

**Problem  
Pregnancy**

**When  
You Need  
the  
Wisdom  
of  
Solomon**

*Helping Others  
Face Problem  
Pregnancies*

©Presbyterians Affirming Reproductive  
Option Options and Women's Ministries  
Program Area, National Ministries Division,  
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

*All rights reserved.* No part of this book may  
be reproduced or transmitted in any for or  
by any means, electronic or mechanical,  
including photocopying, recording or by  
any information storage or retrieval system  
without permission in writing from the  
publisher. For information, address  
Women's Ministries Program Area, 100  
Witherspoon Street, Louisville, KY 40202-  
1396.

*Second Edition*

This pamphlet was originally published by  
the Council on Theology and Culture, 1984.  
This 1999 revision which reflects changes  
made in church policy (1992 and 1997) is  
provided by Presbyterian Affirming  
Reproductive Options (PARO) with the  
permission of the Office of Theology and  
Worship, Congregational Ministries  
Division, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)  
PARO is a network of the Presbyterian  
Health, Education and Welfare Association  
(PHEWA), National Ministries Division,  
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Published by the Women's Ministries  
Program Area, National Ministries Division,  
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Louisville,  
Kentucky.

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

---

**She's fifteen - pregnant - scared to death.**

*What do I say?*

**He's seventeen - she's pregnant - he wants to go to college and he also wants to do the "right thing."**

*Where do I find the words?*

**She's forty eight - married - pregnant for the first time. They want a child.**

*How much should I stress the risk?*

**She's forty-two - mother of three - divorced - works - can't afford another child but has concerns about an abortion.**

*How can I help her?*

**They're in their late thirties - a genetic disorder is diagnosed.**

*How do I counsel?*

---

## **What Shall I say to Her - Him - Them?**

Pastors are called upon to be informed, compassionate, sensitive and helpful when it comes to counseling. This is a tall order indeed, yet all of these skills and abilities are needed when it comes to dealing with a problem pregnancy. A problem pregnancy affects both the pregnant woman and her partner, and perhaps even both sets of their parents. All of them may be looking to you for guidance and advice.

People will be more likely to approach you for counseling if you have signaled your availability and your desire to help. It is important that your preaching and pastoral care, as well as other aspects of your ministry, communicate your openness to persons who are hurting. Your willingness to be deeply involved will encourage such persons to come to you for help. They must be sure that anything told in confidence will remain confidential, and they must have trust that you can and will offer understanding and compassionate advice.

These people come with some of the most wrenching upheavals that

---

human beings encounter. For that very reason, no absolute set of laws or rules can be depended upon to give an answer that will be appropriate in all cases. Since there are no pat answers, your skills as a counselor will be stretched to the limits. When you are faced with cries for help, your most valuable gifts are your care and compassion.

When she (or he) comes to you, the first thing to do is to **LISTEN NON-JUDGMENTALLY**. Resist the urge to provide an easy answer — there is no easy answer or choice. The help you can render will be in direct proportion to the amount of information you gain. Voice inflections, body language, and other nonverbal signals may tell you more than the spoken word.

Seek to get all the information possible about the woman, the man, their families, health (including genetics if appropriate), financial condition, and religious background and understanding. You will want to learn about the attitudes of the families so as to understand the pressures that might be brought to bear upon her, him, or them.

As a counselor, you will need to know the extent of your advisee's knowledge and understanding of what is required in the birth process

---

---

and in child-rearing. A surprising number of young people do not know how pregnancy occurs, or how to prevent pregnancy, and therefore may have no real understanding of fetal development, or the process of birth. Such persons may have no clear understanding of what is entailed in rearing a child. It will help you to be as knowledgeable about and comfortable with these subjects as possible.

## What Are the Options?

There are three distinct options for the pregnant woman to consider:

- 1) She can decide to have the baby and then rear the child after birth.
- 2) She can decide to have the baby and to make a plan for adoption.
- 3) She can decide to terminate the pregnancy

Companion pamphlets have been prepared entitled *PROBLEM PREGNANCY: When No Choice is Easy* and *PROBLEM PREGNANCY: There's Always a Father*. The first pamphlet is addressed primarily to

---

the woman who finds herself pregnant when she does not want to be. The second is addressed to the prospective father. You should be familiar with the content of these pamphlets. This and the companion pamphlets focus primarily upon the situation of young unmarried people. They are, however, not the only people who are confronted by problem pregnancies. Older women, whether or not married, for whom giving birth to a child may be hazardous to the woman's life and health; women carrying a fetus with genetic disorders; women, especially single women, who have more children than they can adequately provide for—these and others may need your help. You may be asked to consult with the prospective father whose desires, aspirations, and moral views may coincide with or differ from those of the mother.

Before you begin to advise, you, as pastor-counselor, will want to consider some of the immediate and long-term effects of each of the options.

### ***Bearing and raising the baby***

Our Christian tradition affirms that all life is a gift from God. Yet many

---

Christians, including Presbyterian Christians, disagree about when a human life begins. While the pregnancy may be a problem for the woman right now because of her circumstances, a child can be a tremendous source of love, fulfillment, and happiness. Your approach may well differ, however, depending upon the circumstances surrounding the pregnancy. The very young teenager, the older woman, the woman whose fetus has been diagnosed to be genetically disordered—these may need very divergent counseling. Only you can determine the direction of your advice. Our church policy recognizes that problem pregnancies are the result of, and influenced by so many complicated and unsolvable circumstances, that the church has neither the wisdom nor authority to address each situation. Therefore, it is not the purpose of this pamphlet to lay down inflexible guidelines. The decision to keep the child must ultimately be left up to the pregnant woman. The decision, however, should be counseled only when she is reasonably sure that she can provide for the physical and emotional needs of a child. If the physical and emotional future of

---

the mother would be jeopardized by selecting this option, then this choice may not be the best.

Adoption or abortion may be more appropriate choices.

***Making a plan for adoption***

This can be a very loving response. Once the pregnant woman has determined that she cannot commit to rearing a child, she may then wish to explore the possibility of adoption.

Adoption may assure the child's future welfare, as well as fulfill the dreams of persons unable to bear children. There are, however, other considerations. Some mothers never get over the emotional loss they experience in giving up a child, and this loss is important to recognize. In addition, some cultural traditions consider failure to rear a child unthinkable - "we don't give our babies away." A careful counselor will want to be sensitive to such mores, recognizing that the advisee may be crying out for affirmation from family and friends that adoption is acceptable.

For those who may view adoption as unbiblical, it is appropriate to mention the incident recorded in I Kings 3:16 in which Solomon decides which of two women is the "real" mother of an

---

infant in question. Here it is clear the love of the biological mother enabled her to give her child away if need be. This is precisely the pattern that a modern birth mother follows when she chooses to have adoptive parents care for the baby.

If adoption becomes the option chosen, then it is imperative to get good legal advice. Adoption is a legal procedure and the mother and perhaps the father will be required to sign papers relinquishing parental rights. Laws on adoption vary from state to state, and a certified adoption agency or a lawyer should be consulted.

### ***Abortion***

The remaining option, abortion, should be considered only after weighing the other two alternatives. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has deep respect for human life, but our church also recognizes that in certain circumstances, abortion can be a morally acceptable decision to make. The church's position is that none of these three options is always an absolute.

The following legal, ecclesiastical, and biblical statements concerning abortion offer information and ideas which you need to consider in discussing this option.

---

## *What do the Courts Say About Abortion?*

In 1973 the United States Supreme Court overturned anti-abortion statutes of Texas and Georgia, in the cases of *Roe v Wade* and *Doe v Bolton*, legalizing abortion with these restrictions:

- a. For the stage prior to approximately the end of the first trimester, the abortion decision and its effectuation must be left to the medical judgment of the pregnant woman's attending physician.
- b. For the stage subsequent to approximately the end of the first trimester, the State, in promoting its interest in the health of the mother, may, if it chooses, regulate the abortion procedure in ways that are reasonably related to maternal health.
- c. For the stage subsequent to viability—usually placed at about even months (twenty-eight weeks but may occur earlier, even at twenty-four weeks)—the State in promoting its interest in the potentiality of human life, may, if it chooses, regulate and even proscribe abortion, except where it is necessary, in appropriate medical judgment, for the

---

preservation of the life or health of the mother.”

In broad summary, a woman can obtain a legal abortion in the first 13 weeks of pregnancy without any interference from the state. (Exceptions are made in some states where parental notification for minors presents a possible restriction.) After the first 13 weeks of pregnancy, she may still obtain an abortion, but the state, if it chooses, may prescribe regulations for the abortion procedure in ways designated to protect the woman's health. The state may more stringently regulate or even prohibit abortion after “viability,” except where abortion is necessary to preserve the woman's life. Viability is the stage in pregnancy after which a fetus would probably survive outside the womb.

*What Does the General Assembly of the PC(USA) Say?*

The basic Reformed tenet that God alone is the Lord of the conscience undergirds long-standing church policy in support of a woman's ability and responsibility, guided by the Holy Spirit, to make good moral choices about contraception and abortion within the limits of federal and state law. In society this is

---

usually called a "pro-choice" policy, allowing for a woman to consider a range of options with regard to reproduction. In this affirmation the church does not advocate abortion, but rather recognizes a woman's moral authority and circumstances that may make abortion the least objectionable of difficult options. This is the bottom line of two major policy statements, "Covenant and Creation: Theological Reflections on Contraception and Abortion" (1983) and "Problem Pregnancies and Abortion: Do Justice, Love Mercy, Walk Humbly (Micah 6:8)" (1992). Not every Presbyterian is in agreement with this "official" policy. It is not binding on the conscience of individuals, but is meant to reflect the predominant opinion of the General Assemblies that adopted or let stand previous statements.

It is useful to read both of these papers, recognizing the purpose of their creation. The 1983 "Creation and Covenant" paper provides a broad theological study of the multiple and complex issues related to contraception, pregnancy, abortion and our covenants with God and each other. The 1992 report, subtitled "Do Justice, Love Mercy, Walk Humbly" provides

---

guidance for how Presbyterians who have different points of view about abortion can get along in our church. Two general ways of using and interpreting scripture and five points of view about when a human life begins are listed as sources of disagreement. The policy development section of the paper is clearly designated and lists areas of substantial agreement allowed by implications for the life and witness of the church.

As in 1983, the 1992 paper makes clear the church's affirmation of a woman's moral authority.

*"We affirm the ability and responsibility of women, guided by scripture and the Holy Spirit, in the context of their communities of faith, to make good moral choices in regard to problem pregnancies."*

The 1992 paper lists some possible circumstances that may make abortion justified: severe physical or mental deformity, rape or incest, or threats to the woman's or fetus's physical or mental health. Also listed are circumstances that are not seen as acceptable reasons: instead of birth control, to select gender for non-medical reasons, or to obtain fetal parts for

---

transplantation. In 1998, the church expressed “grave moral concern” about a particular, rarely used late term abortion procedure. The church clearly says abortion should “be an option of last resort” and that Presbyterians should work to change society so that fewer problem pregnancies happen as a way to decrease the number of abortions.

The church’s concern is not just about the appropriateness of a single choice, abortion, among options; although continuing disagreement in our church might suggest otherwise. You may want to keep on hand a small library of problem pregnancy sources, including the 1983 and 1992 documents, guidelines for evaluating crisis pregnancy centers, adoption study papers, all-option counseling suggestions, and others. A brief listing of contacts is found on the final page of this pamphlet.

### *Biblical and Theological View on Abortion*

There are no biblical texts that speak expressly to the topic of abortion. Consequently, positions are derived from the application of general biblical principles. Varying and even contradictory positions on

---

contraception and abortion are held by different groups in the church, each convinced that their position is "biblical" depending on which texts and what principles are used and how they are used. Recognizing these facts, we can now take a more informed look at three positions held by various Presbyterians. They are: 1) abortion should be forbidden by law in all circumstances, 2) abortion can be a responsible moral choice in limited circumstances, and 3) abortion can be a morally responsible choice under broader circumstances. These positions are not necessarily mutually exclusive, nor are they the only approaches.

Presbyterians who believe that abortion should be prohibited by law under all circumstances cite texts such as Jeremiah 1:5 and the Sixth Commandment: "You shall not kill" (Exodus 20:13). Human life begins at the moment of conception for them because they believe that God is intimately involved in the creation of life in the womb. For the Presbyterians who hold this position, God alone has the right of life and death over creation.

The second group of Presbyterians believes that abortion can be a responsible choice in limited circumstances. These

---

Presbyterians generally hold two beliefs in tension: (1) their belief in the value of potential human life, and (2) their belief that in certain limited circumstances the pregnant woman's life and welfare should take priority over the fetus that she carries. Those who take this position point to Exodus 21:22-25 as an indication that the woman's life had greater priority than did fetal life. These verses say that when a pregnant woman is injured and miscarriage results from the injury, the one who hurt her shall pay a fine. If she has suffered additional injury, however, the one who caused her harm shall be punished under *lex-talionis*, or a life for a life, an eye for an eye . . . Under the Jewish ordinances, the fetus was considered to have less value than a born person.

Presbyterians who take this position reason that if there is biblical evidence that the pregnant woman's life takes priority over fetal life, then the pregnant women's life must take precedence in circumstances where a choice must be made between the fetal and the pregnant woman's life. In addition, some Presbyterians who hold this view would accept abortion in cases of rape, incest, or severe fetal abnormalities.

---

A third position held by Presbyterians views pregnancy and childbearing as part of our covenant relationship with God, and therefore, as a form of stewardship involving both responsibility and decision making in the context of human situation where we all share both the responsibility and consequences for sin. While upholding the dignity of any child conceived under a variety of circumstances, this position challenges the belief that God's intentionality is present in every conception given the fallen nature of human situation. Hence, Presbyterians who hold this position take seriously our responsibility to make decisions, and understand decision making as an important aspect of our stewardship as humans created in the image of God.

Given this, they believe that because the pregnant woman carries the primary biological responsibility for pregnancy and childbearing, she should be allowed to make the critical decisions regarding her pregnancy as Jesus recognized women as responsible, decision making agents (Luke 10:38-42). This is the essence of the church's stance. Her decision whether to have an abortion should

---

reflect her ability—physically, mentally, emotionally, and financially—to give birth and care for a child. Though Presbyterians in this category accept abortion under broader circumstances than the previous group, it would be neither fair nor accurate to characterize this position as advocating “abortion for convenience.”

Presbyterians focused on the covenant relationship with God agree with the Jewish tradition that life begins at birth, with the first breath of a new person. Among other passages, they cite Genesis 2:7, believing that with the first Creator-given breath of life, we become living beings. In Hebrew thought, the closest word to “person” is *nephesh*, occurring over 750 times in scripture. *Nephesh* means a human being’s total nature, and it is incomplete without breath. Most Presbyterians in agreement with this third position believe that once birth and breath have happened, the taking of human life is a sin. A brief description of the conflicting theological views and their basis would not be satisfactory to anyone.

Make your own careful study of the major policy papers and other resources. Reflect upon these

---

---

prayerfully and in light of your own biblical and theological understandings. You may decide that abortion is always wrong or that it is appropriate according to when you understand that a human life has begun. Whatever your conclusion, the church ought to be able to maintain within its fellowship those who, on the basis of the study of scripture and prayerful decisions, come to diverse conclusions (the first area of substantial agreement in the 1992 paper). Whatever your conclusion, remember that within the "pro-choice" framework our church has adopted, your own moral authority prevails. This exercise is nothing less than the wrestling with options that a woman facing a problem pregnancy must do. You owe this much to her as her counselor.

## **The Difficult Part**

You have considered the legal, biblical, and theological implications. You have learned as much as possible about the situation surrounding this pregnancy. Now comes the difficult part. Remember it is not your decision to make. You are there to help those who come to you to be

---

more comfortable and confident about their decision, and for them to feel affirmed by you and the community of faith. The 1992 paper reminds us that “it must be clearly stated. . .that there is no biblical evidence to support the idea that abortion is an unpardonable sin.” “The Covenant of Life” summarizes the counselor’s role: “Effective counseling is evidenced. . .not in the reproductive behavior or decision-making of the families, but in their understanding of their own situation and all of the options, facilities, and persons who are available to help them.” These guidelines are suggested in the 1992 paper:

- *work with men and women in times of critical decision;*
- *seek to nurture faithful and responsible relationships;*
- *proclaim the gracious gift of God’s mercy and forgiveness;*
- *encourage new life in the spirit of God.*

Other issues related to counseling include support of the importance of sexual activity within the context of marriage, love, respect for our

---

partner, self-respect and equality, mutual support, fidelity, the use of contraceptives, and sexuality education.

As you counsel, be clear and truthful about the consequences of each option, as difficult as these consequences may be. Physical, emotional, financial, moral, and theological ramifications of each choice needs to be explored in depth.

The day-to-day responsibilities of child-rearing should be examined so that the woman who might want to raise a child will be fully informed. Feelings of loss which may be produced by making a plan for adoption or which may occur after an abortion deserve attention as well.

Urge the man to take seriously his responsibility. His values or desires as to what option should be selected may differ markedly from that of his partner. If he wants her to keep the baby and she wishes to make a plan for adoption, he may, in some states, by acknowledging himself to be the father, put himself in the position of being able to prevent adoption by third parties by refusing to execute a consent. This option should be considered only, however, if the father is willing to assume full responsibility

---

---

for rearing the child and has the sources to do so.

Never hesitate to refer, if you feel uncomfortable with any counseling situation.

## **Now What?**

You have counseled as fairly as you know how. Now what is the next step? It is important that there be follow-up counseling no matter what the decision is. It may be wise to make an appointment for the next counseling session before the advisee leaves your office. Timing of the woman's decision is critical. From legal, medical, and emotional perspectives, and under the church's guidance, a decision to terminate should, if possible, be made within the first 13 weeks of pregnancy. If your advisee elects to have the baby, urging her to see a physician early is highly desirable so that prenatal care can be started at once, including instruction about good nutrition, personal hygiene, substance abuse, and other factors.

Finally, and imperatively, the woman, in consultation with her physician, must make the ultimate decision. Providing her with accurate information is important, but your greatest gift to her will be your love, respect, and support. As

---

the 1983 policy statement says, "The church is called to be the living and supportive community within whose life persons can best make decisions in conformity with God's purposes revealed in Jesus Christ."

## Resources

In order to be well prepared, a pastor will gather information and resources that may be helpful to the advisee, such as:

- a. names of physicians or other health care professionals to explain the physical process of pregnancy, labor, and delivery; the necessity of prenatal care; costs, and other factors which must be considered if the decision is to have the baby;
- b. names and telephone numbers of social workers (hospital, welfare agencies, etc);
- c. names and addresses of homes and schools for unwed mothers;
- d. names of adoption agencies and lawyers who can discuss issues relating to adoption;
- e. names of agencies or physicians offering safe abortion services (any alert about bogus abortion clinics should be

- 
- provided);
  - f. names of persons, if available, who have faced similar decisions and are willing to help;
  - g. names of evaluated crisis pregnancy ministries endorsed by your presbytery as resource centers;
  - h. names of churches designated by your presbytery as resource centers for those seeking alternatives to abortion;
  - i. sources of financial assistance for whatever option is chosen.

Information about all-options counseling training is available from the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, an interfaith group with Presbyterian participation. Call (202) 628-7700, or visit their website, [www.rcrc.org](http://www.rcrc.org)

May God bless you in your ministry!

---

**For the following resources call  
PDS at 1-800-524-2612**

Web address:

[www.pcusa.org/marketplace](http://www.pcusa.org/marketplace)

*There's Always A Father*

PDS # 72 710 99 015

*When You Need the Wisdom of  
Solomon*

PDS# 72 710 99 016

*When No Choice is Easy*

PDS# 72 710 99 017

*Problem Pregnancies and Abortion*  
(1992 policy paper)

OGA-92-017

*The Covenant of Life and the Caring  
Community and Covenant Creation:  
Theological Reflections on  
Contraception and Abortion (1983  
policy paper)* OGA-88-109

**For more information on resources,  
contact:**

*Presbyterians Affirming Reproductive  
Options (PARO)*, a network officially  
affiliated with the church through  
the National Ministries Division

Tel: 502-569-5794

Web address:

[www.pcusa.org/phewa/paro](http://www.pcusa.org/phewa/paro)

*Women's Ministries Program Area,*  
National Ministries Division

Tel: 502-569-5382/85

*Religious Coalition for Reproductive  
Choice (RCRC)*, an interfaith group  
with Presbyterian participation

Tel: 202-628-7700

Web address: [www.rcrc.org](http://www.rcrc.org)

**Published by**  
**Office of Women's Advocacy**  
**Women's Ministries Program Area**  
**National Ministries Division**  
**Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)**  
**Additional copies of this brochure may be**  
**ordered from the Presbyterian Distribution**  
**Center by calling 1-800-524-2612**  
**\$1.00**  
**PDS # 72 710 99 016**

**A Ministry of the General Assembly Council**

