



**Using the ELCA's
Social Statement on Abortion
In Your Congregation**

A Leader Guide Prepared by
the Division of Congregation Ministries
in Cooperation with the Division for Church in Society
of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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WHAT IS IN THIS GUIDE?

This guide provides:

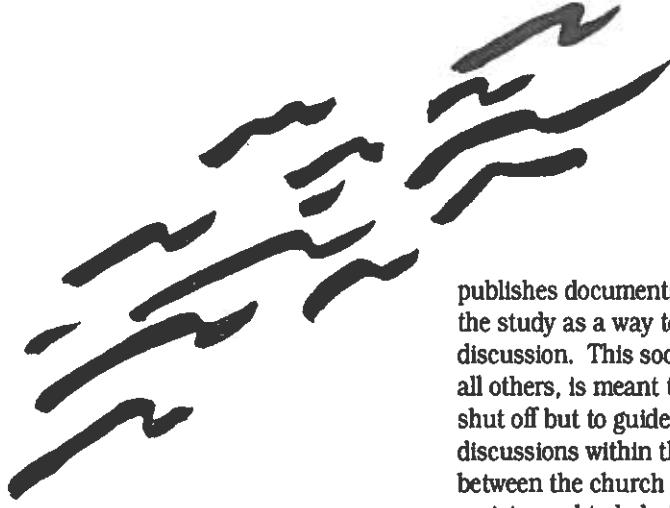
- General instructions to assist those who will plan and lead the abortion study and related activities.
- Detailed directions for a model discussion series for adults, youth, or adults with youth.
- Helps for adapting the model to special settings and circumstances.
- Suggestions and resources for further study and action.
- Handout sheets that may be photocopied for distribution to participants.

WHO WILL WANT TO USE THIS GUIDE?

Pastors, associates in ministry and lay leaders can use this guide to lead congregation members through a discussion of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's *Social Statement on Abortion* and consideration of faith and life issues related to abortion.

Abortion remains an important and sensitive issue. Basic concerns for the protection and preservation of life are complicated by questions regarding quality of life and the rights and responsibilities of parents (especially women) to make the decisions that powerfully influence them and those they love.

The ELCA's statement and this guide can help congregations learn more about the issue of abortion in the light of medicine, ethic, social and cultural concerns and theology. More importantly, it can help learners understand and accept one another as we learn to experience God's grace even while exploring volatile social concerns.



Each person responsible for the planning and leading of discussions should have a copy of this guide and a copy of the abortion statement. All other participants should have their own copies of the statement to study and mark. The ELCA grants permission to reproduce the abortion statement for studies, providing each copy displays the copyright found on the back page of the booklet. Or you may order copies by calling 1-800-328-4648 and asking for item number 69-0062.

WHAT IS THE ELCA'S SOCIAL STATEMENT ON ABORTION AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR THE CHURCH?

The abortion statement is a "social teaching statement" adopted by the Churchwide Assembly in 1991. The ELCA develops social statements as a means of focusing attention on pressing social issues and guiding the church's response. As Christians we believe our lives are lived in response to God's saving grace in Jesus Christ. An important aspect of our response to God's love is our faithful and responsible participation in society. Through a lengthy process of education and deliberation, the church prepares study documents and eventually

publishes documents resulting from the study as a way to extend that discussion. This social statement, like all others, is meant to be used not to shut off but to guide debate and discussions within the church and between the church and the larger society, and to help the people of God to find ways to be in mission in the world.

Soon after the ELCA was formed in 1987 its members saw the need to address the issue of abortion. Predecessor bodies had issued several statements which differed in tone and direction because they addressed differing contexts. For the sake of clarity of teaching regarding a problem that was dividing the nation, a study was launched.

To arrive at a statement on abortion, ELCA initiated a long collaborative process of moral deliberation involving people of different points of view and experiences and from all parts of the church. The abortion study task force itself met for the first time in January, 1990. In September of 1990 the group circulated a document, *Abortion: A Call to Deliberate*, which contained a first draft of the statement, questions for discussion and a request for individuals and congregations to register comments on what they appreciated, what they found to be unhelpful, and what they wished to be further explained or developed in the proposed statement.



STEPS TO PLANNING AND LEADING A DISCUSSION

I Carefully read the *Social Statement on Abortion* and then review this guide prior to your planning. Change and adapt the plans suggested in this guide to suit your local conditions and needs.

2. Work closely with your parish education committee, director of Christian education or others responsible for education in your congregation so that this study will fit with the education purpose and plan of the parish.

3. Carefully target your audience. Consider making your study group diverse and inclusive of men and women of different ages (we recommend age 12 and above) cultures, social classes and points of view regarding abortion. Such diversity will enrich your discussion and expand your understandings.

4. Ask capable people to plan the discussion program, lead large and small group discussions, publicize the event, register participants, prepare the meeting place, provide equipment and materials when needed, and provide and prepare refreshments, if appropriate.

Preparation

The study model presented in this guide suggests four 90 minute sessions. These sessions might meet weekly or even monthly. Other options (note suggestions following the general model) include:

- A five hour "workshop" event on one day. Begin and end with worship. Include breaks and/or meals.
- Two three-hour sessions on a Saturday and Sunday a week apart.
- One or two days at a retreat location.
- A series of six to ten Sunday morning sessions.

After considering the many responses to the first draft, the task force continued to refine its work. The second biennial Churchwide Assembly, meeting in Orlando, Florida, August 28-September 4, 1991 adopted the statement on abortion, along with a general statement on the church's role in society and another on the death penalty, each by a more than two-thirds vote.

Please study the abortion statement carefully before you proceed with the planning of your discussion. Note these features of the document:

- It calls church members to a commitment to mutual understanding, care and concern in response to the grace and command of God.
- It establishes the primacy and power of the unity that God gives as a gift of creation, redemption in Christ, and the faith of the church. This unity provides the foundation for our respect of one another and for our diverse viewpoints.
- It does not simply focus on the moral discernment the church must exercise, but also on the faith community's action, care-giving, public advocacy and witness.
- It moves the ELCA beyond the polarized pro-life vs. pro-choice positions present in the public debate, recognizing both the place of laws and public policies regulating abortion and that "there can be sound reasons for ending a pregnancy through induced abortion."
- It invites continued attention to the issue of abortion and lists a number of questions that require further deliberation by the church.

The Aims of This Study (To be shared with participants during the first session.)

- To become acquainted with the contents of the *ELCA Social Statement on Abortion* and churchwide public policy advocacy.
- To learn more about the issue of abortion from medical, social, psychological, ethical and theological points of view, and from the points of view of ordinary people facing difficulties with decisions over pregnancies.
- To involve all discussion participants in active, healthy and well-informed dialogue with other Christians about the issue of abortion.
- To gain confidence and experience in moral deliberation in the community of faith. (Read "Learning That Heals and Helps" in Handouts section.)
- To provide a forum for congregational reflection on support for children and families and public policy advocacy regarding abortion regulation and resources for the support of life after birth.

Guideposts to Learning

Encourage Listening and Moral Deliberation

Leaders do what they believe. Attitudes show through in such things as tone of voice and body language. For this study, all the planners and leaders should understand and believe that through a deliberative process of learning congregations can be places of reconciliation and healing.

Listening is the first step in effectively leading discussion. Listening openly serves our own welfare and that of the community. With a complex issue such as abortion, we know that we cannot impose a decision on others merely through medical research or even the Bible scholarship. People with varied experiences will interpret science and Scripture in different ways. A single, forced interpretation simply creates resistance or shuts down thought and searching—the effective end of learning.

In this kind of moral discourse, we want to model a way of being together for the "common good." In doing so we do not intend to put off ethical decision making in favor of endless discussion. Nor do we simply seek the lowest common moral denominator. Instead we consider that we each may be wrong and that we each can learn from all others. In doing so, we become attentive to the ways God is moving and calling the church to compassion and justice. The sharing and listening itself transforms people's understanding of what is needed and what is good for the community. The interchange can transform their moral life.

When people respect each other's deeply held values they grow to value the richness of human diversity as they move toward a clearer sense of what is good policy regarding complex problems such as abortion. Tolerant and trusting communities also recognize that they may not be able to arrive at clear consensus. In this case agreeing to disagree may often be a the most authentic, honest, and mature place for the church to stand.

Utilize Feelings As Signposts to New Learning

In education we have often attempted to suppress expressions of strong "negative" feelings. Tears of anguish or despair, or outbursts of rage may seem out of place in the traditional classroom. Strong emotions can threaten leaders. But when we gloss over or forbid such expression, we inadvertently tell people that their feelings are worthless or that the church is not able to deal with the real world and work toward healing and reconciliation.

In this model of discourse, we will want to try the following:

- Acknowledge feelings. Remind people that emotions, by themselves, are neither right nor wrong; they are simply signs of our common humanity.

- Encourage people to learn from feelings. Invite them to reflect and put their emotions into words. Note that feelings can signal new learning or even revelation from God. Always thank participants by name for working to express feelings in a way that builds community.
- Avoid judgmental words, facial expressions and body language.
- Give feed-back. As leader, you need not agree with people's ideas and perceptions, but you will try to feed back to them what feelings you hear them express so that they feel genuinely understood. (Note the process of "Feeling Checks" explained in the first session of the model.)

Encourage Active Learning by All Participants

Remind all participants that the success of the discussions depends on all participants working hard to both think in new ways and to share of themselves and of their ideas with others. A few hints may help:

- Suggest that participants take notes about what they disagree with or don't understand, and what they feel is important to share with the group.
- Some may even want to keep a "learning journal" in which they record such thoughts along with feelings they are beginning to recognize.

A MODEL FOUR-SESSION DISCUSSION SERIES

Preparing to Lead

This four-session model is designed for use with either a mixed adult/youth or an all adult group. Review and adapt the model to fit your needs. Each session has suggestions for activity options, and immediately following the model are listed suggestions for modifying it for use in various settings.

Pre-session Assignment

To make best use of your time together, ask each participant to prepare for session one by doing the following:

- Write a paragraph about stories, experiences and values that have given shape to their present ideas and feelings regarding abortion.
- Read the "Background on Abortion" handout (reproduced from this guide).
- Collect news clippings relating to abortion (including pregnancy and early childhood issues).

Plan for a helpful learning environment

- Meet in a room large enough for whole-group sessions and small group break-outs. Some activities will require seating at tables.
- Arrange chairs in a circle. Leader is a part of this circle.



Gather Resources

- Have on hand Bibles, hymnals (*Lutheran Book of Worship*), extra copies of the abortion statement and handouts, pencils, writing paper, easel with newsprint tablet and markers or blackboard with chalk.
- Place newspaper clippings on abortion-related issues on the bulletin boards. Also consider placing an enlarged copy of discussion guidelines on the wall with masking tape or on the bulletin board.
- If possible place additional resources (see p. 15) on a table for participants to borrow and read between sessions.

SESSION ONE: DEEP ROOTS OF OUR CONCERN

Preparing to Teach

If participants do not know each other well, provide name tags. Allow time for all to get acquainted. You might ask participants to share in pairs and then allow each person to introduce the other person in their pair.

Resources for this Session

- Bibles, hymnals (*Lutheran Book of Worship*), Luther's *Small Catechism*, extra copies of the abortion statement, pencils, writing paper, easel with newsprint tablet and markers or blackboard with chalk.
- Copies of Handouts: *Learning that Helps and Heals*; *Listening to the Voice of those who Have Confronted Unwanted Pregnancy*; *A Background on Abortion*.

Opening Worship

Read the first article of the Apostle's Creed and Luther's explanation from the *Small Catechism*.

Ask several to share what it means to them to say that God is not only creator but sustainer of our lives. Point out that God's preserving is a central concern when we consider the issue of abortion which is a concern over choices—some of them very difficult and painful—about the preservation and nurture of life.

Conclude with John Ylvisaker's "Borning Cry" or "Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee" (*LBW* 551) and/or a prayer such as the prayer for "The Human Family" on p. 44 of the *LBW*.

Feeling Check

Explain that feelings are signposts to new learning. Rather than avoid or suppress these feelings we believe that we can be open to them. Reflecting on our feelings can help us gain new insight. Sharing of our feelings and reflections can help to strengthen us as a learning community faithful to God. At the beginning of each discussion session we will have a check of feelings. At the end of each session we will check both our feelings and new learnings.

- Begin your feeling check by asking a volunteer to start by sharing one or more words which describe some of what they are feeling. Provide a sheet of appropriate feeling words if needed. Invite a volunteer to add a sentence or two of clarification if this might help the group to learn something.
- After one person has finished talking the others take turns by moving clockwise about the group. Each participant has the option of "passing" but should be honest if they share.

Introduce Aims

List on newsprint the aims for the study listed above (p. 4). The aims may become clearer as the concepts of moral discourse and the group as a laboratory are discussed below, so don't dwell too much on clarifying the aims at this point.

HANDOUT: *Learning That Helps and Heals*

Pass out the handout *Learning That Heals and Helps* that you have reproduced from the back of this guide. Read through the sheet a paragraph at a time (**don't force anyone to read aloud**) or read and summarize. Discuss the guidelines to aid understanding.

HANDOUT: *Listening to the Voice of Those Who Have Confronted Unwanted Pregnancy*

- Sit in circle. Ask for quiet attentiveness. Suggest that a first step in dealing with the abortion issue is to hear from those who are most affected by it—away from political or partisan argument. As volunteers (prepared ahead of time, if possible) read the individual voices, others should simply listen with the intent of learning something new about the roots of the pain of unintended pregnancy.
- After the reading pause for about thirty seconds in silence. Then ask for a volunteer to start the sharing by mentioning words or short phrases that indicate one of the "roots of pain" they heard. Ask others in turn to suggest what they heard. Ask someone to record the words and phrases on a sheet of newsprint entitled "The Pains of Unintended Pregnancy." At this time only list the words with no further comment. Upon completion of the list, silently hang your sheet or sheets of newsprint on the wall with masking tape for this and all future sessions.



Sharing: What has Influenced Your Thoughts About Abortion?

- Allow five minutes for participants to reflect (in writing, if possible) on people or events from their personal histories that have especially influenced their attitudes and feelings about abortion.
- In groups of three, ask participants to take turns sharing what they have written or reflected on. **No one should be forced to share.** Encourage open listening—listening without comment or criticism. The purpose of the sharing is to gain an appreciation of the complex factors that go into our moral decision-making and to practice mutual respect. Keep time for the groups so that each person has five minutes to talk.
- Return to a single large circle. Spend about five minutes on a free discussion of the following questions:
 1. What did you hear expressed that helped you understand a feeling, thought or value of your own?
 2. What did you hear that helped you understand better a feeling, thought or value very different from your own?
 3. What differences (or similarities) did you hear between our voices and the voices we listened to before of people who were confronting unintended pregnancies?

HANDOUT: A Background on Abortion

- Distribute the handout sheet *A Background on Abortion* to those who do not already have a copy. The sheet contains more information than you will be able to read through in your session. Though participants were asked to read it beforehand, ask volunteers to summarize the contents of the three segments: clinical aspects, history, statistics, and families of arguments.

You might ask someone who is medically trained to expand on the clinical aspects. You might also invite someone with experience in pregnancy counseling to put a "human touch" to some of the statistics.

- Discuss the handout by asking if anyone discovered information that surprised them. Ask people to bring the history of abortion issues up to date by referring to clippings they brought.

As you close your discussion, stress the importance of using appropriate language. Note, for example, that it is important not to impute motives to anyone. It is better to use the term "unintended pregnancy" than "unwanted pregnancy."

Learning Options

- Present the three "families" of arguments from the "Background" handout in a dramatic way. Ask volunteers to prepare and stage a debate or panel discussion of the issues of abortion. Prepare a list of questions to put to all three representatives of these "families" of arguments. You might also ask volunteers to prepare graphic displays of the "families of arguments. To make it interesting and to reduce the potential for tension, you might want to have volunteers represent a position that differs from their own personal philosophy.

- After the "voices" of those who have confronted unintended pregnancies have been read you might allow people to use drawing paper and markers or colored pencils to make drawings that represent the pressures and fears these people face. Allow time to share and talk about the drawings in small groups.

- Youth may have friends who have faced unintended pregnancy, but be reluctant to speak about them. Encourage them to write their recollections down, changing names and details for the sake of confidentiality. After they have written invite (but do not force) volunteers to share their reflections with the group.

Feeling and Learning Check

Ask each person in turn (**all have the right to pass**) to share a word that describes how they are feeling in a word or sentence. They might also share one thing they have learned about abortion this session. The learning can be a new knowledge or new awareness of something that knew but had not fully appreciated or "felt."

Assignment: To do At Home

Write the following on the board or on newsprint before the end of your session:

- Read sections I and II in the *Social Statement on Abortion* of the ELCA.
- Continue to reflect on what you may have learned. Make notes or write in your learning journal.

Closing

Ask volunteers to share prayers for all children and for particular children of their family, congregation and community. Pray that all children might be loved, cared for and helped to know they are precious to God.

SESSION TWO: BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Preparing to Teach

Resources for this Session

Bibles, hymnals, extra copies of the abortion statement, pencils, writing paper, easel with newsprint tablet and markers or blackboard with chalk.

- A copy of the *Constitution of the ELCA*
- Bible dictionaries, commentaries, Bible study helps.
- Copies of Handout: *Session 2: Bible Study*

Opening Worship

Ask volunteers to pray for openness or use the petition "Grace to Receive the Word" on p. 47 of the *Lutheran Book of Worship*. Sing a hymn from the "Word" section of the *LBW* (hymns 227-240) or "Thy Word is a Lamp Unto My Feet" by Amy Grant and Michael Smith in Augsburg Publishing House's *Songs of the People*.

Feeling Check (See session one for directions.)

Guidelines for Bible Study

The ELCA constitution helps us to understand how we approach Scripture. Choose one or more good readers to read aloud the "Confession of Faith" (chapter 2) section of the constitution. Note the following as implied in the confession of faith: the Gospel of Jesus Christ must be kept as the central focus of our study of Scripture and the church's creeds and doctrines. The Spirit of God works through these witnesses to the Gospel to "create and sustain Christian faith and fellowship for service in the world."

For the purposes of the present study participants should be cautioned against using the Bible to "score points," win arguments, or beat opponents into the ground by taking a higher ground. We are the church and none of us have to prove that we have God on our side. The Bible instead is to be used to build up the body of Christ.

Read or summarize the following:

The Bible is the divine Word of our God, who is worthy to be obeyed. It is also the human expression of individuals and the age-old community of faith, requiring interpretation for use in our time. We must interpret the Scriptures in order to fully obey God. This means when we examine any text from the Bible we should

- Read it in its fullest context.
- Learn about its historical context and ask about what it meant for the community of faith within which it was authored and preserved.
- Ask ourselves how this Word of God becomes Word of God FOR US in our changed circumstances.

In our study we will:

- **Read the words reverently** slowly, and attentively, asking questions for clarification (to be done best in the group of the whole) and with someone present who has researched difficult words and concepts. Have one or more good and current Bible dictionaries and commentaries at hand for reference.

- **Ask what these words mean today.** Work to interpret their meaning according to the Lutheran and Christ-centered principle of Law and Gospel. Remember that Scripture does indeed help us to know and follow God's will, but our moral life remains broken unless we and our community are also driven by the Word of God to the cross of Christ for constant forgiveness and healing.
- **We will interpret within the worshipping community of faith.** With a "teachable spirit" we will not thoughtlessly cling to our private interpretations but seek to learn from the rich gospel-centered tradition of the church. We will also do our study in an atmosphere marked by worship and respect for one another's points of view.

HANDOUT: *Session 2 Bible Study*

Our Unity in Christ

Read aloud the opening paragraphs under this heading or ask volunteers to read.

1. Ask all to read through 1 Corinthians 3. Read verses 10-17 aloud. As you consider the questions, emphasize that "you are God's temple" refers in this context to the community as a whole which is divided (much the way Christians today can be divided by the issue of abortion) and not to the individual as we often believe. Read also 1 Corinthians 8:1; 10:23; 14:4, 12, 26.
2. As you have time, read and reflect on other passages listed, which speak of the common, divine origin of all people (Genesis 1:26-28; 2:7); of Jesus' will that baptism and teaching ministry might unite all people in a life of love and service (Matthew 28:16-20; John 17:20-26); and of the cross of Christ as the focal point of human reconciliation (Galatians 3:27-29; Ephesians 2:11-22; Colossians 1:15-23; Philippians 2:1-11).
- Take time for questions and discussion for clarification.

In groups of three or four ask what these passages say to us today.

- What does the "foundation" of Jesus Christ mean for our consideration of abortion?
- How does it help to build on this foundation? Ask participants to share examples (no names) of people becoming "puffed up" rather than "building up" one another?

Ask for examples of how others helped build up the community with love even when they disagreed on a controversial issue?

God's Gift of Life. . .

1. In the large group read sections of Genesis 1 (esp. 26-28) and 2:4-7; 18-25. Talk about what these passages say about creation and life, and especially what they say about the components of human life. What makes life human?

After discussion suggest that in this passage life is composed of DUST OF THE GROUND + BREATH OF GOD + COMMUNITY. Humans are made to be in relationship with God, God's good creation, and with one another. Time permitting study also Acts 17:24-25; Isaiah 40:25-31; Psalms 8 and 139.

2. Ask someone to read Jeremiah 1:4-5 and Luke 1:41. What is being said about pre-natal life? Remind all that the Bible is not making a scientific point in these passages, and yet some claim is being made. What is it?

In the large group, talk about attempts to decide when human life begins or when it is "viable outside the womb?" Is life ever independent? In what way is life a product of both God-given inward potential and God-given nurturing environment? We affirm life is a gift of God to be cherished and honored in all of its phases.

. . . and Our Responsibility

1. Exodus 20:13 prohibits killing. But our responsibility goes beyond avoidance of murder and harm to active care. Read Genesis 1:26-31 and Genesis 2:9, 15-17. Talk about what it means to have dominion. Compare this to eating of the tree of life in the middle of the garden or of all of the other trees, but not of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God wants us to use the earth's resources, live and enjoy life without arrogating to ourselves the power of God. We are to look to God for direction of good and evil, right and wrong.

2. In groups of three or four read Matthew 5:43-48. This verse ends with Jesus' requirement that Christian disciples be perfect as God is perfect. We often quickly dismiss this as impossible, or hyperbole, but Jesus is saying that as God loves and nurtures the life of even the unrighteous, so we are to value and nurture all of life quite consistently and without regard to personal gain. What does this have to say to Christian congregations as caring communities in the discussion of abortion? What might it say to people dealing with unintended pregnancies? If time permits read Leviticus 19:18; Luke 10:27; Romans 13:9; Matthew 22:39; John 15:17; Romans 12:14-21; 13:8-10; 1 Corinthians 10:24.

3. Again in the same groups of three or four read Martin Luther's explanation of the fifth commandment in the Small Catechism and a further discussion of the same in the Large Catechism.

4. Allow time for small groups to discuss the reading and compare Luke 16:19-31 and Matthew 25:31-46. Record some of the small group's insights and conclusions on the board or on newsprint.

5. Return to the large group and, using newsprint, give a time for general questions and feedback and then gather some of the comments of participants to the questions listed.

Learning Options

- Ask the participants (youth and adults) to write letters from God in which God addresses the things that give God greatest cause for sadness, joy and hope. Ask half of the participants to address the letters from God to children about to be born and the other half to address mothers and/or fathers of the world who are contemplating what to do about an unintended pregnancy or an unborn with fetal abnormality. When the letters are completed have the writers of group one pair up with writers from group two and share the content of their letters and the feelings they experienced in the exercise. Debrief in the large group.



- In a large group remind the participants that in the Book of Revelation the Son of Man instructs the author to write letters to the angels of seven churches concerning endurance and faithful witness under persecution. Brainstorm and compose an imaginary letter written to the angel of your own local congregation concerning the ways you as a community of faith work to sustain life, especially the life of the very young and of the parents and families that sustain them. You might read the letter and respond to it in prayer as your closing devotion for this session.

Feeling and Learning Check

(see session one for directions)

Assignment: To do At Home

Write the following on the board or on newsprint before the end of your session:

- Read carefully the ELCA's *Social Statement on Abortion* sections III and IV.
- Make a written list of ways that congregations may choose to work to provide "conditions more conducive for bringing new life into the world."
- Make a list of ways your congregation is providing such care and support and ways of care-giving it may want to explore in the future.
- List any questions you have about guidance for decisions regarding unintended pregnancies.

Closing (see *Learning Option 2, above*)

- God uses water to sustain life. A chief way God sustains the holiness of life is through the church's ministry of baptism. Provide a basin of water and have people in pairs dip their fingers in the water and make the sign of the cross on the forehead of their partners.
- If time permits invite some people to share how God has "watered" and nurtured their lives through this life-long teaching and pastoral ministry.
- Conclude with the baptismal prayer, inspired by Martin Luther, found at the bottom of page 122 in the *Lutheran Book of Worship*.

SESSION THREE: A COMMUNITY IN CHRIST- SUPPORTIVE OF LIFE

Preparing to Teach

Resources for this Session

Bibles, hymnals, extra copies of the abortion statement, pencils, writing paper, easel with newsprint tablet and markers or blackboard with chalk.

- List reasons women chose abortions (below) on newsprint. Also list "moral reasons for abortion (below).

Opening

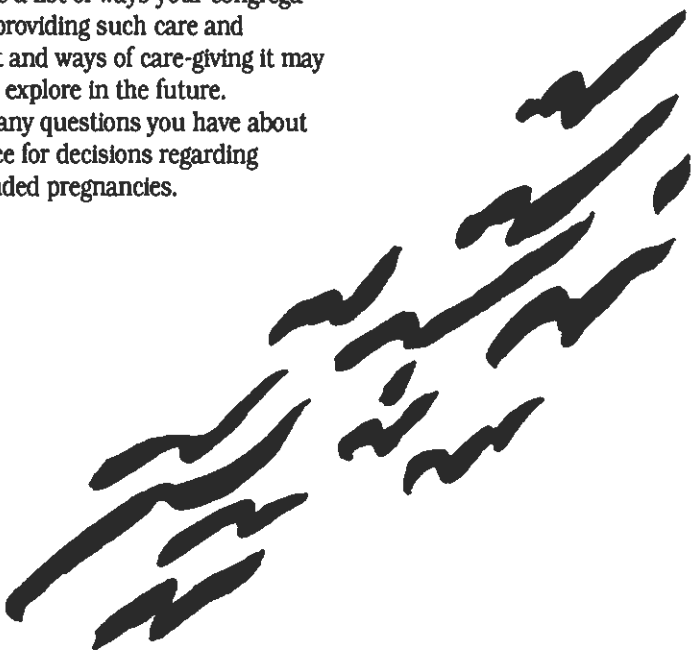
Use a hymn from the *Lutheran Book of Worship* section on society (hymns 413-438), #423, would be especially appropriate. The *LBW* prayer for families on page 51 may be used or ask someone to prepare a prayer for this occasion.

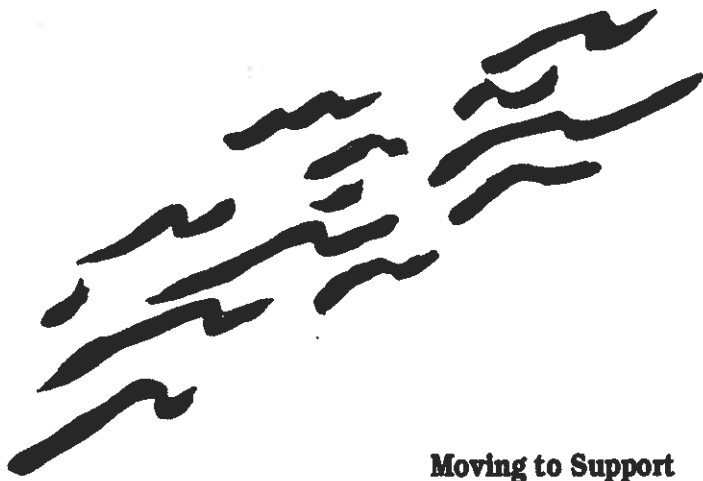
Feeling Check (see session one for directions)

Reasons Women Give for Seeking an Abortion

Remind participants that our theology teaches us that God favors life and calls us to preserve and protect it for all people, especially those most vulnerable. The *ELCA' Statement on Abortion* therefore concludes "abortion ought to be an option only of last resort [and] as a church we seek to reduce the need to turn to abortion as the answer to unintended pregnancies."

- In a large group brainstorm and list on a blackboard or newsprint all reasons participants can think of for why women have abortions. Of those reasons listed ask participants to try to agree on the top three reasons. Put a checkmark beside those three.
- On a separate sheet of newsprint reveal the results of the survey reported in *Family Planning Perspectives*, 1988 and reprinted in *The Battle Over Abortion*.





When asked why they seek an abortion, most women mention several reasons.

Here, in the order in which they are mentioned, are the 12 most common reasons:

- 76% "I'm not ready for the way a baby could change my life."
- 68% "I can't afford a baby now."
- 51% "I'm having problems with my relationship" or "I want to avoid single parenthood."
- 31% "I'm not ready for the responsibility."
- 31% "I don't want other people to know that I've had sex, or that I'm pregnant."
- 30% "I'm too young, not mature enough to have a child."
- 26% "I already have all the children I want."
- 23% "My husband (or partner) wants me to have an abortion."
- 13% "I think the fetus is deformed."
- 7% "My parents want me to have an abortion."
- 1% "I was the victim of rape or incest."

• After reading through the list, discuss some of the following:

What surprised you in the list?

Which did you think would have given lower or higher frequency?

Which reasons given might the church as a caring community be able to address and help?

Take a brief time to list these on the newsprint.

Moving to Support

Form groups of six to eight. In each group, ask a volunteer to record comments on a pad of paper or a piece of newsprint.

- Discuss the parts of section III of the ELCA's *Social Statement on Abortion* that make suggestions about ways congregations may actively support life. List the ideas.
- List other ideas for support of new life that were not mentioned in the document.
- Of all of the ideas from the document and your discussions, circle those which are most lacking and most in need in your community?
- Of those most lacking and in need, put a box around the ones your congregation is equipped to provide on its own? Try to reach consensus in your group.
- Which services of support might be provided best by other agencies or by partnerships of your congregation with others? Work for consensus and mark with a box of a different color or by double underlining them.

In the large group use newsprint to make three lists--"Our Congregation Now Supports New Life By . . . , " "Our Congregation Could Support Life By . . . , " and "Services Our Congregation Could Advocate or Cooperate To Provide."

Guidance for Decisions Regarding Unintended Pregnancies and Fetal Abnormalities

- *Personal Stories*: If possible, invite people from within or outside your group who have had to face decisions about ending a pregnancy. Encourage them to share their story from prepared notes. Do not allow anyone to interrupt their sharing. Be prepared to support them in what will be a stressful experience of reliving past pain. Ask them to reflect on the quality of support they received from care givers, and especially from the church and from church related agencies.
- Brainstorm in groups of three or four. From the shared stories and from a review of section IV of the *ELCA abortion statement*, what are the qualities of care and guidance that people most need as they face decisions regarding the possibility of terminating a pregnancy? Write these on newsprint or a blackboard. These are some mentioned by the statement. Check them against the list generated by your group:
 - Compassion
 - Prayerfulness
 - A feeling of solidarity
 - Encouraging people to seek both professional and personal support
 - Knowledgeable of the complexity of the problem
 - Open and listening
 - Counselors and pastors should be trained and competent
 - Respectful of the value of the woman and of the ways pregnancy affects the whole person and her relationships
 - Respectful of the autonomy of the woman to make decisions regarding herself and her pregnancy
 - Reverent and serious about the Christian calling to protect and preserve human life throughout all its phases

- In groups of six to eight discuss ways in which your own congregation can work to provide such care and guidance for women and couples facing decisions about pregnancies. Have someone record and report your conclusions for the larger group. Consider the following:

- Ways our pastors and other staff members could better be trained and prepared for this ministry.
- Specific ways our congregation could give more support and care.
- Ways we can form partnerships with other groups and agencies to provide guidance and care.

Reasoning About Life, Pregnancy and Abortion

- Divide your group into three teams. Each group considers one of the following cases. Start by asking yourselves about what the principle parties might be feeling and thinking. Refer to pages 6 and 7 of the abortion statement and consider what kind of immediate and extended care a pastor, counselor and congregation should provide for the parent(s), child or others. How would you respect the woman's right to decide? How would you give caring Christian guidance? How would you enlist others to help in giving support?

Case 1: Tina is a sixteen-year-old unmarried girl who is pregnant as the result of being repeatedly raped by her uncle. At first she thought she would run away from home and have the baby, but now she is terribly frightened that her child would turn out just as poor and disadvantaged as she has been. She believes abortion to be her only option, but she knows little about it. You are the only person she can safely talk to.

Case 2: Martha and Bill are a couple in their early thirties who are quite committed to their faith and life in the church and live a comfortable middle-class life. They have one healthy two-year-old child but tests have shown that their expected child will be born without a fully formed brain. The prognosis for the child would then be certain confinement to bed and a very short life with huge medical bills. Previous to the tests they were opposed to abortion, but now, to their surprise, they find themselves seriously considering that option.

Case 3: Gail is a twenty-year-old college junior. She has come in with her boy-friend, Mike, by whom she is pregnant. She wants to bring her pregnancy to term and put her child up for adoption. Her boyfriend, who is a member of your church, wants her to keep the child. He believes this is the "Christian thing to do," and he believes the couple will be good parents. Gail's mother, on the other hand, has said that unless Gail has an abortion and cuts off her relationship with Mike, she will stop paying Gail's tuition for college.

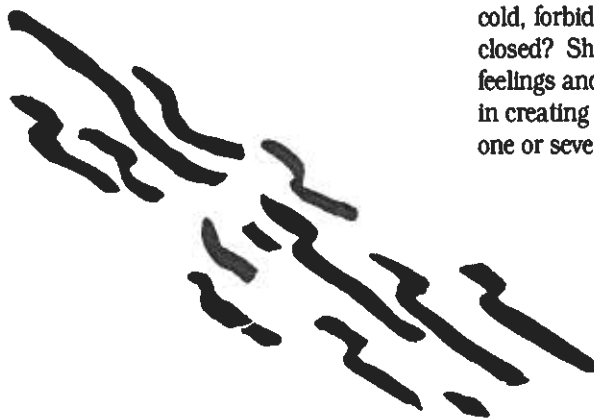
- After the discussions, gather the groups. Ask a reporter/spokespersons to share the case and how their groups advised giving guidance and support. Allow time for discussion of alternative solutions and difficult points.

- Display a list of sound moral reasons for ending a pregnancy through induced abortion as mentioned in the ELCA statement. Note that what may be considered moral grounds in one situation may not in another, due to differences in the conditions and personalities of the persons involved. Also note that the church opposes ending intra-uterine life when a fetus is developed enough to live outside a uterus with the aid of reasonable technology. Ask if people are clear about the moral reasons and if they have any question or difficulty with any of them. The reasons include:

1. When there is a clear threat to the life of the woman.
2. When the pregnancy has resulted from involuntary sexual intercourse or from conditions in which the woman has been so dominated or oppressed that she had no real choice about the matter or access to contraceptives.
3. When there are circumstances of extreme fetal abnormality which will result in severe suffering and very early death of an infant.

Learning Option

Give each participant the chance to work with modeling clay or with paper and crayon or marker to complete an image of what this congregation would look like to a very young child. Youth in your discussions will perhaps have the freshest memories, but will need special encouragement to share them. Are the feelings that come through warm, safe, friendly, open? Are they cold, forbidding, frightening, stiff and closed? Share explanations of the feelings and thoughts you experienced in creating your model or image with one or several other participants.



Feeling and Learning Check

(See session one for directions)

Assignment: To do At Home

Write the following on the board or on newsprint before the end of your session:

- Read section V in the *ELCA abortion statement*.
- Three volunteer individuals or groups should research the current local, state and federal regulations and resources relative to:
 1. sex and parenting education and the prevention of unintended pregnancies
 2. support for the welfare of infants and children
 3. the regulation and public funding of abortion
- Any participants may bring materials that are relevant to these areas.
- If the group approves and elects to provide the time, you might want to bring in guest resource people to talk about one or more of these areas.

Closing

Have someone start the prayer with words like these: "O God, you are our Parent and Head of the family of the church. Give to us the wisdom, courage, and compassion to support and sustain all who must care for our world's children." Then invite others to add brief petitions for ways in which God's help is needed in being a caring community.

SESSION FOUR: PUBLIC POLICY ADVOCACY RELATED TO ABORTION

Preparing to Teach

Resources for this Session

Bibles, hymnals, extra copies of the abortion statement, pencils, writing paper, easel with newsprint tablet and markers or blackboard with chalk.

- Copies of Handouts: *Abortion Statement Recommendations*; *Evaluation*

Opening

Ask a volunteer to read James 2:14-17 and Romans 6:1-4. Note that while it is the forgiving grace of God alone that saves us, we should expect grace to renew our lives in acts of justice and love. If our faith is not active in love we need to reflect, repent, and be opened to new directions from God.

Pray together so that this study may not be an empty exercise in words and ideas, but bear fruit in active caring and advocacy. Or you might pray something like this: "O God, we know that our systems of law, money, and power are sometimes so corrupt and oppressive they make the death of abortion appear preferable to the prospect of new life. We also know that if we, the church do not rise up to change those systems, no one will. Renew us in your grace, O God of life, and lead us in the way to /speak and act. Amen."

Feeling Check (see session one for directions)

Comparing Statement Recommendations to Current Situations

HANDOUT: Abortion Statement Recommendations

- Mention that the abortion statement proceeds on the assumption that individual Christians and the church as an institution have an obligation to support just laws and to work "faithfully through public processes" to change those which are unjust. Ask if there is any reaction or discussion.
- Have the participants separate into three groups: one to discuss prevention of unintended pregnancies, another support for infants and children, and the third regulation of abortion. Include in each group the people who did research on that topic.
- In each group discuss first the recommendations of the ELCA's *Social Statement on Abortion* relative to that area of concern. Then ask the following (print these on paper or newsprint):
 1. According to the research of the volunteer individuals or groups what is the current state of regulation and availability of resources for these things on the local, state and on the federal levels?



Public Policy and Advocacy in the ELCA

Social statements of the ELCA “probe for shared convictions and the boundaries of faithful action; within this framework, they acknowledge diversity. These documents recognize the complexity of society and the power of sin as well as the responsibility of this church to speak and to act with hope and boldness.”¹

This church urges all individuals, congregations and other expressions of the church, as they explore social issues, to respect pertinent statements of the church and to join in church-wide efforts to coordinate public advocacy. Contact the Lutheran Office of Government Affairs (LOGA) or your ELCA state public policy advocacy office regarding upcoming legislative activity regarding abortion and related social issues. See the “Resources” section below for more information. You may well wish to coordinate efforts to help people or groups to contact their legislators directly expressing their views.

2. Discuss the Statement recommendations as a group and prepare a report for the large group, including the following:

- One to three areas of concern that our group identifies as of particularly urgent concern for public advocacy by individual members of our congregation.
 - Areas of concern that our group identifies as of urgent concern for public advocacy by our congregation as a whole.
 - Points in the ELCA statement (relative to advocacy for prevention of unintended pregnancies) that we find in need of clarification.
 - Disagreements our group has with the ELCA statement.
- Share the reports with large group. One person acts as moderator and another records information on newsprint. After each group has given their reports the large group may make some brief comments. Note that the object here is not to arrive at consensus about individual or corporate advocacy, but to model a process and to begin to generate ideas that may be forwarded to responsible persons or groups of the congregation such as the pastor(s), the social concern committee, or the church council.

Evaluation of Discussion Series

Ask participants to complete an evaluation form. See the handout sheets at the end of this guide for a form you may use.

Feeling and Learning Check

(see session one for directions)

Closing

This should be a worship to celebrate the hard work and understanding that has been accomplished, to show support for one another, and to dedicate effort to becoming an ever stronger community in support of life. Think of using “A Prayer Attributed to St. Francis” on page 48 of the *LBW*, a Bible reading such as chapter 12 of Romans, and a hymn such as “Now Thank We All Our God,” (*LBW* 533 or 534).

MODIFYING THE MODEL FOR OTHER GROUPS AND OTHER SETTINGS

Young people are working very hard to be accepted by their peers. As they reach their late teens their individuality becomes more and more important. It is important for adults to maintain a safe atmosphere where youth feel accepted and affirmed.

Younger teens tend to look to authority and older teens question it. Adults working with youth should seek to make a non-anxious and non-absolutist witness to God and the church. Encourage young people to use their God-given thinking abilities in the service of God and one-another.

Youth and young adults are in the process of learning to think abstractly. In discussing complex issues related to abortion be sure to provide many examples. Help people see, hear and feel what they are learning as you provide increasingly complex ideas. Be patient and encourage young people to ask questions about what they don't understand.

Share the responsibility within the group. Give youth full opportunity to read aloud, do research and share it with the group, lead prayers, provide refreshments, and so forth. Also give them the opportunity to refuse assignments and keep their thoughts and feelings to themselves if they feel uncomfortable.

Obtain consent from parents or guardians before their children become involved in a discussion of pregnancy and abortion. Make sure they understand the aims and nature of the discussion and that human sexuality is an issue that will be addressed.

Tailor the sessions to the needs of youth. If you are working only with youth you may wish to increase time spent on activities for youth mentioned in the "Options" sections at the end of each session.

This series is not intended as a discussion of sexuality and prevention of unintended pregnancy for youth. Young people, however, do feel more at home in a congregation and a faith that non-judgmentally help them to deal with those issues. See the "Resources" section below for suggestions about course material for such a study.

RESOURCES

Materials About Abortion

- Statistics on pregnancy related issues are available through The Alan Guttmacher Institute, New York, NY and from the Centers for Disease Control which regularly publishes its "Abortion Surveillance" statistics in *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*. Many libraries do not carry either report directly, but do have access to *The Journal of the American Medical Association* which frequently provides thorough statistical reports.
- Daniel and Sidney Callahan edited an anthology, *Abortion: Understanding Differences* (New York: Plenum Press, 1984), examines the diverse values that people bring to the abortion debate.
- Laurence H. Tribe's *Abortion: The Clash of Absolutes* (New York: Norton, 1990) details the political, legislative and ethical aspects of the American debate on abortion.
- The Public Agenda Foundation supported by the Kettering Foundation has published a handy guide containing materials on several perspectives on abortion in *The Battle Over Abortion: Seeking Common Ground in a Divided Nation* (1990).

- Groups interested in books and audio-visual materials may call the National Issues Forums, Dayton, Ohio, at 1-800-433-7834 (in Ohio, 1-800-433-4891) or order books only directly from Kendall/Hunt Publishing in Dubuque, Iowa at 1-800-338-5578.
- Lutheran studies include:
 - *The Problem of Abortion: After the Supreme Court Decision* by Franklin Sherman (New York: Lutheran Church in America, 1974);
 - *Mother Versus Child: Material on the Question of Abortion* a compilation of Lutheran statements and related materials edited by Susanne Kasch (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 1980).
 - *Abortion: A Series of the American Lutheran Church*, 1974, 1976, 1980. Available from the ELCA.

Sexuality Education

- The Search Institute in Minneapolis has developed an excellent video tape-based series for adolescents and parents on sexual decision called *Human Sexuality: Values and Choices*. It is designed for schools, but can be adapted for use in churches. Write to Search Institute or arrange to borrow the series from synodical or regional resource centers.
- Augsburg Publishing House provides several sexuality studies for youth including *Sexuality: Fact and Fantasy* in the "Image Series" *Fully Human: Faith and Sexuality* in the "Witness Senior High" and *Decisions about Sexuality* in the "Decisions" series.

Moral Discourse in the Congregation

- For more on moral discourse in the congregation see:
 - Don S. Browning, *Religious Ethics and Pastoral Care*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983)
 - *Caring for the Commonweal: Education For Religious and Public Life* ed. by Parker J. Palmer, Barbara G. Wheeler and James W. Fowler (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1990)
 - *The Church in the Education of the Public: Refocusing the Task of Religious Education*, edited by Jack L. Seymour, Robert T. O'Gorman and Charles R. Foster (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984).
 - "Our Church and Social Issues" (pamphlet #69-7290); "If Not Here, Where? The Church and Moral Deliberation" (video #AV-5090). Both available from the ELCA Distribution Service—1-800-328-4648.

Public Advocacy

- Under the auspices of its Division for Church in Society the ELCA maintains a Lutheran Office of Governmental Affairs (LOGA) in Washington, DC. In that office there is the Public Policy Advocacy Ministry. For suggestions and advice about advocacy related to abortion, contact Assistant Director: Domestic Public Policy Advocacy Ministry (Domestic Issues), Lutheran Office of Governmental Affairs, 122 C. St., NW, Suite 300, Washington, DC 20001.
- At present seventeen states have their own state public policy advocacy office. Call 1-800-638-3522, Ext. 2561.



Learning that Heals and Helps

Ideas and Guidelines

Use these discussions as practice in Christian community!

The people of God have never had all of the answers to life's questions, but we proceed in worshipful trust and obedience toward God, depending on each other for care and comfort as we interpret God's will for us in the present situation.

Use this group as a laboratory for relationships!

Try to use this discussion group to experiment with new ways of talking with others about moral issues. Aim not at convincing others, but at gaining understanding and growing as a group. If you usually comply, give in, or become self-effacing, try saying no. If you usually resist suggestions and hold back, try taking a risk with a new idea. If you usually talk to fill the silences try using the silence to get in touch with uncomfortable feelings and then share those feelings. If you are usually quiet or wait for others to speak and only then respond, try being assertive with your point of view or initiating ideas for others to respond to.

Guidelines for Discussion

1. Come prepared each day to contribute to the learning of the group. Do the homework assignment, be at peace through prayer so that you may relate to others in the love of God.
2. Listen! Listen carefully, not to win arguments but to better understand other people and the issue at hand.
3. When quoting Scripture or other authorities, do so to illuminate, not to win arguments. Remember, we all need help to interpret and apply God's Word.
4. Do not interrupt others. No cross talk. Take turns as directed by the discussion leader.
5. Use appropriate language. Use terms accepted by all, such as "unintended" instead of "unwanted" pregnancy. Avoid using politically charged labels that only serve to polarize, such as "pro-choice" and "pro-life."
6. Become involved in discussions. Share your point of view.
7. Do not dominate the discussion. Share the time.
8. During "feeling checks" strive to be open and honest with your feelings. Pass if you cannot think of the right words at the time.
9. Express your anger warmly before it turns to cold resentment.
10. Give "I" messages. While making a point or expressing your evaluation of things or of other people always speak for yourself and not for others.
11. After a speaker has shared feelings or experiences connected with strong emotions remember to say, "thank you," and name the person who shared. To share emotions is a great blessing to all.
12. Always ask permission of a speaker before giving any feedback to feelings that person has shared.

Voices of Those Who Have Confronted Unwanted Pregnancy

Listen! Listen to the voices of some who have been confronted with unintended pregnancy.

Girl - Last semester I got pregnant and I would sit in bed at night, every night, and say, "I don't believe this, this can't be happening to me. go away. Leave me alone. I can't handle this." I mean, I know that sounds ridiculous, but I didn't know anything and I was so frightened I just thought I'd force my body not to be pregnant.

Boy - I am embarrassed about the way I treated Linda when she got pregnant. I was afraid she'd start pressuring me into marrying her, so I told her I didn't even think it was my kid. I mean, underneath I knew it had to be, but I said that and it made her feel really bad. I told her she better get an abortion and I gave her the money for it. She wanted to have an abortion anyway, but I didn't know that until after I bad-mouthed her. She broke up with me right away after that.

Woman - I wish I had though more about my decision to have that abortion. At the time I was so desperate, I didn't know what else to do. After all, I was only fifteen. But I don't think it's right to say that abortion isn't killing just because the fetus is too small to live outside the mother. That's not the point. If you don't have the abortion, the fetus will grow to be big enough to live. That's the point.

Girl - I was so happy when I was pregnant. It was one of the best times in my life - to know that someone was growing inside me. And my friends thought it was so neat. But now the baby is born. He's real cute, but he cries all the time. My friends are all out partying and I'm stuck at home. Getting pregnant wasn't such a good idea after all.

Woman - It seemed like a punishment. I used birth control and got pregnant anyway. I no longer trusted my diaphragm, my lover, or my body. My guilt about being pregnant turned into anger when I learned that no method of birth control is 100 percent effective! I took all the precautions and still got pregnant.

Woman - To this day I have conflicted feelings about the murder issue, but the decision was fairly simple. Since I knew I couldn't deal with another delivery and adoption, I simply said a prayer that the spirit of the child would pass to someone who would be receptive.

Boy - My girlfriend and I talk about the baby a lot. He would have been a year old this month. Father's Day just passed and I got very depressed, but I know we did the right thing. Joan and I both know we weren't ready to be parents. We couldn't have given our baby anything, and now he's probably with parents who really wanted to have a baby badly. I think the whole experience made me and Joan grow up a lot.

Woman - I'm a mostly single mother with five kids. My husband isn't around much. Not long ago, he came home drunk and wanted sex. I knew it was either get beat or let him have his way, so that's what I did. Now he's gone again and I'm pregnant. I can't support the children I've got. How am I supposed to manage with another?

Young woman - My boy friend and I slept together a few times. We weren't really that close, but we did it anyway. Now I'm pregnant. I graduate in the spring and then I've got to find a job. Who's going to hire a pregnant woman? I just can't have children right now, and even if I could, I don't want him to be the father. What can I do?

Woman - The mixed feelings I had throughout this experience will probably never be resolved. This abortion occurred at a very difficult time for me. I had just lost my mother and was entering the end of my reproductive years. The experience has left me with a sense of loss. I do not consciously regret the decision I made, but I often think of the child I might have had.

Reprint from the Northern Illinois Synod, Task Force on Abortion, 1990 Synod Assembly Report--amended for churchwide use, 2/91.

Background On Abortion

Clinical Aspects and Technical Terms

Any loss of the embryo or fetus before it is able to live outside the womb is called **abortion**. When abortions occur spontaneously they are called **miscarriages**, while those caused intentionally are called **induced abortions**. (Note that after the fertilization of the egg in the uterus the resulting entity is called an **embryo** until the eighth week of pregnancy. From that time until termination of the pregnancy it is called a **fetus**.)

Most abortions are done by **vacuum aspiration**. In this technique a metal or plastic tube is inserted into the uterus through its opening, the cervix. A spoonlike instrument at the end of the tube is used to gently scrape the developing embryo or fetus from the walls of the uterus while a suction machine attached to the tube removes it. For the sake of safety this technique should be done under strict medical supervision and under local anesthetic.

After the first three months (or **trimester**) abortions become increasingly complex and risky. Abortions after this time period are usually performed by **dilation and evacuation**, a procedure which calls for the injection of an **abortifacient** substance such as salt water into the uterus, causing contractions and the expulsion of the fetus.

A Brief History

Induced abortion first became legal in the United States when the U.S. Supreme Court, by a 7-2 decision in the **Roe v. Wade** case, ruled that a woman has a right to terminate her pregnancy until the time of **viability**—the point at which the fetus is capable of living outside the mother's womb. This, the court determined, becomes possible during the last trimester or three months of pregnancy.

Prior to "Roe v. Wade" and to a much lesser extent today women resort to illegal and **self-induced abortions**. People have used all sorts of articles such as hatpins, clothes hangers and pencils to probe through the cervix into the uterus, rupturing the fetal sac or they have introduced chemicals into their uterus. These actions bring on expulsion of the fetus, but also often result in severe injury and life-threatening infection for the woman.

The battle over abortion has most recently involved court actions, state legislative initiatives and street demonstrations. In 1989 the U.S. Supreme court, in a 5-4 ruling (**Webster vs. Reproductive Health Services**) stopped short of overturning "Roe v. Wade," but upheld three provisions of a 1986 Missouri law that placed restrictions on abortion.

Pennsylvania imposed severe restrictions on abortion in 1989 but a federal judge blocked enforcement of this act in a 1990 ruling. In Illinois, Florida and Idaho restriction laws were turned back. During all of this time and up to the present there have been many street demonstrations and blockades of clinics and hospitals where abortions were being performed.

In 1988 a French pharmaceutical company developed a drug called **RU 486** which, when taken during the first 7 weeks of pregnancy, causes the embryo to detach from the uterus and is reported to be safer (though long-term effects are unknown) and less expensive than induced abortion.

Tissues from induced abortions have been long used in medical research and treatment of Parkinson's and other diseases. Such practice not been halted but have been debated due to concern over the ethics of abortion.

Continual improvements in pre-natal testing (such as amniocentesis) has made it possible for physicians to inform parents whether a fetus has a genetic or developmental abnormality. This raises a new moral dilemma.

Some Statistics Related to Abortion

Several agencies keep statistics on abortion related subjects. They all show a sharp and steady increase in the number of legal abortions beginning with the "Roe v. Wade" decision to 1980, followed by a much slower increase from that date (The Alan Guttmacher Institute reported 744,610 abortions in 1973, 1,553,890 in 1980 and 1,588,550 in 1985.)¹ The Centers for Disease Control figures show a similar trend and note that the ratio of abortions to live births declined slowly between 1980 and 1990. The decline has continued while the numbers of both births and abortions increased because the increase in births was greater than the increase in abortions. Since the "baby boom" generation is reaching maturity the number of women of childbearing age reached an all time high in 1990. The reason why more pregnant women have been having babies instead of abortions could be due either to declining access to abortion services or an improvement in contraceptive practices resulting in reduced numbers of unintended pregnancies.²

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention received reports of 1,429,577 legal abortions in 1990. This represented an increase of 2.4% over 1989, paralleling the increase in population. The overall abortion rate remained



constant over the period at 24 per 1,000 females between the ages of 15 and 44. Most of the women who had abortions in 1990 were single, white and less than 25 years of age.³

Induced abortion has been becoming safer through the years. Antibiotics and the growing use and effectiveness of contraceptives combined to reduce the number of deaths from illegal abortions from a conservative estimate of 1,407 in 1940 to only 160 in 1966. That trend has continued for legal abortions as deaths declined sixfold from 1973 to 1985 (from 3.3 per 100,000 abortions or 44 deaths in 1973 to 0.4 per 100,000 abortions or 7 deaths in 1985) due to improvement in physician skills and medical technology and the earlier termination of pregnancy. The risk of death from legal abortion is higher for minority women, women over the age of 35 years and women who undergo abortion later into their pregnancy. Estimates of the number of illegal abortions have always been speculative, but there is a consensus that their numbers declined drastically after "Roe v. Wade." Between 1973 and 1985, 47 deaths related to illegal abortions were reported to the Centers for Disease Control, most of them during the first two years of that period. Eleven of the 17 were black, three Hispanic and three non-Hispanic whites. Nine of these women sought illegal abortions to keep the procedure a secret, six to avoid the costs of a legal abortion and the others had various other reasons. The risk of death from abortion is substantially less than the risk of dying from pregnancy and childbirth.⁴

Extensive research has shown that legal abortion of an unwanted pregnancy in the first trimester does not pose a psychological hazard for most women. Past Surgeon General C. Everett Koop, after reviewing more than 250 studies stated in 1989 that emotional problems stemming from abortion are "minuscule from a public health perspective." Women who do experience negative emotions after abortion tend to be those who "had the abortion for medical or genetic indication, have had prior psychiatric contact before the abortion, have had a second-trimester abortion, expressed serious ambivalence about the procedure or did not make the decision freely, or had wanted to become pregnant." Women who have had multiple abortions have more difficulty in interpersonal relationships.⁵

Seventy percent of women in the United States who have an abortion want to have children in the future. The Centers for Disease Control states that vacuum aspiration, which is the procedure for 90% of legal abortions in the U.S. today, does not pose a measurable risk to a woman's future childbearing capability or to the health of future children.⁶

In at least one case a law requiring parental involvement in the abortion decisions of minors has seemed to affect a decline in the number of abortions performed on young women. A 1981 Minnesota law requires women 18 and under to notify both parents at least 48 hours prior to an abortion, or to seek court approval. A survey of that state's abortion statistics from 1975 through 1987 shows that both the abortion and birth rates declined for women from ages 15 to 19 with a particularly sharp decline for ages 15 to 17. This indicates that minors were practicing better pregnancy avoidance after the law's passage.⁷

Forty percent of teen pregnancies in the United States end in abortion. Teens in the 1970's were twice as likely to have sex as those in the early 1960's.⁸

Seventy-nine percent of abortions in 1990 were performed on unmarried women, and twenty-one percent on married women.⁹

The proportion of abortions being performed on minority women has increased. In 1980 women of color accounted for 30.1 % of all abortions while in 1990 that figure was 35.5 %. Still the typical woman having an abortion is young, white and unmarried.¹⁰

In 1988 more than one million infants, or more than one quarter of the total births, were born to unmarried mothers. Eighteen percent of white infants and 63 percent of black infants are born to unmarried women. Teenaged and unmarried mothers are at a much greater risk of having low birth weight babies. These infants tend to have many health problems due to poverty and poor nutrition and health care.¹¹

Three "Families" of Arguments Concerning Abortion

Because our convictions are shaped by community and experience as well as by standard authorities there are as many "positions" on abortion as there are people in this world. Public arguments have tended to move toward one of the following three clusters or families.

One family of arguments centers on the notion that from the moment of conception the unborn is not less than human and it possesses an inalienable right to life. While other ethical values, such as freedom of choice and privacy all are important, they must give way to our obligation to protect life.

From the point of view of this argument the "Roe v. Wade" decision virtually legalized abortion on demand since it placed no meaningful restrictions even on abortions after the second trimester. Abortions during this period may be allowed if continued pregnancy poses a threat even to the mother's psychological health—including under the umbrella of health about every reason a woman might advance for having an abortion. Such permissiveness, it is argued, also encourages a climate of irresponsible sex. Indeed statistics show that only a small percentage of women cite a threat to their physical health as the major reason for seeking an abortion.

To opponents of legal abortions, its most offensive aspect is that it denies the sanctity of human life. Many Catholics and evangelical Christians have joined the ranks of those who see anti-abortion as a necessary stance of faith in a creator-God who is pro-life. Since abortion takes life it is murder. And since murder is universally recognized as evil, abortion is not open to individual choice but to be banned by law.

In the majority opinion for the "Roe" decision, Justice Harry A. Blackmun wrote that a mother is justified in choosing abortion because the fetus has not yet reached "the capability of meaningful life" and is not yet a "person in the whole sense." This, some warn, is just the kind life-denying reasoning used both in the reprehensible Dred Scott case of 1857 which justified slave ownership in the U.S., and by the Nazis to persecute the Jews and others in the 1930's and 40's.

Another family of arguments focuses on freedom of choice. Since a woman's freedom and human dignity depends on her ability to control her reproductive process, women must have the right to legal abortion. From this point of view it is often pointed out that prior to "Roe" between 300,000 and 1 million illegal abortions were performed annually. What has changed is that women are treated with dignity and well over 90 per cent of abortions are now performed in the healthy environment of a clinic. This argument also challenges the perception that legalized abortion somehow encourages women to be thoughtless toward the life of the unborn. Studies show women usually give great care to the decision and consider serious life-related issues such as their ability to adequately care for a child.

Critics of anti-abortion arguments charge that restricting abortion does nothing to address the serious and underlying problem of unintended pregnancy. They point out that those who resort to abortion are most often under age 25 and disproportionately of minority races. We should

be providing better sexuality and pregnancy education to prevent unintended pregnancies, this argument asserts, but meanwhile we should not punish women by taking away their right to choose.

Those who favor legalized abortion emphasize choice and the right of privacy. The women who typically seek abortions are representative of the most powerless and most oppressed segment of our society. They are often gripped by a true terror that comes from being bullied and denied resources in a world dominated by white, upper-class men. The right to decide whether or not to give life, since it involves a woman's body and well-being, should be considered private and closed to government regulation and invasion.

Religious people who oppose the restriction of abortion claim to hold life just as sacred as abortion opponents. However, they point out, God gives humans the obligation of a stewardship over life that requires decision and choice. It is also wrong, they say, to force religious standards and values on others with the force of law.

The third family of arguments is a mediating position represented by the ELCA's social statement. It argues that, while life is indeed sacred, when there are compelling moral factors, women should be permitted to choose early abortion. Public policy should reflect the community's interest in protecting and preserving the life and the rights of both the unborn and pregnant women. Theologically speaking this argument says that individuals should rely on a God who works through the community of faith to help guide decisions and sustain life.¹²

¹"Induced Termination of Pregnancy before and after Roe v. Wade: Trends in the Mortality and Morbidity of Women" *The Journal of the American Medical Association* Dec 9 1992, p. 3231-3232.

²Barringer, Felicity. "Rate of Abortions Is Lowest Since 70's" *New York Times* Dec 19, 1992, p. 9, col 1.

³"Abortion Surveillance: Preliminary Data -- United States, 1990." *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, Dec. 18, 1992, v41, n50, pp. 936-939.

⁴JAMA, Dec 9 1992 pp. 3231-3234.

⁵"Induced Termination of Pregnancy" JAMA, Dec 9, 1992, p. 3236.

⁶"Induced Termination of Pregnancy," JAMA, Dec 9 1992, p. 3237.

⁷Rogers, James L.; Boruch, Robert F.; Stoms, George B.; DeMoya, Dorothy "The Impact of the Minnesota Parental Notification Law on Abortion and Birth." *The American Journal of Public Health* March 1991, v81, n3, pp. 294-299.

⁸"Teen Sex: Truth and Consequences, part 1." *The American Enterprise*. Jan-Feb, 1993, v4, n1, p52.

⁹Barringer, 1992, section 7, p. 9.

¹⁰Barringer, 1992, section L, p. 9.

¹¹"Trends in Fertility and Infant and Maternal Health—United States, 1980-1988" *Journal of the American Medical Association* July 3, 1991, pp. 24-26.

¹²The treatment of the three "families of arguments" is based on a similar model in *The Battle Over Abortion: seeking Common Ground in a Divided Nation*, (Dubuque, Ia: Kendall Hunt Publishing, 1990.)

Session 2: Bible Study

Our Unity in Christ

In matters of controversy we are often defeated before we begin because we fear disagreement will divide us. We can overcome this fear and manage a healthy exchange if we keep in mind the true basis of our unity with all people in creation and with other Christians in God's grace in Jesus Christ.

In the Church of Corinth to which the Apostle Paul ministered there were deep divisions along religious and ethical lines. Note how Paul works with the notion that the people of the church are God's building. He wants to model for others the importance of "building up" the church on the foundation of Jesus Christ.

1. Read: 1 Corinthians 3. Note especially verses 10-17. Read also 1 Corinthians 8:1; 10:23; 14:4, 12, 26. What does it mean to say that we collectively are the "temple of God"? What does that understanding add to our ability to deal with difficult issues?

2. Read and talk about:

Genesis 1:26-28; 2:7—*What does our common origin mean for our study?*

Matthew 28:16-20; John 17:20-26—*How do the passages clarify our unity?*

Galatians 3:27-29; Ephesians 2:11-22; Colossians 1:15-23; Philippians 2:1-11—*How does the cross of Christ enter our discussion?*

What do these passages say to us today?

God's Gift of Life. . .

1. Read Genesis 1 (esp. 26-28) and Genesis 2:4-7; 18-25. What do the passages say about creation and life? What makes life human? Compare Acts 17:24-25; Is 40:25-31; Psalms 8 and 139.

2. Note how the Bible speaks of fetal or pre-natal life in Jeremiah 1:4-5 and Luke 1:41. What, if anything, does this say about the attempts to decide when human life begins or when it is worth protection on the basis of when it is "viable outside the womb?"

. . . and Our Responsibility

1. Exodus 20:13 prohibits killing, but read Genesis 1:26-31 and Genesis 2:9, 15-17. What does it mean to have dominion?

2. Read Matthew 5:43-48. What does this text have to say to Christian congregations as caring communities in the discussion of abortion? What might it say to people dealing with unintended pregnancies? Compare Leviticus 19:18; Luke 10:27; Romans 13:9; Matthew 22:39; John 15:17; Romans 12:14-21; 13:8-10; 1 Corinthians 10:24.

3. Read Martin Luther's explanation of the fifth commandment in the *Small Catechism* and a further discussion of the same in the *Large Catechism*:

You shall not kill.

What does this mean? We should fear and love God, and so we should not endanger our neighbor's life, nor cause our neighbor any harm, but help and befriend our neighbor in every necessity of life.

[God] wishes to have all people defended, delivered, and protected from the wickedness and violence of others, and he has set up this commandment as a wall, fortress, and refuge about our neighbor so that no one may do him bodily harm or injury . . . this commandment is violated not only when a person actually does evil, but also when he fails to do good to his neighbor, or, though he has the opportunity, fails to prevent, protect, and save him from suffering bodily harm or injury. If you send a person away naked when you could clothe him, you have let him freeze to death. If you see anyone suffer hunger and do not feed him, you have let him starve. Likewise, if you see anyone condemned to death or in similar peril and do not save him although you know ways and means to do so, you have killed him. It will do you no good to plead that you did not contribute to his death by word or deed, for you have withheld your love from him and robbed him of the service by which his life might have been saved. Therefore God rightly calls all persons murderers who do not offer counsel and aid to men in need and in peril of body and life.

What do Luther's words add to our understanding of life as God's gift and our responsibility?

4. Read and discuss Luke 16:19-31 and Matthew 25:31-46. Who are our neighbors in the matter of abortion? How might we as a church better serve the needs of the unborn child? of parents facing unintended pregnancies (often young, minority, unwed mothers)? of young children of our society?

5. Discuss the following questions:

- What does the Bible say about the nature of human life?
- What makes life human?
- How are we to value human life?
- What is our responsibility, as a Christian congregation toward the unborn? toward parents facing unintended pregnancies? toward all children?

Statement on Abortion Recommendations

Recommendations in specific areas:

- *Prevention of unintended pregnancies:*
 - *Sex education in schools*
 - *Community pregnancy prevention programs*
 - *Parenting preparation classes*
 - *Contraceptives should be available*
 - *New forms of contraceptives should be researched*
 - *People should be enabled to consider voluntary sterilization*

- *Support for infants and children:*
 - *Access to quality, affordable health care*
 - *Access to child care*
 - *Access to housing*
 - *Sufficient income support to families by employers*
 - *Sufficient income support to families of the unemployed through government assistance*
 - *Support for education*
 - *Nutrition support*
 - *Services to protect children from abuse and neglect*
 - *Adequate maternity and paternity leaves and flexibility in the work place for the sake of families*
 - *Correction of disparity between incomes of men and women*
 - *Laws that hold both parents financially responsible for their children*

- *The Regulation of Abortion*
 - *Policies should enjoy sufficient consensus to be enforceable*
 - *Policies should be effective in protecting prenatal life*
 - *Policies should protect the lives, health and dignity of women and their freedom to make responsible choices*
 - *Policies should offer equal protection regardless of class or race*

Statement Recommendations:

- Government should regulate abortion
- Government should not outlaw abortion in all circumstances.
- Government should prohibit abortions 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
- Laws should not prevent access to information about all options available to pregnant women
- Laws should not deny access to safe and affordable services for morally justifiable abortions
- Government should not coerce abortion or sterilization
- Government should not prevent couples from practicing contraception
- Government should not harass those considering or deciding upon abortion
- Government should provide financial assistance for low income parents seeking abortions for morally justifiable reasons
- If a law requires parental consent for an abortion when the pregnant woman is a minor, it should specify other trusted adults as alternatives if parental involvement is inappropriate or unsafe

Evaluation

Evaluate the following, indicating by drawing a circle around the number that most closely describes your assessment of each:

5 = *strongly approve* 4 = *approve* 3 = *neutral*
2 = *disapprove* 1 = *strongly disapprove*

- | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Prayers and worship | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 2. Feeling checks | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 3. The overall way strong feelings were handled | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 4. The way the biblical and theological material was handled | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 5. The way people were allowed and encouraged to think for themselves and form their own conclusions | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 6. The way leadership was exercised | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 7. Clarification of the ELCA statement and policies | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 8. The degree to which I was helped to understand others | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 9. The degree to which I was helped to think and decide about abortion | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 10. Discussion of our congregation as a community supportive of life | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 11. Treatment of the church and public policy advocacy | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

