

Intersections of Evangelicalism  
and Lutheran Positions on Abortion  
in the United States

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803: Formation of Pietism and Evangelicalism

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## PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY AND METHOD

When I started this study, my intention was to show what I perceived to be influences of the Evangelical movement on the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's (ELCA) *Social Statement on Abortion*, which was generated from 1990-1991. Like any hypothesis, when held up against the research it was subject to be debunked. What I discovered was that if one Christian tradition influenced the other, it may have been that Lutheran theology had influence upon the contemporary Evangelical stance on abortion. This was an unexpected result, as Evangelicals are notoriously anti-choice, and Lutherans renowned for their middle ground, nuanced position.

Because the ELCA's *Social Statement on Abortion* was developed in 1990-1991, the historical materials of the Task Force commissioned with its development have not all been transcribed and made accessible. The known materials retained by the ELCA Archives include five handwritten notes and minutes, one video-taped meeting, and thirty-seven audio tapes. The notes, minutes, and videotape were available for the development of this study thanks to the retrieval of Joel Thoreson, archivist. Three of the living Task Force members, Karen Bloomquist, Jerry Folk, and John Stumme, offered their thoughts via email inquiries. First person accounts are very enriching and a true blessing, and to them I am very thankful for the time they took to consider my questions. Additionally, Pastor Fritz Foltz, Gettysburg, was blogging and reflecting on the history and question of abortion at the same time of this study. As one who was a contemporary with the development of the ELCA statement and predecessor statements, his contributions were valuable.

This study is an attempt to capture the environment in which the ELCA wrote its social statement on abortion. At the time of its formation, the Evangelical movement, called

“fundamentalism” at the time, was reaching new heights in political activism and voice. Additionally, various church bodies had expressed alarm about the increase in abortions following the Supreme Court’s *Roe versus Wade* decision in 1973. In the midst of these things, in 1991, I interviewed my grandmother, Mary Watts Sassaman, who was born in 1904 and had lived through all sides of the conversation. Abortion is a real-life concern, affecting women from all walks of life. Including her story is my attempt to ground this history in the voice of a woman who has lived through it.

If we believe that God is the same, and the Evangelical movement and Lutheran church are moved by the same Spirit, then it stands to reason that two separate Christian bodies may similarly reflect the guidance of that Spirit. This paper will set out those points of spiritual intersection and agreement between these bodies, as well as the points of divergence.

## TERMINOLOGY

The late Dr. William J. Robinson, who has been characterized as one of the “leading advocates of birth control in the United States”,<sup>1</sup> defined abortion in 1917, as follows:

The word abortion, used somewhat loosely, signifies the premature expulsion of the fetus; the expulsion of the fetus from the womb before it is viable, i.e., before it is capable of living independently. Used in a stricter sense, the word abortion is applied to the expulsion of the fetus up to the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> week; to the expulsion of the fetus between the 16<sup>th</sup> and the 28<sup>th</sup> week the term miscarriage is applied; and when the expulsion of the fetus takes place after the 28<sup>th</sup> week, but before full term, we use the term premature labor. The laity does not like the term abortion as it is under the impression that the term always signifies criminal abortion; it therefore prefers to use the term miscarriage (“miss”), regardless of the time at which the expulsion of the fetus takes place.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel K. Williams, *Defenders of the Unborn: The Pro-Life Movement Before Roe v. Wade* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 21.

<sup>2</sup> William J. Robinson, *Woman: Her Sex and Love Life* (New York: Eugenics Publishing Company, 1928), 117.

He proceeded to describe several forms of abortion: spontaneous, therapeutic, criminal and habitual. By simply naming the various ways an abortion can occur, he demonstrated the complexity of the situation. This highlights the problems with the current obtuse use of the word “abortion” to simply cover the early end of a pregnancy at any time, in any manner.

The word “abortion” has become so volatile, that its vague definition and the implications associated with its occurrence have nearly become the stuff of horror films. Anti-abortion activists holding up pictures of fetuses in utero or in buckets could be found on street corners, grocery store parking lots, as well as outside health clinics. When self-described, “pro-life” presidential candidate Donald Trump was asked during a 2016 debate a question regarding “late-term abortions,” he said, “in the ninth month you can take the baby and rip the baby out of the womb of the mother just prior to the birth of the baby - you can take the baby and rip the baby out of the womb in the ninth month on the final day, and that’s not acceptable”.<sup>3</sup> Such rhetoric is inflammatory, to say the least. Yet, it demonstrates the problem of the blurry use of the term “abortion”, bordering on a vile characterization of the medical procedure properly called a Dilation and Curettage (D&C) in the first trimester or Dilation and Evacuation (D&E) in the second trimester.

Despite these complications, and the non-specific use of the term, for the purposes of this paper, I will be using the colloquial term, abortion to define medical intervention and termination of a pregnancy in the first two terms. This is because that is the use by nearly every publication on the topic. However, it is important that we reclaim proper use of these terms to remove the stigma and false characterization of this medical procedure.

I attempt to avoid other terms that are associated with this topic, because they have

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<sup>3</sup> CBS News. “2016 Final Presidential Debate: Abortion.” Filmed October 19, 2016. Segment, 3:43. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kqbm2YkMP0Q>.

become equally problematic and inflammatory. They may occur within quotes or when a characterization is made by the person or group being quoted or to whom I refer. Those terms include the following: pro-life, pro-choice, anti-choice, pro-abortion, conservative, or liberal. This is not a political paper. It is an historical theological view of the development of the ELCA *Statement on Abortion* and its comparison to the Evangelical position on abortion. As such, these terms are unnecessary, save for those occasions already mentioned.

As a prelude to the topic, I wish to share my grandmother's story, in her own words.

I will tell you the way I feel about this. I do not think that any man ought to enter into this at all, because when you think about it: it isn't their body. I cannot decide that for any other woman. It's her body. She's going to have to account for what she does. And it's up to her to do it. And it's not up to a government that has hungry children to feed that are here to say that a child wants to be born. How do they know a child wants to be born? They don't know a thing about it. Men talk out of ignorance. They don't know anything. And I believe that. But I believe that a fetus is not a person until it leaves the body of its mother. Then, the soul enters that body...

You know, I lost a baby...

I had a million things to do. It was early, maybe the fourth month. I spotted and I went to Nick <her doctor> and he said - this is when he gave me this lecture. He said, "At your age," and he said, "and what you are carrying with the children you have." He said, "You should have had more sense than to become pregnant again." He said, "I doubt if you can carry this child. It means that you have got to spend most of your time in bed." Well, I knew that that was just as possible as getting bananas off of this tree out here. So, I tried in the evening. I would try to lie down and I couldn't lie very long because the baby, Mary Sue <her youngest> was just a baby! And this night, Ira <her husband> was at a meeting at the church, and I was alone and this ting came on and I crawled up the steps and had it in the toilet and crawled down again. I went to the phone to call the doctor and he was sick and couldn't come. I had it all by myself. And it was called an abortion, because it wasn't <pause> But I do not believe - I saw the thing. I had it in the toilet. It was like a chicken, and it really looked like that to me. I couldn't think of that as a person. That was an organism. That was something that was developing.

But when you talk about a human being you talk about a spirit, a soul. A being. And I don't believe there's a being before you're born.<sup>4</sup>

### *STATUS CONFESSIOINIS AND ADIAPHORA*

I am not an impartial historian in the case of abortion. I am a woman, confessional Lutheran-Christian theologian, who was raised in a family of strong, educated, thoughtful Christian women. I am an ordained clergyperson of the one, holy, catholic (universal), and apostolic church of Christ as manifest in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, a denomination of approximately 10,000 congregation and 3 million members across the United States. Our denomination is a part of the Lutheran World Federation, a global federation of Lutheran expressions in every country of the world. We are also members of the World Council of Churches, and the National Council of Churches, both ecumenical, cooperative expressions of the God's church.

When I speak of being a confessional Lutheran-Christian, I am referring to the common thread of Lutheranism often referred to as "the confessions", that is, the contents of the *Book of Concord (BOC)*. Upholding the *confessions* is the one unifying proclamation of how to understand God's self-revealing through scripture, church history, and worldly practice. In the BOC can be found the *keys of the church*, that is, the three historic creeds (Apostles', Athanasian, Nicene), the catechism, and other documents related to the German Reformation. Within that tome, the Reformers prioritize teachings of the faith.

Lutherans uphold that there are two types of expressions of faith: *status confessioinis* (those things essential to Christian faith for salvation) and *adiaphora* (non-essentials of the Christian faith). Trusting in those things confessed in the creeds is essential to the Christian faith

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<sup>4</sup> Mary Watts Sassaman, Interview by Elizabeth C. Polanzke, Cassette recording, November 26, 1991.

(*status confessionis*). The ethical issues presented in living-out the Christian faith are matters of *adiaphora*. I like to say that *status confessionis* is the artist's masterpiece and *adiaphora* is the frame on the picture. The frame is not necessary, but a bad frame does not compliment a picture properly. A good frame lets the picture shine. As Jesus says, "Let your light so shine so that others may see your good works and glorify your Father in Heaven (Mt 5:16)."

While legal access to abortion is considered *adiaphora*, it is hardly such for the women making those life and death decisions. Is it better to continue a pregnancy when a woman knows it will end her life? That is the question for every one in 1000 pregnant women who are diagnosed with cancer.<sup>5</sup> Will having an abortion in order to receive chemotherapy lose her salvation in Christ? Is it better for a ten-year-old girl to carry the baby of her rapists to term? Or does she lose possibility of salvation if she receives a D&C, so that she may begin the process of restoring her life, which will hopefully be a long and happier one? Does the married woman who used birth control, but became pregnant anyway, receive an abortion to sever the ties to her husband who just announced he is having an affair and divorcing her? Is the young Christian woman who got pregnant during a night of partying required to bring that pregnancy to term despite that it will force her to quit college, ostracize her from her family, and destabilize her mental health? When it is discovered in the twenty-fourth week of a pregnancy that the baby has a fatal genetic malformation and will not survive, is the mother expected to carry that child for ten more weeks?

These women ask, "If I have a D&C, will my soul be condemned?" "Does this pregnancy have a soul even if it cannot live outside of my uterus?" "Is my life more valuable

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<sup>5</sup> Adriana Hepner, Daniel Negrini, et. al., "Cancer During Pregnancy: The Oncologist Overview" *World Journal of Oncology*, February 2019 Vol 10 (1) Published online February 26, 2019. Retrieved August 1, 2022, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6396773/#!po=0.675676>.



than the heart beating in my uterus, even if it is not yet a person?” “What does it mean to love? Is having an abortion a loving act?” “Why would God give me a baby and then kill it in my womb?” “Can I be forgiven?”

These are not hypothetical scenarios and questions. They are real ones for which I have been a part of the discussion as pastor, confidante, family member, and friend. Not even one of these women and their families made their decisions lightly. To date the church across expression and denominations has treated abortion as if it is an ethical “issue”, and therefore, *adiaphora*. But for the women (and female children) and their families who weighed these matters, these questions are the very stuff of faithful deliberation, and relationship with God.

Prominent Lutheran theologian and historian, the late Rev. Dr. Robert Jenson once wrote regarding abortion that “the wisdom of the counseling chamber does not directly translate into just law or wise policy.”<sup>6</sup> His words may ring true for some moral issues, but I would debate him on the question of abortion. The counseling chamber is precisely the place where policy, prayer, theology, and practice meet. To save lives, spiritual and temporal, God’s voice must be heard and preached rightly.<sup>7</sup> In my opinion, abortion is neither a social issue to issue an opinion upon, nor is it *adiaphora*. It is a medical matter addressed in the deepest, spiritual, and personal place. It is at the heart of family, which is the foundation for human community.

#### THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA (ELCA)

The ELCA was formed in 1988 through a merger of three Lutheran bodies: The American Lutheran Church (ALC), the Lutheran Church in America (LCA), and the American Evangelical Lutheran Church (AELC). Two of these predecessor bodies, the ALC and LCA, had

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<sup>6</sup> Robert W. Jenson, “On Abortion: Sorting Out the Questions” (*Lutheran Forum*, Lent 1983), 9.

<sup>7</sup> “Augsburg Confession: Article VII: The Church” *Book of Concord*, translated by Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 26.

established statements regarding abortion.

Trusting in God's guidance, Lutherans labor to interpret today's concerns and world events through a churchwide process of study, discussion, and prayer which leads to a written statement. By this method, the ELCA presents a unified voice on many contemporary matters including but not limited to abortion, the death penalty, genetic research, human sexuality, and economic life. Such ethical matters are considered *adiaphora*. Regarding such issues it is generally upheld that Christians of good conscience may differ on any social issue. The function of a social statement is to "guide the life of <the ELCA> as an institution and inform the conscience of its members in the spirit of Christian liberty."<sup>8</sup> Social statements, therefore, like the ELCA *Social Statement on Abortion* (see Appendix) do not require adherence by ELCA members, but act as a witness of its calling to be in the world and offer moral guidance according to God's salvific offering.

The ELCA embraces scientific discovery as part of God's ongoing revelation to the world for the improvement of the human condition. As stated in the *ELCA Social Statement on Genetics, Faith and Responsibility*, "Breakthrough discoveries and cutting-edge technologies evoke a sense of awe and provide insights into the human place within the web of creation. They unlock unprecedented power to diagnose and cure diseases and to address agricultural and environmental problems." Science is a gift from God, but may pose ethical questions in the proper stewardship of its discoveries. To that end, the ELCA forms social statements to consider those matters that arise. Abortion and genetics have provided the ground for such deliberation.

## THE ELCA AND ABORTION

The ELCA *Social Statement on Abortion* was developed by a Task Force from 1990-

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<sup>8</sup> "ELCA Statement on Church in Society" Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (Orlando, FL, August 28-September 4, 1991), 7.

1991, and adopted at a Churchwide Assembly in 1991. As a recently developed denomination, the ELCA had codified the predecessor body documents until the newly formed ELCA could adopt a new statement of its own. The use of pre-existing statements on abortion meant that any position taken by the ELCA would have some consistency of witness on this issue.

The Task Force on abortion included ELCA staff members, and “the leader of Lutherans for Life on one side, a woman gynecologist who performed abortions on the other and in-between them people of all possible persuasions on the spectrum of opinions on abortion.”<sup>9</sup> Jerry Folk, who was the Executive Director of the Commission for Church in Society, characterized the meetings of the Task Force in this way:

The most important commitment of the Task Force made at its first meeting and remained faithful to throughout its deliberations was to be open to and respectful of one another and also to be open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit...Listening and mutual respect in such a group are herculean difficult tasks. Indeed, two or three times one or more people would leave the table in tears and we did not know if they would be back, but they always returned.<sup>10</sup>

The resulting statement is a nuanced witness to the Gospel that claims that the church is a community supportive of life. While it does not state when life begins, it affirms that “abortion ought to be an option only of last resort.”<sup>11</sup> For that reason, the denomination seeks to support those “who face problematic pregnancies in ways that effectively address their immediate as well as long-term needs.”<sup>12</sup>

When the statement was adopted, its nuanced position was initially mischaracterized by the media. Karen Bloomquist, chairperson of the Task Force and ELCA staff person, recounted,

At the final meeting of the task force, the religion editor of the *New York Times*, who had been covering the RC bishop (Weakland)

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<sup>9</sup> Jerry Folk, Interview by Elizabeth C. Polanzke, Email, June 14, 2022.

<sup>10</sup> Folk, *ibid.*.

<sup>11</sup> ELCA, *Abortion*, *ibid.*.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*.

who had been advocating a different position than the Vatican position, came to visit our meeting for a short time, and stayed for all of it. He remarked that what this task force was doing was remarkable, in how it was cutting new ground. He got it correct (it <the statement> was neither stridently pro life or pro choice), and had to correct an AP reporter who would in print mis-characterise it when adopted by the ELCA.<sup>13</sup>

## EVANGELICALISM

“Evangelicals are a worldwide family of Bible-believing Christians committed to sharing with everyone everywhere the transforming good news of new life in Jesus Christ, an utterly free gift that comes through faith alone in the crucified and risen Savior.”<sup>14</sup> Evangelicalism is a movement, not a denomination, and as such those who identify as Evangelicals may be found across denominations and congregations throughout the world. Evangelicals, today, were known as fundamentalists only a few years ago.

There are certain marks that define Evangelicalism, and while there is some disparity within the movement to define it, I have distilled those characteristics from a variety of sources.

❑ **Conversion** The life of an Evangelical begins with repenting of the old life, and committing oneself to Christ. This is a marked event in the life of the Evangelical, sometimes recounted as a minute, moment, date or event. At time conversion is marked with the rite of baptism.

❑ **Bible-believing or “Biblicalism”** The center of understanding and confessing God’s work in the world is through the Bible, which is characterized as the infallible, inerrant Word of God. The Bible provides the truths around which the Evangelical shapes his or her life. For example, some Evangelicals may believe that the world was created in

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<sup>13</sup> Karen Bloomquist, Interview by Elizabeth C. Polanzke, Email, May 25, 2022.

<sup>14</sup> Douglas A. Sweeney, *The American Evangelical Story: A History of the Movement* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 1

seven twenty-four hour days (Gn 1:1-2:4). Consequently, they are reluctant to embrace modern scientific theories like evolution. One of the first political challenges to Evangelicalism's embrace of scripture centered on the question of creation and climaxed with the "Scopes Monkey Trial", properly known as *The State of Tennessee v. John Thomas Scopes* (1925). At issue was whether it would be legal to teach evolution in schools. For Evangelicals, the Bible is "the ultimate authority for all matters of faith and religious practice".<sup>15</sup>

❓ **God is moral being** Conversion can be considered either a work of the heart – the word lived - or a work of rational thought – word spoken.<sup>16</sup> Either way, the result is to align one's life with God's law and expectation for moral living, rather than adhere to a denominational expression of the Christian faith. Until recently, Evangelicals accepted that all of humanity is in possession of natural law, that is, a common morality written on the heart and mind of every rational being. The converted person, then, is to align their life with God's natural law. For various reasons, it has become apparent that the morality which was assumed to be held in common, is not truly held in common. People from various cultures may follow a variety of norms, so Biblical law has taken on a much more prominent place in the expression of the faith and definition of morality.

❓ **City on a Hill** "Foundational to evangelicalism is the need to witness to the 'good news' of Jesus Christ, to 'go into all the world.' At its core, it is a faith with a global vision."<sup>17</sup>

When the Puritans arrived with this vision, they conceived that their calling was to

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<sup>15</sup> Mark A Noll, "Defining Evangelicalism", *Global Evangelicalism : Theology, History and Culture in Regional Perspective*, eds. Donald M. Lewis and Richard V. Pierard. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2014. Accessed August 13, 2022. ProQuest Ebook Central), 20.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, 19.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, 19.

establish a “model Christian community”, the City on a Hill.<sup>18</sup> Their vision of the United States as a Christian nation, committed to Christ for the sake of converting and claiming the world for Christ has carried over to form today’s Evangelical activism. It is the *raison d’etre* for Evangelical involvement in the American political sphere.

❓ ***Christus Victor*** The central Christian narrative of Evangelicalism is Christ’s sacrifice on the cross and victory over the grave. Christ triumphant and victorious over sin, death, and the devil, *Christus Victor*, supports and undergirds all Evangelical Biblical interpretation, the vision of the Light on a Hill, personal achievement in conversion and moral living.

## EVANGELICALS AND ABORTION

The problem with trying to characterize the Evangelical position on abortion is primarily due to its being a movement, not a unified denomination. As a movement, it relies heavily upon the leadership of the movement to be the voice and interpreter of God’s intention in contemporary matters. As the leaders of the movement changed and developed, so too, has the Evangelical voice regarding abortion.

Ultimately, the Evangelical position on abortion is to create a world where it is unnecessary. This aim is part and parcel of being the City on a Hill, a moral city that is committed to Christ. Committing to Christ means to support life in all its forms. The extreme version of this vision leads Evangelicals to support eliminating all abortion for any reason.

Historically, Evangelicals avoided associating with movements that sought to eliminate abortion, because “they were suspicious of Catholics,” who led the anti-abortion movement,

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<sup>18</sup> Francis Bremer, *The Puritan Experiment: New England Society from Bradford to Edwards* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1995), 55.

“and because they lacked a clear theology of when human life began.”<sup>19</sup> It wasn’t until the mid-1970s when that changed, and the Evangelical movement aligned itself with the Roman Catholic position on abortion. At that time, Francis Schaeffer, a fundamentalist apologist, wrote a number of articles concerning abortion. Jerry Falwell, the founder of Liberty University and popular proponent of fundamentalism, “had occasionally preached against abortion in the mid-1970s, but after reading one of Francis Schaeffer’s articles on the issue, he embarked on a pro-life campaign in 1978...Schaeffer’s writings convinced Falwell to cooperate with Catholics and to join the pro-life movement.”<sup>20</sup>

Jerry Falwell’s activism created the very public environment which inspired the creation of Operation Rescue, a group aimed at “using nonviolent human force to temporarily shut down abortion clinics.”<sup>21</sup> Operation Rescue and Jerry Falwell’s leadership were in full force at the time that the ELCA was creating its social statement in 1990-1991. Most likely this is the reason the *New York Times* reporter remarked upon the new ground being broken by the ELCA. The much more public and publicized Evangelical efforts to end abortion must have been more familiar to that reporter, and easier to print, than a lengthy statement.

It was in those days, Mary Watts Sassaman, reflecting on the public debate, said,

“I do not think that any man ought to enter into this at all, because when you think about it: it isn’t their body. I cannot decide that for any other woman. It’s her body. She’s going to have to account for what she does. And it’s up to her to do it. And it’s not up to a government that has hungry children to feed that are here to say that a child wants to be born. How do they know a child wants to be born? They don’t know a thing about it. Men talk out of ignorance. They don’t know anything.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Williams, *Defenders*, *ibid.*, 67.

<sup>20</sup> Daniel K. Williams, *God’s Own Party: The Makers of the Christian Right* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 155-156.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, 223.

<sup>22</sup> Sassaman, *ibid.*.

## POINT OF INTERSECTION: PERSONHOOD

Even in the Lutheran church, certain leaders cannot be ignored. The late Rev. Dr. Robert W. Jenson was one such leader. A longtime educator, who mentored and instructed hundreds, if not thousands, of Lutheran clergy and laity, he left a prolific legacy of writings. In 1983, he wrote, “It is an old theological puzzler: When does God add the soul to the body? The Lutherans have heretofore unanimously answered: Never. To use the old theological technical vocabulary, the Lutherans have been ‘traducian’; they have taught that the soul – personhood – is not the kind of thing that can be added to the organism, that the act of the parents in conception *is* God’s one and only act to initiate new human reality, to initiate the one human person of whom body and soul are merely aspects.”<sup>23</sup> He assumed that life begins at conception and that the zygote is in possession of a soul. His position was articulated previously by the ALC in 1980 who resolved, “that human life from conception, created in the image of God, is always sacred”<sup>24</sup> Catholic anti-abortion groups adopted this philosophy from the ALC, even as the Lutheran denomination supported abortion legalization in limited cases.<sup>25</sup>

Only two years before the ALC’s statement, Zondervan Publishing House produced the New International Version of the Bible. Translation choices were made by Zondervan, specifically in Exodus 21:22-23, which “seemed to these evangelicals to differentiate between the moral status for the woman and the life inside her.”<sup>26</sup> So, while the ALC and a prominent Lutheran historian were claiming that life begins at conception, “the novel translation of Exodus

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<sup>23</sup> Jenson, *ibid.*, 12.

<sup>24</sup> “Abortion: A Series of Statements of The American Lutheran Church 1974, 1976, and 1980” Minneapolis: Office of Research and Analysis: The American Lutheran Church, 1980) 1.

<sup>25</sup> Williams, *Defenders*, *ibid.*, 83.

<sup>26</sup> Jonathan Dudley, “When the ‘Biblical View’ for Evangelicals Was That Life Begins at Birth,” *Religion Dispatches* (September 27, 2019), <https://religiondispatches.org/when-the-biblical-view-for-evangelicals-was-that-life-begins-at-birth>.



21:22-23 allowed the founders of the evangelical Right to neutralize previous, Bible-based reservations about pro-life activism. By 1980, Jerry Falwell was off to the races. ‘The Bible clearly states that life begins at conception,’ he declared in his book *Listen America!*”<sup>27</sup> He went on to say that “pious evangelicals who came before him just didn’t read their Bibles closely enough,” lending credence to the idea that the scriptures always said this.<sup>28</sup>

When the ALC adopted this position in 1980, it was reported by the United Press International (UPI), which leads to a question of who influenced who. Did Jerry Falwell read the UPI article? We’ll never know.

Like Falwell, the ALC and Jenson position that life begins at conception were a new concept for Lutherans, who for the most part, had accepted that life begins with the first breath. This stance harkens to the story of creation in Genesis in which God breathes life into Adam. The idea is reinforced by the scriptural Hebrew word, “*ruah*” and Greek word, “*pneuma*”, both of which mean breath and are the words for “spirit.”

#### POINT OF DEPARTURE: COMPASSION OR WARFARE

“We *are* bodies,” wrote Lutheran theologian, Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel in 1995.<sup>29</sup> Around the time that the questions around abortion were heating-up, she was asking the question of embodiment. She wrote,

The feminist movement continued and continues to be anxious about a lapse into the biological determination of women. Many people feel that the body can imperceptibly snap shut over women again and banish them to home, child-bearing and cooking. Moreover, it is women’s bodies that make them prone to becoming victims: at home, in the marital bed, on the streets, and recently once again in war. As a majority of women in society feel that

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<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*.

<sup>28</sup> Jonathan Dudley, “How Evangelicals Decided That Life Begins at Conception,” *HuffPost* (November 5, 2012), [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/how-evangelicals-decided-that-life-begins-at-conception\\_b\\_2072716](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/how-evangelicals-decided-that-life-begins-at-conception_b_2072716).

<sup>29</sup> Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, *I Am My Body: A Theology of Embodiment*, (New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1995), 6.

their bodies are humiliated and humiliating, this is no happy beginning for a woman's movement. Society must be liberated and changed so that women's bodies can also be free..."

Where Dr. Jenson writes that a mother (and father) "must have nothing whatever to say about whether an abortion is in fact to be performed,"<sup>30</sup> Dr. Moltmann-Wendel writes,

Independence in dealing with one's body also includes responsibility in questions of pregnancy. In the end the woman must decide whether a life coming into being can be accepted or a pregnancy has to be aborted. For it is *her* body which bears and has to give birth to the child. It is her body through which she gives it care and security. It is her dedication through which a human being becomes a human being.<sup>31</sup>

Between these theological giants, which way does the ELCA turn in its social statement? Again, the ELCA accomplishes a nuanced position which honors the independence and life of the mother (and father), and includes the community in the discussion. "The language used in discussing abortion should ignore neither the value of unborn life nor the value of the woman and her other relationships...The concern for both the life of the woman and the developing life in her womb expresses a common commitment to life."<sup>32</sup>

This is where a divergence occurs between the ELCA and Evangelical position on abortion. The ELCA maintains a heightened and egalitarian view of the life of the woman alongside the unborn. The Evangelical position with its commitment to moral behavior, maintains a heightened value on the unborn as an innocent who cannot protect itself from the immoral mother or doctor who would terminate the pregnancy. While "most pro-life Christians also want to address the societal factors that lead to abortion and care for a woman as "the

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<sup>30</sup> Jenson, *ibid.*, 12.

<sup>31</sup> Moltmann-Wendel, *ibid.*, 13.

<sup>32</sup> ELCA, *Abortion*, *ibid.*.

second victims” when they choose to abort,” there exists among Evangelicals a position that seeks to criminalize mothers and doctors who would abort.<sup>33</sup>

Additionally, the rhetoric of Evangelicals around abortion are words associated with warfare. In 1989, Tim Stafford wrote in the evangelical publication, *Christianity Today*, “The Abortion Wars: What Most Christians Don’t Know.” The rhetoric he uses has become familiar to the anti-abortion movement among Evangelicals. He writes of “war”, “tactics”, and “winning”. The inflammatory language is problematical enough, but it was also aimed directly at women.<sup>34</sup> While the ELCA urged compassion, the Evangelical anti-abortion movement spoke of war. The contrast between the two couldn’t be sharper than that.

Beginning in 1984, a series of clinics where abortions were being performed were bombed by anti-abortion activists. As the rhetoric of warfare escalated, so too, did acts of violence against women, families, and doctors. In 2009, Dr. George Tiller, a doctor who performed abortions, was shot and killed during worship in Reformation Lutheran Church, an ELCA congregation. He had survived a previous shooting in 1993, two years after the ELCA had adopted its social statement. Of this event, Jon Shields wrote in *Christianity today*, “We can only hope that imprisoning Tiller’s killer will put an end to abortion-related murders, and that Tiller’s death will encourage the pro-life mainstream to redouble its commitment to civility and public reason once again.”<sup>35</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Mary Watts Sassaman said, “when you talk about a human being you talk about a spirit, a

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<sup>33</sup> Ericka Andersen, “When ‘Pro-Life’ Isn’t Enough: Abortion ‘Abolitionists’ Speak Up,” *Christianity Today* (August 2, 2022), <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2022/august/abortion-abolitionists-pro-life-movement-christian-roe-wade.html>

<sup>34</sup> Tim Stafford, “The Abortion Wars: What Most Christians Don’t Know,” *Christianity Today* (October 6, 1989).

<sup>35</sup> Jon A. Shields, “Abortion Violence and American Democracy,” *Christianity Today* (June 3, 2009).

soul. A being. And I don't believe there's a being before you're born."<sup>36</sup> She reflected the tradition in which she was raised, not the one that was adopted later in her life at the time of this interview. She believed, as the church did in some places for many centuries, that life began when God gives breath. Her thoughts were unaffected by the debate and statements of the church: As are most woman while in the counseling chamber.

In 1991, when the ELCA adopted its *Statement on Abortion* it sought to provide the church with guidance when considering abortion in the public sphere as well as private contemplation. While the ELCA created this guidance, the Evangelical movement was living out its own version of the gospel, to create a world where abortion doesn't happen and is unavailable for contemplation. These efforts were taken with the intention of working toward establishing the United States as the world's moral center, the City on a Hill, a Christian nation.

The waves which led each religious group to address the concerns about abortion continue to ebb and flow. With the advent of the internet, and diversification of religious leadership through it, Evangelicalism will struggle to identify the next leader of its anti-abortion movement. In the vacuum of a single voice, the movement risks having more radical voices such as Abortion Abolitionists fill the void. Meanwhile, the ELCA statement remains and stands without alteration as a guidepost for current and future generations.

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<sup>36</sup> Sassaman, *ibid.*.

## Evangelical Lutheran Church in America



A Social Statement on:

### ABORTION<sup>37</sup>

*This social teaching statement was adopted by a more than two-thirds majority vote at the second biennial Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, meeting in Orlando, Florida, August 28-September 4, 1991.*

## I. OUR UNITY AND DIVERSITY IN CHRIST

### A. The Basis of Our Unity

We in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America are united with all human beings and the whole creation because God has created us and all that exists.

We are united in Christ with all Christians in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.

As Lutherans we are united in our confession that we are justified by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. We believe that the Bible is the authoritative source and norm for Christian faith and life.

### B. The Gift of Our Diversity

Because we are united in Christ through faith, we have both the freedom and the obligation to engage in serious deliberation on moral matters.

Induced abortion, the act of intentionally terminating a developing life in the womb, is one of the issues about which members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America have serious differences. These differences are also found within society.

Differences hold promise or peril. Our differences are deep and potentially divisive. However, they are also a gift that can lead us into constructive conversation about our faith and its implications for our life in the world.

### C. Talking about Our Differences

The topic of abortion evokes strong and varied convictions about the social order, the roles of women and men, human life and human responsibility, freedom and limits, sexual morality, and the significance of children in our lives. It involves powerful feelings that are based on different life experiences and interpretations of Christian faith and life in the world. If we are to take our differences seriously, we must learn how to talk about them in ways that do justice to our diversity.

The language used in discussing abortion should ignore neither the value of un-born life nor the value of the woman and her other relationships. It should neither obscure the moral seriousness of the decision faced by the woman nor hide the moral value of the newly conceived life. Nor is it helpful to use the language of 'rights' in absolute ways that imply that no other significant moral claims intrude. A developing life in the womb does not have an absolute right to be born, nor does a pregnant woman have an absolute right to terminate a pregnancy. The concern for

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<sup>37</sup> The issue of abortion was addressed by the Lutheran Church in America in its social statement, *Sex, Marriage, and Family* (1970) and in a 1978 clarifying minute. The American Lutheran Church addressed this issue in a series of statements in 1974, 1976, and 1980.

both the life of the woman and the developing life in her womb expresses a common commitment to life. This requires that we move beyond the usual ‘pro- life’ versus ‘pro-choice’ language in discussing abortion.

## II. CONVICTIONS OF OUR FAITH

Some basic faith convictions undergird our judgments on abortion:

- Human beings, created in God’s image as male and female (Genesis 1:27-28), are persons of intrinsic value and dignity. Human beings live in community, with responsibility and accountability to God, self, and others. Women, faced with unintended pregnancies, are called to be good stewards of life by making responsible decisions in light of these relationships. Women and men share equally in the responsibility and accountability for procreation, although it is women who are most intimately affected by decisions about abortion.
- All of life is a mysterious, awesome gift of God. Biblical passages express the God-given mystery of creation (Psalm 139; Jeremiah 1:5; Isaiah 40:26ff; Luke 1:41; Acts 17:24-25). God creates life, redeems it through Jesus Christ, and fulfills it in the coming of the reign of God. Personal human life is a part of this divine drama. God creates a human being through complex genetic, physiological, and relational developments.<sup>38</sup> Human life in all phases of its development is God-given and, therefore, has intrinsic value, worth, and dignity. Guided by God’s Law, which orders and preserves life, human beings are called to respect and care for the life that God gives.
- What God has created has become corrupted by sin. Sin is both a condition of alienation from God and the acts that issue from this condition. Human judgments, actions, organizations, and practices are marked by a distortion of God’s will and purpose for life. Sin is evident in the many ways human lives are not given equal respect or treated with high value, but are subject to abuse, violence, and neglect by individuals, groups, and entire societies. We are caught up in a web of sin in which we both sin and are sinned against.
- God calls us to repentance, renewal, and responsible living. We have ‘died to sin’ through our Baptism into Christ and through him are raised to new life (Romans 6:2ff). We are forgiven and sustained through God’s grace. Our faith is to be active in love and our freedom used for the benefit of one another. This is the fruit of the Spirit manifest in our lives. We are to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God (Micah 6:8).

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<sup>38</sup> Embryology provides insight into the complex mystery of God’s creative activity. How we interpret and evaluate this data makes a difference in how we as Christians make decisions regarding abortion:

The genetic material from the egg and sperm unite at the point of fertilization and form a unique, undifferentiated, loose cluster of cells. From 40-75 percent of these zygotes spontaneously fail to implant in the uterus. After implantation occurs at about two weeks after fertilization, the complex process of developmental differentiation begins, with a close symbiotic relationship between the embryo and the mother’s body. At about the eighth week, the embryo becomes a fetus. Integrated brain functioning begins to emerge at about the tenth week, followed by the increasingly complex emergence of functional, behavioral, and eventually psychic individuality. The social aspect emerges through recognition by and relation with others, most dramatically as birth is approached. The fetus becomes viable when it is capable of surviving disconnected from the placenta. Depending upon technological supports, this can occur at 24 weeks if not earlier.

- As a community of forgiven sinners, justified by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ, we are empowered so that we might do what is effective in serving the needs of the neighbor. Inspired by Jesus' own ministry, our love for neighbor embraces especially those who are most vulnerable, including both the pregnant woman and the life in her womb.

### III. THE CHURCH AS A COMMUNITY SUPPORTIVE OF LIFE

Because we believe that God is the creator of life, the number of induced abortions is a source of deep concern to this church. We mourn the loss of life that God has created.<sup>A</sup> The strong Christian presumption is to preserve and protect life. Abortion ought to be an option only of last resort. Therefore, as a church we seek to reduce the need to turn to abortion as the answer to unintended pregnancies.<sup>B</sup>

We also deplore the circumstances that lead a woman to consider abortion as the best option available to her. We are moved particularly by the anguish of women who face unwanted pregnancies alone. The panic and isolation of such pregnancies, even in the best of circumstances, can be traumatic. Poverty, lack of supportive relationships, immaturity, oppressive social realities, sexism, and racism can intensify her sense of powerlessness. The prospect of having and caring for a child can seem overwhelming.

We confess our sin as a community of faith.<sup>C</sup> We often have fallen short in respecting God's gift of life and in providing conditions more conducive for bringing new life into the world.

As a community of faith we seek to live out our support for life in all its dimensions. We are committed to supporting those who face problematic pregnancies in ways that effectively address their immediate as well as long-term needs. This can include financial, nutritional, medical, educational, social, and psychological, as well as spiritual support.

Our ministry of hospitality to all people ought to include women who have had abortions, women who are considering abortions, children, families, and those who bear and raise children under all kinds of circumstances. This should be reflected throughout congregational life and church policy. Congregations are encouraged to support day-care centers and nurseries in their facilities. Services and shelter should be provided, especially to enable young mothers and fathers to continue their education and care for their children. Members should also be encouraged to become foster and/or adoptive parents. By our policies and practices as a church we need to indicate that we are truly supportive of children through the long years after, and not only before, they are born.

Marriage is the appropriate context for sexual intercourse. This continues to be the position of this church. We affirm that the goodness of sexual intercourse goes beyond its procreative purpose.<sup>39</sup> Whenever sexual intercourse occurs apart from the intent to conceive, the use of contraceptives is the responsibility of the man and of the woman.

Our congregations and church schools ought to provide sex education in the context of the Christian faith. Such education, beginning in the elementary years, needs to emphasize values such as responsibility, mutuality, and abstinence from sexual intercourse outside of marriage.

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<sup>39</sup> These positions are represented in predecessor social statements of the American Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Church in America. Because a social statement on human sexuality is expected to be considered by this church in 1993, matters of sexuality are not dealt with at length in this statement.

Parents should also be prepared to teach sexual responsibility to their children in the home. It is especially important that young men and young women be taught to exercise their sexuality responsibly.

Because this church recognizes parenthood as a vocation that women and men share, we should encourage and educate males, from an early age, to assume more responsibility for raising children. Congregations should provide parenting classes and support groups for fathers and for mothers.

In keeping with our commitment to become communities that are truly life-affirming, this church challenges the following life-degrading attitudes that permeate the prevailing culture and may contribute to the high incidence of abortion: messages in the media and elsewhere that encourage irresponsible sexual activity; materialism, individualism, and excessive concern for self-interest; the desire for ‘perfect’ children, and treating those who are not as if they were ‘disposable’; attitudes and practices that are inhospitable to children and to the women who bear them; low regard of human life, especially the lives of African-Americans, Hispanics, Asians, or Native Americans, and of many women and children who are poor.

Through these and other efforts, we as a church seek to reduce the need to turn to abortion as the answer to unintended pregnancies.

#### **IV. GUIDANCE IN MAKING DECISIONS REGARDING UNINTENDED PREGNANCIES**

We are called to be a compassionate community, praying and standing with those who struggle with decisions regarding unintended pregnancies. We encourage women and men to seek support and counsel from family members, pastors, professionals, and confidants whom they trust and respect. Church members must not only be aware of the moral complexity of the situation, but be able and willing to listen and walk with women and men through the process of decision-making, healing, and renewal, a process that may include feelings such as grief, guilt, relief, denial, regret, or anger.<sup>D</sup>

Pastors and other members of this church should be trained to provide counsel that is competent and respectful of the integrity of the woman, the man, and others who may be involved in these decisions. The professional expertise of the church’s social ministry organizations should also be utilized. It is important that those who counsel persons faced with unintended pregnancies respect how deeply the woman’s pregnancy involves her whole person—body, mind and spirit—in relation to all the commitments that comprise her stewardship of life. Counsellors should seek to call forth her power to act responsibly after prayerful reflection upon all factors involved.

Regardless of the decisions, our pastoral response must be a gracious affirmation of the value of women’s lives and assistance in dealing with ongoing implications of their decisions for their own well-being and their relationships.

##### **A. Continuing the Pregnancy**

Because of the Christian presumption to preserve and protect life, this church, in most circumstances, encourages women with unintended pregnancies to continue the pregnancy. Faith and trust in God’s promises has the power to sustain people in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles. In each set of circumstances, there must also be a realistic assessment of what will be necessary to bear, nurture, and provide for children over the long-term, and what resources are available or need to be provided for this purpose. The needs of children are a



constant. The parenting arrangements through which these needs are met may vary. If it is not possible for both parents to raise the child, this might be done by one parent, by the extended family, or by foster or adoptive parents.

This church encourages and seeks to support adoption as a positive option to abortion. Because adoption is an increasingly more open process today, it generally is easier for birth parents to have a role in selecting the adoptive parents and in maintaining some contact with the child. These possibilities can be helpful in the grieving process that is likely to occur when birth parent(s) choose to place the child for adoption after having bonded with the child during pregnancy. Care needs to be taken in selecting adoption processes that do not exploit but safeguard the welfare of all parties involved. At the same time, we recognize that there are unintended pregnancies for which adoption is not an acceptable option.

We encourage and seek to make it possible for people of diverse cultural and racial backgrounds and with limited financial means to adopt children. We encourage those who contemplate adopting to consider adopting children with special needs. Mothers and fathers choosing to place their children for adoption should be affirmed and supported in view of society's prejudices against such decisions.

## **B. Ending a Pregnancy**

This church recognizes that there can be sound reasons for ending a pregnancy through induced abortion. The following provides guidance for those considering such a decision. We recognize that conscientious decisions need to be made in relation to difficult circumstances that vary greatly. What is determined to be a morally responsible decision in one situation may not be in another.

In reflecting ethically on what should be done in the case of an unintended pregnancy, consideration should be given to the status and condition of the life in the womb. We also need to consider the conditions under which the pregnancy occurred and the implications of the pregnancy for the woman's life.

An abortion is morally responsible in those cases in which continuation of a pregnancy presents a clear threat to the physical life of the woman.

A woman should not be morally obligated to carry the resulting pregnancy to term if the pregnancy occurs when both parties do not participate willingly in sexual intercourse.<sup>E</sup> This is especially true in cases of rape and incest. This can also be the case in some situations in which women are so dominated and oppressed that they have no choice regarding sexual intercourse and little access to contraceptives. Some conceptions occur under dehumanizing conditions that are contrary to God's purposes.

There are circumstances of extreme fetal abnormality, which will result in severe suffering and very early death of an infant. In such cases, after competent medical consultations, the parent(s) may responsibly choose to terminate the pregnancy. Whether they choose to continue or to end such pregnancies, this church supports the parent(s) with compassion, recognizing the struggle involved in the decision.

Although abortion raises significant moral issues at any stage of fetal development, the closer the life in the womb comes to full term the more serious such issues become.<sup>F</sup> When a child can survive outside a womb, it becomes possible for other people, and not only the mother, to nourish and care for the child. This church opposes ending intrauterine life when a fetus is

developed enough to live outside a uterus with the aid of reasonable and necessary technology. If a pregnancy needs to be interrupted after this point, every reasonable and necessary effort should be made to support this life, unless there are lethal fetal abnormalities indicating that the prospective newborn will die very soon.

Our biblical and confessional commitments provide the basis for us to continue deliberating together on the moral issues related to these decisions. We have the responsibility to make the best possible decisions in light of the information available to us and our sense of accountability to God, neighbor, and self. In these decisions, we must ultimately rely on the grace of God.

## **V. PUBLIC POLICY ISSUES RELATED TO ABORTION**

The purpose of law is to protect life and liberty, and to provide for the general welfare of society. One of the clearest ways in which a society both expresses its attitudes and values, and shapes them, is through law. Therefore, the church's position on abortion must include guidance for the political decisions whereby justice is sought in the community, from before the pregnancy to long afterward.

What is legal is not necessarily moral, and what is moral should not necessarily be enacted into law. Laws cannot enforce Christian love, but in principle and application they should be just. Christians as citizens and this church as an institution should join with others to advocate for and support just laws and to work to change those, which are unjust. In our attempts to influence the shaping of public policy, we should not disregard the rights of others, but work faithfully through the public processes by which justice is sought for all.

### **A. Prevention of Unintended Pregnancies**

Prevention of unintended pregnancies is crucial in lessening the number of abortions. In addition to efforts within church and home, this church supports appropriate forms of sex education in schools, community pregnancy prevention programs, and parenting preparation classes. We recognize the need for contraceptives to be available, for voluntary sterilization to be considered, and for research and development of new forms of contraception.

### **B. Support for Life after Birth**

Many women choose abortion in a desperate attempt to survive in a hostile social environment. In order to affirm the value of life and reduce the number of abortions, it is essential for us as a church to work to improve support for life in society.

Greater social responsibility for the care, welfare, and education of children and families is needed through such measures as access to quality, affordable health care, child care, and housing. Sufficient income support for families needs to be provided by employers, or, in the case of the unemployed, through government assistance. As a society we need to provide increased support for education, nutrition, and services that protect children from abuse and neglect.<sup>G</sup>

Because parenthood is a vocation that women and men share, this church supports public and private initiatives to provide adequate maternity and paternity leaves, greater flexibility in the work place, and efforts to correct the disparity between the incomes of men and women.

The law must hold both parents responsible for the financial support of their children.

### **C. The Regulation of Abortion**

Members of this church hold different opinions about the role and extent of public law and regulation in relation to abortion. The spectrum of disagreement ranges from those who believe all abortions should be prohibited by law, except to save the life of the mother, to those who oppose any law seeking to regulate abortion, except to protect the health and safety of the woman. For some, the question of pregnancy and abortion is not a matter for governmental interference, but a matter of religious liberty and freedom of conscience protected by the First Amendment. For others, the law's function in protecting life needs to include the life in the womb. Some stress the limited ability of law to stop abortions, and contend that there is increased danger to women if abortions are made illegal. They maintain that regulation takes away a woman's freedom to choose abortion as well as her freedom to affirm life by choosing to bear the child. Still others see the need to work for laws that both protect life in the womb to a greater degree and protect women's freedom to choose abortion in certain circumstances.

The position of this church is that government has a legitimate role in regulating abortion. A major challenge is to formulate policy regarding abortion that will have sufficient consensus to be enforceable. Furthermore, any proposed regulation should contribute toward the intended goals without generating problems worse than those it seeks to address.

In the case of abortion, public policy has a double challenge. One is to be effective in protecting prenatal life. The other is to protect the dignity of women and their freedom to make responsible decisions in difficult situations. Pursuing those ends is particularly formidable because our society is so divided on this issue, and because women, people of color, and those of low income are so under-represented in legislative and judicial processes. In its advocacy regarding these issues, this church should exert every effort to see that the needs of those most directly affected, particularly the pregnant woman and the life in her womb, are seriously considered in the political process.

Laws should be enacted and enforced justly for the preservation and enhancement of life, and should avoid unduly encumbering or endangering the lives of women.

Because of our conviction that both the life of the woman and the life in her womb must be respected by law, this church opposes:

- the total lack of regulation of abortion;
- legislation that would outlaw abortion in all circumstances;
- laws that prevent access to information about all options available to women faced with unintended pregnancies;
- laws that deny access to safe and affordable services for morally justifiable abortions;
- mandatory or coerced abortion or sterilization;
- laws that prevent couples from practicing contraception;
- laws that are primarily intended to harass those contemplating or deciding for an abortion.

The position of this church is that, in cases where the life of the mother is threatened, where pregnancy results from rape or incest, or where the embryo or fetus has lethal abnormalities incompatible with life, abortion prior to viability should not be prohibited by law or by lack of public funding of abortions for low income women. On the other hand, this church supports legislation that prohibits abortions that are performed after the fetus is determined to be viable,

except when the mother's life is threatened or when lethal abnormalities indicate the prospective newborn will die very soon.

Beyond these situations, this church neither supports nor opposes laws prohibiting abortion.

#### **D. Some Issues Requiring Further Deliberation**

It is the position of this church that further deliberation is needed on such questions as whether consultation with the spouse or partner should be required, whether and how parental consent should be required for a minor seeking an abortion, and whether public funds should be used to pay for abortions.

On the issue of public funding of abortions, two important values are in conflict—the concern for equity of access to legal medical services, and the concern that people's tax money not be used to pay for what some people consider profoundly wrong. While we strongly affirm family communication and support, the law should recognize that in some cases husband or partner involvement in the decision could be unwise or dangerous (e.g., if the relationship is broken or violent). If a law requires parental consent when the woman is a minor, it should specify other trusted adults as alternatives if parental involvement is inappropriate or unsafe.

It is through the public processes of our society that the common good is sought for all. This church encourages its members to participate in the public debate on abortion in a spirit of respect for those with whom they differ. Committed to a process of raising and deliberating the difficult and unresolved questions, this church encourages its members, informed by faith understandings and by their conscience, to decide and act on this issue in ways that are responsive to God and to the needs of the neighbor.

In conclusion, the church's role in society begins long before and extends far beyond legislative regulation. It seeks to shape attitudes and values that affirm people in whatever circumstances they find themselves. Its pastoral care, compassionate outreach, and life-sustaining assistance are crucial in supporting those who bear children, as well as those who choose not to do so. Through these and other means the people of God seek to be truly supportive of life.

*Social teaching statements provide an analysis and interpretation of an issue, set forth basic theological and ethical perspectives related to it, and offer guidance for the corporate Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and its individual members. They also illustrate the implications of their teaching for the social practice of this church. In their use as teaching documents, their authority is persuasive, not coercive. (From Social Statements in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, adopted by the 1989 Churchwide Assembly, which also specifies that an addendum "be added to those statements that elicit significant division in the Churchwide Assembly summarizing dissenting points of view.")*

#### **Addendum**

The following amendments (at the points indicated in the text) received significant support at the Churchwide Assembly but they did not receive the vote needed for approval:

A—"... and oppose induced abortion as a method of birth control."

B—"... and thereby the number of abortions."

C—to expand the paragraph as follows: "We recognize that the violation or the taking of human life in any way is not in accord with God's ultimate will for creation and therefore sinful. We confess our sin as a community of faith. All who participate in this decision must be guided by

the theological principles of ‘tragic last option’ or ‘greater good,’ which acknowledges that God has given to humankind the gift of discernment. We often have fallen short ....”

D—to insert a new paragraph at this point: “The support given by members of this church will seek to witness to the scriptural norm that God is the creator and preserver of life. This church, and especially the pastors, will carry out its ministry with both God’s Law and God’s Gospel, and proclaim forgiveness and new life to all who are troubled and penitent.”

E—“A woman should not be morally obligated to carry the resulting pregnancy to term if the pregnancy occurs in cases of rape and incest.”

F—“Abortion is not acceptable later than the first trimester.”

G—“The Church must work vigorously to support state and national legislation to provide free prenatal and maternity care to women whose medical needs are not adequately met through medical insurance.”

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Great Job Liz. There have been so many attempts to capture the history of the prolife and prochoice movements. The angle you took with the ELCA is a helpful approach to filling out the story that often times gets dominated by how evangelicals and Catholics approached the topic. It was also helpful to see some intersection between the ELCA and evangelicals. A