



The United Church of Canada General Council

GC28 Contraception and Abortion (1980C511)

True Document Date

July 31, 1980

As Amended by the Executive Council of the General Council, November 1989.

Preamble

As Christians we wish to affirm:

The sanctity of human life, born or unborn. That life is much more than physical existence.

We also affirm that:

The taking of human life is evil.

Our concern must not be limited to a concern for the unborn but it must also include a concern for the quality of life as a whole.

Life in this imperfect world often places us in a complex circumstances of moral dilemma and ambiguity where values ultimate in themselves seem at times to be in conflict with other values and rights.

We are called as a people of God to take responsibility for our lives and the world in which we live. This may involve making grave decisions relating even to life itself.

Each of us is called upon in a freedom that is given by God and within the context of the community of faith to make responsible personal decisions, even when choosing between two wrongs.

As a forgiven people in Christ, it is possible for us to live in the midst of moral dilemmas.

Within our community strong difference of opinion on moral issues are our strength and not our weaknesses.

1. Massive Contraception Program

- a. A child has a right to be wanted, so that it may have some assurance of this essential element in human development. Bringing unwanted children into the world is irresponsible.
- b. Thus, family planning, including vasectomy and the tubal ligation is Christian duty. Our Canadian society has to make every effort to ensure that contraception is the only completely acceptable form of birth control. Some practice of abortion is inevitable for the next few years while contraception techniques are imperfect and contraceptive ignorance is widespread, but the aim of all education, research and social pressure must be always to reduce the incidence of abortion and to promote effective contraception.
- c. To anticipate the use of abortion as a form of birth control and therefore neglect to practise contraception is medically and morally deplorable and socially expensive. Such intentional use of abortion by individuals or governments is morally wrong.

Sexuality

- i. We call on all persons to appreciate their own sexuality primarily in terms of person relationships and only secondarily in terms of physiology, programs,

techniques and services; and charge parents, educators and churches to represent adequately sexuality as intimate, awesome and holy.

- ii. We call on all parents to accept the responsibility to discuss sexual attitudes and information with their children as frankly and as fully as necessary, from the time children begin to ask such questions or need such enlightenment
- iii. We call on all educators, in provincial departments, regional boards and local schools to arrange for comprehensive programs, appropriate to the developmental stages of the children and young people, in family life, sex education, contraception information, personality development, relationships and the development of their own values as responsible, sexual persons.
- iv. We recommend that sexually mature young people should be informed by parents, congregations, schools, Health Departments, etc., as to where contraception information and prescriptions are available, and should be instructed in the dangers of venereal disease.
- v. We commend the federal government for making available funds for education in family planning and birth control, ask it to continue to do so, and urge our people to take action to ensure that the fullest possible use is made of these funds by provincial and local departments of health.
- vi. We call on all United Church people, congregations and presbyteries to urge provincial and local governments to make use of funds available to establish family planning clinics in hospital and public health units, and to support the efforts of public or voluntary agencies to develop or expand such facilities.
- vii. We urge congregations to accept their responsibility to carry out programs on family life education, contraception information, personality development, relationships and the development of sexual values, appropriate to the needs of their members or constituencies.

2. Abortion

- a. We affirm the inherent value of human life, both as immature in the foetus and as expressed in the life of the mother and related persons. The foetus is a unique though immature form of human life and as such, has inherent value. Christians should witness to that value by stressing that abortion is always a moral issue and can only be accepted as the lesser of two evils and should be the most responsible alternative available in each particular situation. Therefore, abortion is acceptable only in certain medical, social and

economic situations.

- b. The previous law, which required a hospital therapeutic abortion committee to authorize an abortion was unjust in principle and unworkable in practice.
- c. We do not support "abortion on demand". We believe that abortion should be a personal matter between a woman and her doctor, who should earnestly consider their understanding of the particular situation permitting the woman to bring to bear her moral and religious insights into human life in reaching a decision through a free and responsive exercise of her conscience.

Therefore:

1. We URGE the government of Canada to:

- a. NOT use the provisions in the Criminal Code to regulate abortion.
- b. ENACT and enforce penalties for people who without the required medical qualifications perform or attempt to perform abortions or who perform or attempt to perform abortions in place other than those approved for that purpose.
- c. THROUGH the use of shared funding under the Canada Health Act to require all provincial governments to provide adequate contraceptive education and services to effectively reduce the incidence to unwanted pregnancies; and to provide early access to early diagnosis and if necessary, termination of pregnancy to that any abortion should be as early as possible.

2. WE urge provincial governments to:

- a. PROVIDE adequate contraceptive education and services.
- b. PROVIDE facilities and require all hospitals to declare publicly their policy on abortion.

3. In order to protect the foetus and the woman from an ill-advised abortion, and to help the woman make a responsible decision, we urge the federal and provincial governments to co-operate with churches and other helping agencies in the funding and further development of counselling services in all centres where abortions are performed, and in geographic areas where such hospital and medical services are not available. This counselling should include:

- a. Early pregnancy counselling to help the woman to:
 - understand her own feelings about being pregnant

- explore all the options for coping with the pregnancy
- carrying the pregnancy to term
- giving up or keeping the baby
- abortion
- articulate her reasons for choosing abortion or carrying the pregnancy to term
- relate to family members or friends to whom she can look for support in her situation

To inform the woman about:

- available community services, should she choose to have and to keep the baby, or have and give up the baby
 - adoption possibilities and procedures
 - abortion procedures and possible mental, spiritual and social ramifications
- b. Contraceptive counselling to ensure that the client and, if possible, her male partner understand the facts of fertility, are informed about contraception methods, and have access to devices and prescriptions.
 - c. Follow-up counselling to deal with personal problems that may arise from the operation and to encourage the continued use of contraceptives.
4. **Further**, as an expression of our Christian concern, we urge churches, governments and all helping agencies to work through all possible avenues to ensure adequate community support for mothers choosing to give birth, both those giving up and those keeping their babies.
 5. **We commend** members of the medical and nursing profession for their responsible and compassionate involvement in the matter of abortion, while reiterating their right to refuse to participate on ground of conscience. We repeat our request to all hospital boards to grant nurses and other medical personnel the option of non-participation and at the same time refer medical personnel to the Canadian Medical Association Code of Ethics in this matter. We draw attention to the action of the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada at their meeting in June, 1971: "That for the time being the fees for the performance of termination of pregnancy should not exceed that set in the local and provincial fee schedules."
 6. **We instruct** the Division of Mission in Canada and the Division of Ministry, Personnel and Education to develop further the provisions which encourage and

enable ministers and lay people to prepare themselves for the counselling of women faced with an abortion dilemma and, where appropriate, their partners or parents.

7. **We instruct** the Division of Mission in Canada to continue to study the church's position on both birth control and abortion, and to make available to the congregations current statements that will enable the church to maintain a responsive involvement in these important concerns.

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