

## ELCA Social Statement on Abortion

Summary points, prepared by Mary J. Streufert, Ph.D.

**Points in bold are taken from the outline of the social statement.**

### **I. OUR UNITY AND DIVERSITY IN CHRIST**

#### **A. The Basis of Our Unity**

1. with all creation because God creates
2. with all Christians through Christ
3. with all Lutherans through the confession that we are justified by grace through faith in Jesus Christ

#### **B. The Gift of Our Diversity**

1. Unity in Christ gives “the freedom and the obligation to engage in serious deliberation on moral matters” (1).
2. Differences within the ELCA on abortion are deep.

#### **C. Talking about Our Differences**

1. Taking differences seriously means learning how to talk with respect for this diversity.
2. How we talk about abortion will be best served by avoiding extremes, such as “pro-life” and “pro-choice” (2).

### **II. CONVICTIONS OF OUR FAITH**

- A. God creates humans with value and dignity, and since we live in community with God, self, and others, we need to make responsible decisions related to procreation (2).
- B. God creates, redeems, and fulfills life; as such, we need to honor the mystery of creation and allow ourselves to be guided by God’s Law, which is meant to help us respect and care for others (2-3).
- C. Sin is a condition of separation from God and our acts that reflect this separation. We sin and are sinned against and cannot free ourselves (3).
- D. “God calls us to repentance, renewal, and responsible living. . . . Our faith is to be active in love and our freedom used for the benefit of one another” (3).
- E. As a forgiven and redeemed community, this church “embraces especially those who are most vulnerable, including both the pregnant woman and the life in her womb” (3).

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

- A. “Because we believe that God is the creator of life, the number of induced abortions is a source of deep concern to this church” (3).
- B. “Abortion ought to be an option only of last resort. Therefore, as a church we seek to reduce the need to turn to abortion as the answer to unintended pregnancies” (3-4).
- C. “We also deplore the circumstances that lead a woman to consider abortion as the best option available to her” (4).
- D. The ELCA commits itself to many aspects of policy and practice that support avoiding unintended pregnancy and that support having children and healthy lives (4-5).

1. “congregational life and church policy” (4)
2. Sexual intercourse is for marriage and its goodness goes beyond procreation; contraception is everyone’s responsibility.
3. Sex education needs to be in the context of faith (4-5).
4. Sexuality requires responsibility, mutuality, and abstinence outside of marriage (5).
5. The ELCA challenges self-centered, excessive, abusive, and degrading cultural attitudes that contribute to the number of abortions in the U.S. (5).

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

Those who need to decide whether or not to have an abortion have moral authority that involves their whole person—body, mind, and spirit—and should be trusted to make decisions and should be supported by their pastors and communities (5-6).

*In other words:*

Making a decision to have an abortion or to keep a pregnancy can be a difficult decision. Anyone who needs to make this decision is encouraged “to seek support and counsel” from trusted people, including professionals and pastors. ELCA members, including pastors, should be trained to offer competent and respectful. The pregnant person has moral authority in this decision: “It is important that those who counsel persons faced with unintended pregnancies respect how deeply the woman’s pregnancy involves her whole person—body, mind and spirit—in relation to all the commitments that comprise her stewardship of life. Counsellors should seek to call forth her power to act responsibly after prayerful reflection upon all factors involved” (5-6).

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

1. Usually, the ELCA would like to see pregnancies continue, but every situation needs to be assessed given the circumstances in which people are.
2. The ELCA encourages adoption, but adoption is not realistic in every situation.
3. People who place their children for adoption should be supported because there is not a lot of social support for parents who do this.

##### **B. Ending a Pregnancy**

1. “This church recognizes that there can be sound reasons for ending a pregnancy through induced abortion” (6).
2. Every situation is different and requires its own “morally responsible decision” (6).
3. Factors to consider in ethical decision-making include
  - a. “the status and condition of the life in the womb” (7)
  - b. “the conditions under which the pregnancy occurred” (7)
  - c. “the implications of the pregnancy for the woman’s life” (7)
4. However, “[t]his church opposes ending intrauterine life when a fetus is developed enough to live outside a uterus with the aid of reasonable and necessary technology. If a pregnancy needs to be interrupted after this

point, every reasonable and necessary effort should be made to support this life, unless there are lethal fetal abnormalities indicating that the prospective newborn will die very soon” (7).

5. In the end in these decisions, we trust in God’s mercy and grace: “We have the responsibility to make the best possible decisions in light of the information available to us and our sense of accountability to God, neighbor, and self. In these decisions, we must ultimately rely on the grace of God” (7).

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

“The purpose of the law is to protect life and liberty, and to provide for the general welfare of society” (7). This church’s position on abortion should influence the law because it is meant to provide justice for all (8).

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

1. Prevention of unintended pregnancies is essential in decreasing the number of abortions.
2. This church supports
  - a. sex education in schools, homes, and churches
  - b. “community pregnancy prevention programs” (8)
  - c. “parenting preparation classes” (8)
  - d. “contraceptives to be available” (8)
  - e. “voluntary sterilization” (8)
  - f. “research and development of new forms of contraception” (8)

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

1. Because difficult circumstances are often the reason for decisions to abort a pregnancy, the ELCA is committed “to improve support for life in society” (8).
2. Social responsibility for families and children includes
  - a. “access to quality, affordable health care, child care, and housing” (8)
  - b. “[s]ufficient income . . . or . . . government assistance” (8)
  - c. “increased support for
    1. education,
    2. nutrition,
    3. and services that protect children from abuse and neglect” (8)
  - d. adequate parental leave
  - e. “greater flexibility in the work place”
  - f. corrections to gender-based pay inequity
  - g. laws that hold all parents financially responsible for their children

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

1. Members of the ELCA hold many different views on what and how the law should regulate abortion, or not (8-9).
2. “The position of this church is that government has a legitimate role in regulating abortion” (9).
3. With abortion, there is a twofold challenge with laws. They should “be effective in protecting prenatal life,” and they should “protect the dignity

of women and their freedom to make responsible decisions in difficult situations” (9).

4. “Laws should be enacted and enforced justly for the preservation and enhancement of life, and should avoid unduly encumbering or endangering the lives of women” (9).
5. Because this church has a paradoxical position, it opposes the following:
  - a. “the total lack of regulation of abortion;
  - b. legislation that would outlaw abortion in all circumstances;
  - c. laws that prevent access to information about all options available to women faced with unintended pregnancies;
  - d. laws that deny access to safe and affordable services for morally justifiable abortions;
  - e. mandatory or coerced abortion or sterilization;
  - f. laws that prevent couples from practicing contraception;
  - g. laws that are primarily intended to harass those contemplating or deciding for an abortion” (9-10).

**D. Some Issues Requiring Further Deliberation**

1. “whether consultation with the spouse or partner should be required”
  - a. Although communication is ideal, relationships might be violent or otherwise broken.
2. “whether and how parental consent should be required for a minor seeking an abortion”
  - a. Although communication with parents is ideal, other trusted adults can stand in as contacts.
3. “and whether public funds should be used to pay for abortions”
  - a. People should have equitable “access to legal medical services,” not based on income, yet there is a stated “concern that people’s tax money not be used to pay for what some people consider profoundly wrong” (10).