



# CHRISTIAN COUNSELING ON ABORTION

*(A statement of the Seventh General Convention of The American Lutheran Church adopted October 14, 1974, by action GC74.12.124, as a statement of comment and counsel addressed to the members of the congregations of The American Lutheran Church to aid them in their decisions and actions. The vote was 500 delegates voting for and 379 delegates voting against adoption of the statement.)*

WHEREAS, Pastors and lay members of the congregations of The American Lutheran Church are confronted with the issues of "abortion on demand" and an emerging "abortion mentality"; and

WHEREAS, They desire and deserve guidance from their church in facing prayerfully the complexities of these issues, and

WHEREAS, Such guidance should seek to enlighten rather than to bind the Christian conscience in distinguishing between good and evil, be it

*Resolved*, That this Seventh General Convention of The American Lutheran Church adopt the following statement of comment and counsel addressed to the members of the congregations of this Church to aid them in their personal decisions and actions.

1. The American Lutheran Church rejects induced abortion as a ready solution for problem pregnancies. An induced abortion deliberately ends a developing human life. No one dare take such a step easily or lightly. Yet, The American Lutheran Church accepts the possibility that an induced abortion may be a necessary option in individual human situations. Each person needs to be free to make this choice in light of each individual situation. Such freedom to choose carries the obligation to weigh the options and to bear the consequences of the decision.

2. The position taken by The American Lutheran Church is a pro-life position. It looks in awe at the mystery of procreation and at the processes through which a human being develops, matures, and dies. It takes seriously the right of the developing life to be born. It takes into account the rights of the already born to their health, their individuality, and the wholeness of their lives. It allows the judgment that, all pertinent factors responsibly considered, the developing life may need to be terminated in order to defend the health and wholeness of persons already present and already participating in the relationships and responsibilities of life.

3. Though an induced abortion may be an appropriate action under compelling individual circumstances, much preferable is action to prevent a possible

problem pregnancy. Toward this end The American Lutheran Church advocates such responsible measures as:

a. Teaching the meaning of human life and relationships as lived in Jesus Christ, in love for God, for family and neighbor, and for self;

b. Helping parents grow in understanding of the joys, satisfactions, and duties of parenthood, of the individuality of each child, and of the trust given them for the nurture of their children;

c. Communicating the meaning of the gift of joy and pleasure in human sexuality when expressed within a marriage relationship of permanent commitment, love, and faithfulness;

d. Research and development leading to safer, more reliable, inexpensive, and simple contraceptives;

e. Comprehensive family planning services made available to all persons who want or need such help;

f. Exercising responsible management of male and female reproductive powers, including self-control and effective, consistent use of reliable birth control measures;

g. Provision of adequate and effective private and governmental programs for income maintenance, health and medical care, education and social services to enable married and unmarried parents to rear their children in self-respect and dignity; and

h. Building on the fellowship of the congregation to motivate and support persons in their daily effort to express in action the knowledge, the good intentions, and the wholesome feelings which are the fruits of Christian life.

4. Specific compelling circumstances may cause persons to question whether a particular pregnancy should be allowed to run its natural course or be terminated. Such a decision should be informed, but not forced, by the Church, by law, by public opinion, by family, and by other trusted persons. It is a decision toward which the Christian community ought to offer its tender, embracing, and understanding love, help, and counsel. Competent counseling strives for an understanding of what is involved in each option, a facing of the probable effects of one or the other decision, an assessment of competing claims and rights, and a determination of how the considerations of life, health, healing, and wholeness shape the decision. Such counseling seeks to:

a. Provide reliable information concerning the various options open to the prospective parents, including carrying the pregnancy to term and keeping and rearing the child or placing the infant in an adoptive home, as well as information on the nature of abortion and its probable implications for future health and pregnancies;

b. Help the involved persons, especially the prospective parents, to clarify and deal with their thoughts and feelings regarding the crisis situation in which they find themselves;

c. Take into account such considerations as: the circumstances under which the conception occurred; the maturity and the physical and emotional health of the prospective parents and of other children in the family; the economic factors at stake; and the influence of deeply held religious beliefs on a person's attitudes and actions in deciding alternatives to abortion;

d. Sift out and hold up for careful assessment possible notes of pride, status, self-concern, or personal comfort and convenience which clash with the interests of the developing life;

e. Refer the persons, at their option, either to an agency with an effective program of family and children's services, including adoptive placement or to a competent practitioner able to perform the surgical procedure in accord with good medical practice;

f. Offer post-abortion or post-delivery assistance to deal with whatever problems or questions may develop.

5. Committed Christians seek also to bring into focus another series of dimensions. In deciding their own positions and actions on abortion they seek:

a. The counsel and guidance of the Scriptures studied as a whole for the message of Law and Gospel which God speaks therein to His creatures;

b. Their understanding of the meaning and purpose of human life as created by the Father, redeemed by the Lord Jesus Christ, and enlightened by the Holy Spirit for service to others and an eternity of life and fellowship with all the saints;

c. The relationship between the commandment "Thou shalt not kill" and induced abortion, killing in wars, and killing in self-defense;

d. Clarity as to when a person's life begins;

e. Honor for the high regard Scriptures accord children, seeing them as a blessing from the Lord, warning of the perils facing those who abuse, hurt, or warp children;

f. Answers to how far they should press that civil laws define as crimes those acts which they regard as sins; and

g. Awareness of the ambiguity of the human situation and the difficulty of knowing and doing God's will, yet recognizing God's understanding and forgiveness of those who trust His promises.

6. Needless to say, equally committed Christians differ in their understandings of how these dimensions answer the abortion issue. The American Lutheran Church earnestly urges the members of its congregations to show Christian love, mercy, and compassionate understanding to those with whose views and actions on the abortion issue they totally disagree.

7. As Lutheran Christians we are deeply aware of the sinfulness in every human decision. We also are deeply confident of God's grace and forgiveness. Thereby we are freed from the anxious drive that our deeds make us right with God. We have no need to itemize a list of circumstances under which abortion is acceptable or is forbidden. We have the responsibility to make the best possible decision we are capable of making in light of the information available to us and our sense of accountability to God, neighbor, and self. For the rightness or wrongness of the decision to abort or to carry to term we rely on God's grace and His forgiveness. So freed and forgiven, so at one with the Father through Jesus Christ, we are given the Spirit's strength to work for whatever is good, positive, and wholesome in our every relationship with spouse, family, neighbor, nature, and social systems. Love and service rule our lives. Our faith directs our deeds, in the issues of abortion as in every other area of our lives under God.

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