm our unwavering commitment to the protection and preservation of the reproductive rights of women; pledge our presence and support wherever, whenever, and for however long our goal may require it at the federal, state and local levels of government; further, we affirm our commitment to work in coalition with compatible pro-choice groups.
- Endorse the 1973 United States Supreme Court decision on *Roe v. Wade* and deplore all attempts, legislative and judicial, to dismantle it.
- Support non-restrictive federal and state funding of reproductive services, including abortion, and non-restrictive private insurer coverage.
- Support minors' access to reproductive health services, including contraceptives and abortion, unrestricted by

parental notification, parental permission, or other court ordered requirements.

- Support the use of public hospitals and clinics, however defined, for the performance of abortions, with unrestricted access and funding for women who need it; affirm the right of health professionals, those publicly employed and those in private practice, to provide reproductive service counseling and advice, including information about family planning, contraception and abortion, and to perform abortions; oppose the criminalization of either the health professionals who perform or assist at abortions or the women who receive them and affirm the obligation of local governments to protect physically the clients, staff, and premises of reproductive care facilities against the actions of anti-choice persons and groups.

United Synagogue for Conservative Judaism, 1975 (reaffirmed 1989)

Jewish tradition cherishes the sanctity of life, even the potential of life which a pregnant woman carries within her. Under certain unfortunate circumstances, such as when the life or health of the mother are in jeopardy, Judaism sanctions, even mandates, abortion. Judaism does not, however, condone or permit abortion for contraceptive purposes; and

Judaism does not believe that personhood and human rights begin with conception. The premise that personhood begins with conception is founded on a religious position which is not identical with Jewish tradition. Therefore, under special circumstances, Judaism chooses and requires abortion as an act which affirms and protects the life, well being and health of the mother. To deny a Jewish woman and her family the ability to obtain a safe, legal abortion when so mandated by Jewish tradition, is to deprive Jews of their fundamental right of religious freedom;

Now, therefore, be it resolved that the United Synagogue for Conservative Judaism continues to affirm its strong support for the 1973 Supreme Court decision of *Roe v. Wade*. Any weakening, limitation, or withdrawal of the *Roe v. Wade* decision is sure to produce tragic consequences.

Jewish Reconstructionist Federation, 1981

Although the Jewish tradition regards children as a blessing, a gift of life itself, the tradition permits the abortion of an unborn child in order to safeguard the life and physical and mental health of the mother. The rabbis did not take a consistent stand on the question of whether a fetus resembles "a person." They did not think it possible to arrive at a final theoretical answer to the question of abortion, for that would mean nothing less than to be able to define convincingly what it means to be human.

We recognize that abortion is a tragic choice. Any prospective parent must make an agonizing decision between competing claims—the fetus, health, the need to support oneself and one's family, the need for time for a marriage to stabilize, responsibility for other children and the like. Some of us consider abortion to be immoral except under the most extraordinary circumstances. Yet we

all empathize with the anguish of those who must make the decision to abort or not to abort.

American Baptist Churches, USA, 1988

We grieve with all who struggle with the difficult circumstances that lead them to consider abortion. Recognizing that each person is ultimately responsible to God, we encourage women and men in these circumstances to seek spiritual counsel as they prayerfully and conscientiously consider their decision... We also recognize that we are divided as to the proper witness of the church to the state regarding abortion... Consequently, we acknowledge the freedom of each individual to advocate for a public policy on abortion that reflects his or her beliefs.

... We call upon American Baptist Congregations:

- To challenge members to live in a way that models responsible sexuality in accordance with biblical teaching,
- To expend efforts and funds for teaching responsible sexuality,
- To provide opportunities for intergenerational dialogue on responsible sexuality and Christian life,
- To provide relevant ministries to adolescents and parents of adolescents in and out of the church.

American Friends Service Committee, 1970 (reaffirmed 1989)

For two decades the AFSC has taken a consistent position supporting a woman's right to follow her own conscience concerning child-bearing, abortion and sterilization. AFSC is deeply aware that the decision to terminate a pregnancy is seldom an easy one. That choice must be made free of coercion, including the coercion of poverty, racial discrimination and availability of services to those who cannot pay.

Catholics for a Free Choice, 1999

There is much in the Catholic tradition that supports the pro-choice position. There is a mistaken belief that the Catholic Church has spoken definitively and unchangingly on abortion. However, a careful reading of church documents shows that while the prohibition of abortion is a serious teaching, room remains for Catholics to support the legalization of abortion and even its morality in a wide range of circumstances. And an examination of core principles of Catholic theology reveals a tradition that respects the capacity of individuals to make moral decisions.

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), 1975 (reaffirmed 1989)

Whereas, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) has proclaimed that in Christ, God affirms freedom and responsibility for individuals, and

Whereas, legislation is being introduced into the U.S. Congress which would embody in law one particular opinion concerning the morality of abortion...

Therefore be it resolved, that the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)...

- Affirm the principle of individual liberty, freedom of individual conscience, and sacredness of life for all persons.
- Respect differences in religious beliefs concerning abortion and oppose, in accord with the principle of religious liberty, any attempt to legislate a specific religious opinion or belief concerning abortion upon all Americans.
- Provide through ministry of the local congregation, pastoral concern and nurture of persons faced with the responsibility and trauma surrounding undesired pregnancy.

Young Women's Christian Association of the USA, 1970, 1973, 1988

The position of the YWCA is not "pro-abortion." It is

a position supporting a woman's right to make an individual decision based upon her own religious and ethical beliefs and her physician's guidance. This is the position taken by the Supreme Court on January 22, 1973, in the case of *Roe v. Wade*. The Court recognized that science cannot tell us "when life begins," for to science, all life is continuum. The answer to the question, "When does personhood begin?" must remain in the ethical and religious realm....

Legal restrictions and prohibition of abortions affect primarily poor women, depriving them of safe, medically-approved abortions, while women of means can travel to locations where abortion is legal and safe. The problem of unwanted pregnancies cannot be solved by outlawing abortions, and the denial of public funding for abortions prevents some women from exercising a Constitutional right guaranteed to all.

MEMBERS OF THE RELIGIOUS COALITION FOR REPRODUCTIVE CHOICE

Christian

Episcopal Church

Presbyterian Church (USA)

Presbyterians Affirming Reproductive Options

Washington Office

Women's Ministries

United Church of Christ

Justice and Witness Ministries

United Methodist Church

General Board of Church and Society

General Board of Global Ministries, Women's Division

Caucuses/Organizations

Catholics for a Free Choice

Christian Lesbians Out (CLOUT)

Church of the Brethren Women's Caucus

Disciples for Choice

Episcopal Urban Caucus

Episcopal Women's Caucus

Lutheran Women's Caucus

Methodist Federation for Social Action

YWCA of the USA

Jewish

Conservative Judaism

Rabbinical Assembly

United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism

Women's League for Conservative Judaism

Humanist Judaism

Society for Humanistic Judaism

Reconstructionist Judaism

Jewish Reconstructionist Federation

Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association

Reform Judaism

Central Conference of American Rabbis

North American Federation of Temple Youth

Union for Reform Judaism

Women of Reform Judaism, The Federation of Temple Sisterhoods

Women's Rabbinic Network of the Central Conference of American Rabbis

Caucuses/Organizations

American Jewish Committee

American Jewish Congress

Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith

Hadassah, WZOA

Jewish Women International

NA'AMAT USA

National Council of Jewish Women

Women's American ORT

American Humanist Association

Ethical Culture

American Ethical Union

National Service Conference of the American Ethical Union

Unitarian Universalist

Continental Unitarian Universalist Young Adult Network

Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations

Unitarian Universalist Women's Federation

Young Religious Unitarian Universalists

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