

# **The Presbyterian Church of Old Greenwich**

38 West End Avenue  
Old Greenwich, CT 06870

(203) 637-3669

[office@pcogonline.org](mailto:office@pcogonline.org)

[www.pcogonline.org](http://www.pcogonline.org)

## ***Pastoral Letter***

### ***On Abortion***

**Affirming Biblical principles**

**Affirming the life of the pre-born**

**Affirming the mother no matter what decision she makes**

# Pastoral Letter on Abortion

In October 1991, the session of The Presbyterian Church of Old Greenwich, began a study of the issue of abortion. Our starting point in this study was our trust in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord and our acceptance of Scripture as the unique and authoritative witness for faith and action. After many months of study, reflection, discussion and prayer, we have come to general agreement as to what we believe the Holy Spirit is leading us to say and do

In the course of our study, we have become painfully aware of the heartache and tragedy for everyone involved with "problem pregnancies." We have been particularly sensitized to the tragic circumstances of women who are victims of rape and incest. Therefore, we offer this "Pastoral Letter on Abortion" to the congregation of The Presbyterian Church of Old Greenwich for prayerful study and consideration as we seek to exhibit the justice and compassion of Jesus Christ in our life together as the people of God.

**In obedience to Jesus Christ and under the authority of scripture, we believe:**

- **That God endows every human life with personhood at the moment of conception.**

*Rationale:* Personhood is intrinsic to human nature because it is bestowed by God on humankind by virtue of being created "in the image of God" and is the foundation of human dignity and worth. Personhood is further affirmed by God's active, personal involvement in the creation, development and nurture of every living human person from the moment of conception. (Gen. 1:26-27; Ps. 139:13-16)

- **That abortion ends the life of a living human person and is offensive to God.**

*Rationale:* The ending of human life is an

offense against the "image of God" intrinsically present in every living human person and is therefore an offense against God (Gen. 9:6; Ex. 20:13)

- **That God expects the church to uphold both justice and compassion.**

*Rationale:* God is both just and compassionate and expects the same from the people of God, the Church (Ps. 89:14; Mi. 6:8, Mt. 23:23)

- **That justice requires the church to protect and support those who are most vulnerable in our society - particularly needy women and children.**

*Rationale:* God's justice is directed particularly towards the weakest members of society. The Church is expected to actively protect their lives, respond to their needs and defend their cause, and is held accountable by God for doing so. (Ps. 140:12, Is. 1:17, Jer. 22:3, Pr. 31:8-9, Pr. 24:11-12, Ez. 33:6, Mt. 25:34,40)

- **That compassion requires the church to extend God's grace and mercy to every person, regardless of their decisions concerning "problem pregnancies."**

*Rationale:* God has given the Church the ministry of reconciliation which extends God's forgiveness and healing to all who confess their sin and put their faith in Jesus Christ. (Ps 130:3-4; Jn 3:16-17; Ro 3:22-24; 1Jo 1:8-9, Jas 5:15-16)

- **That God calls the church to positive action based on its beliefs.**

*Rationale:* Faith in Jesus Christ requires obedience - working out our faith in practical ways that demonstrate the justice and compassion of Jesus Christ. (Mt 17:5, Lk 6:46-48; Jn 14:23-24; Jm 2:14-17)

**In obedience to Jesus Christ and under the authority of scripture, we intend:**

**• To advocate for a biblically-responsible sexual morality.**

- Provide teaching and education on Biblical sexuality:
  - a. God has given us the gift of human sexuality to be exercised and enjoyed within the covenant relationship of marriage;
  - b. God expects the unmarried to live a pure and celebrate life
- Support efforts in the community to promote Biblical sexuality

**• To advocate for the sanctity of every human life.**

- Promote the fundamental right to life for every living human person - born or unborn, young or old, male or female, able or disabled

**• To encourage women facing "problem pregnancies" to prayerfully choose life first.**

- Support crisis pregnancy centers and Christian counseling services.
- Assist with long-term support for single parents, needy children, or families in dire economic straights.
- Support efforts to relieve the effects of women's career development on motherhood, e.g. part-time employment and maternity leaves.
- Support strict enforcement of laws prohibiting discrimination on the basis of parenthood.

**• To support services for women and children after giving birth.**

- Support the development of creative childcare programs.
- Promote adoption and support Christian adoption agencies
- Support efforts to provide safe foster homes.
- Provide assistance for families with disabled children.

**• To acknowledge the economic realities of needy women and children.**

- Support efforts to provide universal access to health care
- Support efforts to provide adequate, affordable housing for families.
- Support efforts for job training and workplace policies that support parenthood and children.
- Support efforts to require the child's father to provide economic and social support for mother and child.

**• To be a community of faith that**

- Openly confesses its need for forgiveness before God, joyfully receives God's forgiveness in Jesus Christ and freely offers God's forgiveness to all who call on God's name
- Extends God's grace, mercy and healing to persons involved with "problem pregnancies," regardless of their decisions.
- Is willing to sacrifice its own comfort and rearrange its priorities in order to provide concrete support for women with "problem pregnancies."

Moderator of Session:

The Rev. Dr. Arthur B Chartier

Clerk of Session:

Elder Walter E. Baker

Dated: *June 23, 1992*

## Question and Answer Supplement

In offering a "Pastoral Letter on Abortion" to our congregation, we realize that Session has had the advantage of many months of study, discussion and prayer on this difficult issue. During the course of this study, we have come to some understandings on our definition of terms, on the scope of the problem, and on the role of our church in addressing this issue. We offer this "Question & Answer Supplement" to share some of our understandings with the congregation.

**Q: To whom is the "Pastoral Letter on Abortion" addressed?**

A: It is addressed specifically to the congregation of The Presbyterian Church of Old Greenwich. It is our intent to set forth principles as a basis for moral guidance and counsel, in obedience to Jesus Christ and under the authority of Scripture. It makes no attempt to address the legal issues surrounding abortion.

**Q: What is a "problem pregnancy?"**

A: "Problem pregnancy" is an inclusive term that covers virtually any pregnancy that women or couples view as a problem. The term is intentionally broad and covers pregnancies involving

- failed contraception
- economic hardship
- threat to the emotional well-being of the mother
- stressful former pregnancies
- mother under 15 or over 40
- multiple pregnancies
- HIV or drug deformities
- congenital deformities
- rape and incest
- threat to the life of the mother.

**Q: How do "problem pregnancies" differ from so-called "hard cases?"**

A: The so-called "hard cases" is a much narrower term that describes "problem pregnancies" involving

- severe congenital deformity
- rape or incest
- threat to the life of the mother.

These so-called "hard cases" represent less than 3% of the 1.6 million abortions performed in the United States in 1991.

**Q: Why does this "Pastoral Letter on Abortion" address the larger category of "problem pregnancies?"**

A: Excluding the so-called "hard cases," this larger category of "problem pregnancies" covers 97% of the abortions performed in the United States today and represents, in effect, abortion on demand. We are opposed to abortion on demand.

**Q: What is your opinion on these so-called "hard cases?"**

A: For the families whose lives are actually touched by the reality of one of these "hard cases," the issues are complex, emotional and often overwhelming. We would encourage these families to make their decisions prayerfully before God, with the understanding that both mother and child are living human persons made in the "image of God." We would further be prepared to support these families and minister God's grace and mercy to them regardless of their decisions.

**Q: What is your response to women who have had abortions?**

A: We welcome them, not in judgment, but in mercy, remembering that all of us are forgiven sinners by the grace of God, no matter what we have done.

**Expanded Biblical Supplement**

*Our session study of abortion has involved months of Biblical study. Our understanding of Biblical teaching on this matter shaped our beliefs and intentions. We offer this "Expanded Biblical Supplement" to the "Pastoral Letter on Abortion" so that the reader can follow our Biblical reasoning in greater detail. This "Biblical Supplement on Abortion" is not exhaustive. It does, however, set forth what we believe to be the key Biblical principles in the discussion of abortion.*

***In obedience to Jesus Christ and under the authority of Scripture, we believe:***

***• That God endows every human life with personhood at the moment of conception.***

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, in Our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Genesis 1:26-27

*1 "In the image of God He created him" designates humankind's essential nature and personhood and is INTRINSIC in humankind's being.*

*2 The "image of God" ENDOWS humankind with personhood and is BESTOWED on humankind by God at the moment of creation.*

*3. The "image of God," with attendant designation of personhood, establishes the basis for human DIGNITY and WORTH.*

For You created my inmost being; You knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise You because I am fearfully and -wonderfully made; Your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from You when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, Your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in Your book before one of them came to be. Psalm 139:13-16

*1 God is actively involved in the CREATION of every living human person.*

*2. God is intimately involved in the DEVELOPMENT of every living human person while he/she is still in the womb*

*3 God CARES FOR, and HAS A PLAN FOR, every living human person.*

*4 God establishes a PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP with every living human person at conception that continues in the womb and after birth.*

***• That abortion ends the life of a living human person and is offensive to God.***

"Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man." Genesis 9:6

*1. The "image of God" gives intrinsic VALUE and WORTH to every living human person.*

*2. The ending of human life is a CAPITAL OFFENSE against the "image of God" intrinsically present in every living human person. "You shall not murder." Exodus 20:13*

*a. Every living human person is PROTECTED under the sixth commandment.*

***• That God expects the church to uphold both justice and compassion.***

"Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; love and faithfulness go before you." Psalm 89:14

*1. JUSTICE and COMPASSION are united in the very character of God who is both loving and just.*

"He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." Micah 6:8

1. God requires JUSTICE and COMPASSION and judges the Church accordingly

*"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices -- mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law -justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former." Matthew 23:23*

1 Both JUSTICE and COMPASSION are essential requirements of Christian ethics

**• That justice requires the Church to protect and support those who are most vulnerable in our society - particularly needy women and children.**

*"The LORD works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed." Psalm 103:6*

*"I know that the LORD secures justice for the poor and upholds the cause of the needy. " Ps. 140:12*

1. God's justice is directed particularly towards those who cannot defend themselves — the OPPRESSED, the POOR, and the NEEDY.

*"Learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow. " Isaiah 1:17*

1. God's people are expected to be instruments of God's justice on behalf of NEEDY CHILDREN -- "the fatherless."

2. God's people are also expected to be instruments of God's justice on behalf of NEEDY WOMEN -- "the widows."

*"This is what the LORD says: Do what is just and right. Rescue from the hand of his oppressor the one who has been robbed. Do no wrong or violence to the alien, the fatherless or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place." Jeremiah 22:3*

1 God's people are warned against shedding INNOCENT BLOOD

*"Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy." Proverbs 31:8-9*

1 God's people are expected to ACTIVELY DEFEND and SUPPORT those who cannot speak up for themselves -- both mother and child

*"Rescue those being led away to death: hold back those staggering toward slaughter. If you say, 'But we knew nothing about this,' does not He who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not He who guards your life know it? Will He not repay each person according to what he has done?" Proverbs 24:11-12*

*"But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet to warn the people and the sword comes and takes the life of one of them, that man will be taken away because of his sin, but I will hold the watchman accountable for his blood." Ezekiel 33:6*

1. God's people are held ACCOUNTABLE for DOING NOTHING.

*"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world...' 7 tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did for Me." Matt. 25:34-40*

1. Jesus identifies personally with the WEAK and POWERLESS.

2. Our treatment of the WEAK and POWERLESS relates directly to our treatment of Jesus.

3. Christians will be JUDGED accordingly.

**• That compassion requires the church to extend God's grace and mercy to every person, regardless of their decisions concerning "problem pregnancies."**

*"If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O LORD, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness..." Psalm 130:3-4*

1 God is MERCIFUL

*"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him." John. 3:16-17*

1. God loves us and wants to FORGIVE us.

*"This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus." Romans 3:22-24*

1 Everyone needs the forgiveness that is graciously offered to us through FAITH in Jesus Christ.

*"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." 1John 1:8-9*

1. CONFESSION is the gateway to forgiveness.

*"The prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." James 5:15-16*

1. With confession comes FORGIVENESS and HEALING

**• That God call the church to positive action based on its beliefs.**

*"While Jesus was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, 'This is My Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased. Listen to Him!'" Matthew 17:5*

*"Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say? I will show you what he is like who comes to Me and hears My words and puts them into practice. He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built." Luke 6:46-48*

*"Jesus replied, 'If anyone loves Me, he will obey My teaching. My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. He who does not love Me will not obey My teaching. These words you hear are not My own: they belong to the Father who sent Me.'" John 14:23-24*

*"What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, 'Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed.' but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead." James 2; 14-17*

**Study Resources Available in the Church Library**

**Books:**

- Christian Action Council, *Abortion Debaters' Handbook*, Christian Action Council, Falls Church, VA, 1984.
- David, John Jefferson, *Abortion and the Christian: What Every Believer Should Know*, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing House, Phillipsburg, NJ, 1984
- Fowler, Paul B, *Abortion: Toward and Evangelical Concensus*, Multnomah Press, Portland, OR, 1987.
- Garton, Jean Staker, *Who Broke the Baby?*, Bethany House Publishers, Minneapolis, MN, 1979
- Luker, Kristin, *Abortion A the Politics of Motherhood*, University of California Press, Berkeley, CA, 1985.
- Pierson, Anne, *52 Simple Things You Can Do to Be Pro-Life*, Bethany House Publishers, Minneapolis, MN, 1990
- Powell, John, S.J., *Abortion: The Silent Holocaust*, Argus Communications, Alien, TX, 1981.
- Sproul, R. C , *Abortion: A Rational Look At An Emotional Issue*, Navpress, Colorado Springs, CO, 1990.
- Wilkie, Dr & Mrs J. C., *Abortion: Questions & Answers*, Hayes Publishing, Cincinnati, OH, revised 1988.

**Reports and Studies:**

- The Covenant of Life and The Caring Community*, and *Covenant and Creation: Theological Reflections on Contraception and Abortion* (Policy Statement and Recommendations) adopted by the 195th General Assembly (1983) of the Presbyterian Church (USA)
- Abortion: A Review With Critical Reflections on Our Church's Most Recent Documents*, i.e. "The Covenant of Life and The Caring Community" and "Covenant and Creation: Theological Reflections on Contraception and Abortion," by Bart Tarman, El Montecito Presbyterian Church, Santa Barbara, CA, 1984.
- Response to "The Covenant of Life and The Caring Community" and "Covenant and Creation: Theological Reflections on Contraception and Abortion,"* including a Position Statement of College Hill Presbyterian Church on Abortion and Responsible Sexual Behavior, The College Hill Presbyterian Church, Cincinnati, OH, 1985.
- Abortion: Materials Related to How (Presbyterian) Church Bodies Have Struggled With the Issue of Abortion from 1969-1990*, compiled by Dr. Alex W. Williams, Presbyterian Campus Ministry, Inc., Athens, GA, 1991.
- Report of Special Committee on Problem Pregnancies and Abortion*, (Majority & Minority Reports), Majority Report adopted by the 204th General Assembly (1992) of the Presbyterian Church (USA).

**Videos:**

- Abortion: A Rational Look At An Emotional Issue*, with study guide, R. C. Sproul, Navpress, Colorado Springs, CO, 1990.
- Everyday Miracle: Birth*, Films, Inc., Wilmette, IL, 1-800-323-4222.
- Nova: The Miracle of Life*, by Lennart Nilsson, Crown Video, New York, NY, 1986, distributed by Random House.
- Ultrasound: A Window on the Womb*, by Shari Richard, Sound Wave Images, Union Lake, MI, 313-360-0743 or 313-347-9439.