

## A Brief History of PCUSA's Stance on Abortion

**1647** Westminster Catechism- *"neglecting or withdrawing the lawful or necessary means of preservation of life...and whatsoever tends to the destruction of the life of any"* is sinful. Further, it teaches that our Christian obligation includes *"protecting and defending the innocent."*<sup>1</sup>

**1869** GA statement: *"This Assembly regards the destruction by parents of their own offspring before birth, with abhorrence, as a crime against God and against nature...."*<sup>2</sup>

**1962 and 1965** GA statement: *"The fetus is a human life to be protected by the criminal law from the moment when the ovum is fertilized....As Christians, we believe that this should not be an individual decision on the part of the physician and couple. Their decision should be limited and restrained by the larger society."*

## PCUSA switches to pro-abortion stance

**1970** GA statement: *"Women should have full freedom of personal choice concerning the completion or termination of their pregnancies."*

**1972** Language regarding "personal choice"<sup>3</sup> and "responsible decision" regarding abortion began to appear in church documents.

**1983** GA adopted language affirming abortion as a "stewardship responsibility." (3)

**1988** GA Stated Clerk James Andrews filed an amicus brief with the US Supreme Court in support of "abortion rights."

**1992** GA statement: *"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."*

It considers moral judgments to be a matter of each woman's individual interpretation of what is right or wrong in her particular crisis situation, and

*"...acknowledges circumstances in a sinful world that may make abortion the least objectionable of difficult options."*

Further, current policy states that

*"...no law or administrative decision should limit access to abortion; limit information and counseling concerning abortions; or limit or prohibit public funding for necessary abortions for the socially and economically disadvantaged."*

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<sup>1</sup> The Shorter Catechism, 7.068 and 7.069

<sup>2</sup> 1869 Minutes of the General Assembly, pp. 937-938

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.spiritrestoration.org/Church/Denominational-stand-on-the-issue-of-abortion.htm>

**1996** GA rejected an overture affirming that *“partial birth abortion of a live fetus, except to save the life of the mother, falls short of God’s plan for humankind.”* (In 1997, PCUSA did adopt a position expressing "grave moral concern" about partial-birth abortions.)

**2006** GA statement: *“When an individual woman faces the decision whether to terminate a pregnancy, the issue is intensely personal. . . . Humans are empowered . . . to make significant moral choices, including the choice to continue or end a pregnancy.”*

**2009** PCUSA’s Washington Office fought efforts to remove abortion coverage and funding from the national health care bill. <sup>4</sup>

**Over the past 20 years**, in each General Assembly a motion has been made to have PCUSA affirm the sanctity of life and oppose abortion. None of these motions have been approved.

**PCUSA currently** advocates for abortion in the following ways:

- **stated position**- *“the considered decision of a woman to terminate a pregnancy can be a morally acceptable, though certainly not the only or required, decision.”* PCUSA’s sexuality curriculum teaches that, *“...it can be an act of faithfulness before God to intervene in the natural process of pregnancy and terminate it.”*
- **financial support**- PCUSA actively supports and endorses the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (formerly the Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights, RCAR) and Presbyterians Affirming Reproductive Options (PARO). Both organizations are featured on the PCUSA website.
- **medical benefits plan**- PCUSA’s plan pays for abortion without restriction.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.layman.org/news.aspx?article=26589>