



BRAVE CHURCH
TACKLING TOUGH TOPICS
TOGETHER

Abortion
History, Religion & Justice

Prayer

If you need wisdom—if you want to know what God wants you to do—ask Him and he will gladly tell you. He will not resent your asking.

James 1:5

Lord,
We ask for wisdom, tolerance and empathy
as we discuss a very difficult topic.
Open our hearts.
In Jesus' Name we pray.
Amen

Covenant Rules

RULE 1

We will accept conflict and commit to the way of kindness.

RULE 2

We will take responsibility for how our own words are received.

RULE 3

We will ask permission before we challenge someone's views on a subject.

RULE 4

We will show respect for one another and graciously receive feedback if someone feels disrespected.

RULE 5

We will use 'I' instead of 'you' statements. We will not accuse or attack."

RULE 6

Give everyone who wants to speak an opportunity to do so.

Topics on Abortion

May 10

Ethics of Abortion

Facts-Biology of Fetal development

Personhood

Facts-Abortion reality today

Women's Rights

May 17

History & Law

What does Religion say?



HISTORY & LAW

Fertility Control

Ancient Egyptian, Samaritan, Assyrian & Persians

Recipes of herbs and plants to prevent pregnancy,

Abortifacients to bring back the menses

Pessaries and poultices to insert into vagina

Greeks & Romans

Abortion was preferred to Exposure (infanticide)

Silphium, effective popular contraceptive

Abortion was considered part of contraceptive practices
and widely practiced in the Ancient world

Women in the Early Christian Era

- Greek & Roman women were expected to be chaste and limited to the household. Marriage was about male property rights, paternity & alliances
- Early Church Woman led congregations and engaged in public activities and ministries—defying Roman and Jewish gender roles
- Tertullian, the “father of Latin theology” in (200 AD)
 - woman should refrain from Church leadership
 - Keep silent and defer to her husband and fathers dress chastely
 - You are each an Eve-
Women, and their body are the root of sin in the world
- Augustine-women not created in the image of God equally with men

Sexuality as Sin

Abortion

**was not a major Theological concern during
most of Church history.**

**Sexual lives and behaviors
has been the focus.**

Colonial & early Republic Era

Colonists sought Population growth and manipulation

White Europeans were encouraged to have large families large &immigrate

Native Indians were discouraged by war, removal and missionary practices

Enslaved were increased by importation and breeding (intermarriage outlawed)

“Restoring the menses” (Abortion) before quickening was legal and accessible until the mid 1800s

Hearing the rhetoric of Freedom, liberty and inalienable rights, White women began limiting the number of pregnancies

1800	1 abortion/25-30 live births
1850	1 abortion/5-6 live births

What Changed?

19th c.

□ Abortion in the mainstream and Commercial

- Advertisement for products and practitioners
- Female practitioners: Midwives and informally trained doctors
- *Irregular* practitioners provided herbal & gyn treatments

□ Medical Practice is Professionalized

- AMA-American Medical Association for *Regular*, formally trained doctors, 1847
- Crusade to criminalize Abortion-Horatio Storer
 - discredit quickening, termination immoral due to continuous fetal development
 - frighten women about potentially dangerous procedures & Portray as victims
 - Cast women as incapable of rational thought due to hormones

▪ ***Abortion became a crime from 1867 to 1973***

Abortion during Depression

- ❑ 2.1 births per woman despite legal restrictions
- ❑ estimated 25 to 40 % of pregnancies ended in Abortion
 - M.D. or midwife-complications rare
 - self induced-75 % serious complication

Abortion and Law

- ❑ Comstock Law **1873**

Obscene mail---family planning, venereal disease material or products

- ❑ Griswold v Connecticut 1965

Marital right to privacy-birth control (first birth control pill on market in 1960)

- ❑ Eisenstadt v Baird 1972

Privacy right extended to unmarried

- ❑ Roe v Wade **1973**

Abortion through 2nd trimester

- ❑ Hyde Amendment 1977

No Federal funds for Abortion

- ❑ Dobbs v Jackson Women's Health Organization 2022

Abortion regulation left to each state

- ❑ Texas blocks FDA approval of Mifepristone 2023

Adjunct medication used with Misoprostol prior to 10-12 weeks gestation

Discussion

Questions

What do you think has caused a change in the church and society's approach to abortion over history?

Does knowing more about the history change any of your understanding?



WHAT DOES RELIGION SAY?

Ensoulement

Aristotle

- Vegetable soul at 40 to 80 days
- Animal Soul (sensitive)
- Human soul (rational)

Augustine

- The Law does not provide that the act (loss of fetus) pertains to homicide because one cannot as yet say there is a live soul in that body derived of feeling, if it in a body not formed and therefore derived of all feeling

Thomas Aquinas

- abortion before animation (Quickening) is not homicide

What Does the Bible Say?

22 If men struggle with each other and strike a woman with child so that she gives birth prematurely, yet there is no injury, he shall surely be fined as the woman's husband may demand of him, and he shall pay as the judges decide.

23 But if there is any further injury, then you shall appoint as a penalty life for life

24 Eye for eye....

Exodus 21:22-23

Breath of Life

Ecclesiastes 11:5

*As you know not the path of the life-breath
into the limbs within the full womb,
so you know not the deeds of God*

Context-how to conduct your life in the face of unpredictability

Roman Catholicism

- **purpose of sex is reproduction**
 - **Sterilization more serious than Abortion**
 - **Male masturbation (sperm= homunculi) sometimes called homicide**
- St. Thomas Aquinas Medieval-
 - **delayed ensoulment: stillbirths, miscarriage not baptized**
- St Antonius 15th C archbishop, Antonius de Corduba 16thC, Jesuit Thomas Sanchez, 17thC
 - **Early abortion to save life and health of mother permissible**
- Pope Pius IX *Apostolicae Sedis Moderation* **1869**
 - **No distinction between animate and inanimate fetus**
- *Pope Pius XI Casti Connubii* **1930**
 - **Contraception & Sterilization Sin against nature,**
 - **Abortion Sin against life**
- *Pope Pius XII* **1954**
 - **Rhythm method of Birth Control**
- Pope Paul VI **1968**
 - **Chemical and Mechanical methods sinful**

Protestantism

- ❑ Hierarchical control to individual and shared discernment
- ❑ Married Clergy & family-centered

Protestant Birth rates indicate fertility management

- ❑ 19th C. Clergy not support doctor crusade to control Abortion

Southern Baptist Convention

1970 poll: 70% of clergy supported a woman's access to abortion

1971 resolution: "We call upon Southern Baptists to work for legislation that will allow the possibility of abortion under such conditions as rape, incest, clear evidence of fetal deformity, and carefully ascertained evidence of the likelihood of damage to the emotional, mental, and physical health of the mother."

Right Wing Protestants
& Catholic Hierarchy

The ODD Couple of Politics

- 1973 Catholic Bishops encouraged Civil Disobedience to resist Abortion Legalization
- 1975 Catholic Bishops pushed single issues politics
- 1979 Moral Majority (mobilized around segregation) --Traditional Family Values Platform
Prohibit Abortion, Oppose Equal Rights Amendment, Oppose homosexuality

Coalesce Around Two Values

◦ **Fetus as a Person**

◦ **Patriarchal Fear of Gender Role Shifts**

Discussion

Questions

What scriptures, biblical principles, or beliefs do you find most relevant to the conversation?

How can you appeal to the Bible to find common ground with Christians who hold different views?

How should churches seek to reconcile the diversity of viewpoints within their body?

What Does the Presbyterian Church Say?

For Your
Consideration
Across the Decades

- ✓ The destruction by parents of their own offspring before birth
- ✓ An individual decision on the part of the physician and couple
- ✓ Abortion as a realm of the law
- ✓ Abortion as a matter of careful ethical decision of a woman, her physician, and her pastor or other counselor
- ✓ Thoughtful human choice-making at the beginning of life
- ✓ The potential for abuse and dehumanization both at the beginning of life and at the end of life
- ✓ Unavailability of funds to programs that provide services to the poor
- ✓ Challenging the abuses of justice in access to medical care and policies that deprive the poor, the very young, and the elderly of programs that provide nutrition and basic services designed to prevent disease
- ✓ Defending life as God's good gift, affirming the responsibility of persons to make decisions about its quality and use
- ✓ Careful consideration of all alternatives to planning a family

What Does the Presbyterian Church Say?

For Your
Consideration
Across the Decades

- ✓ Support of a woman's ability and responsibility, as guided by the Holy Spirit, to make good moral choices
- ✓ Consideration of problem pregnancy issues and personal well-being
- ✓ Affirmation of the value of children
- ✓ Understanding of human life from Scripture, in light of science, human experience, and reason guided by the Holy Spirit
- ✓ Forgiveness is central to our faith. God is the only Lord of the conscience—not the state or the church
- ✓ The decision to terminate a pregnancy is intensely personal should not be made in a moral vacuum but must be based on Scripture, faith, and Christian ethics
- ✓ Affirm that the lives of viable unborn babies ought to be preserved and cared for and not aborted
- ✓ The church supports efforts to protect the life and health of both the mother and the baby
- ✓ A provision for pastoral and tangible support to women in problem pregnancies, surrounding families with a community of care
- ✓ Affirmation of adoption as a provision for women who deliver children they are not able to care of

What Does the Presbyterian Church Say?

For Your
Consideration
Across the Decades

- ✓ Affirmation that abortion should not be used as a method of birth control.
- ✓ When life begins
- ✓ Circumstances that may make abortion justified
- ✓ Circumstances that are not seen as acceptable reasons for abortion
- ✓ Abortion only as a last resort
- ✓ Affirmation that it is the ability and responsibility of women, guided by the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit, in the context of their communities of faith, to make good moral choices in regard to problem pregnancies
- ✓ The church's responsibility to offer guidance, counsel, and support to those who make or interpret laws and public policies about abortion and problem pregnancies.
- ✓ The church's duty to counsel with and pray for those who face decisions about problem pregnancies
- ✓ The congregation's duty to pray for and support those who face these difficult choices
- ✓ Maintenance of fellowship with those who come to diverse conclusions and actions on the basis of a study of Scripture and prayerful decision

The Presbyterian Church (Old School) Assembly – 1869

The earliest appearance of abortion as an issue before the General Assembly occurs in 1869, at the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. (Old School) Assembly in New York. Responding to Overture 44, on “unscriptural views of marriage, divorce, and infanticide,” the commissioners wrote, “This Assembly regards the destruction by parents of their own offspring, before birth, with abhorrence, as a crime against God and against nature.”

UPCUSA General Assembly – 1962

A century later the 1962 UPCUSA General Assembly adopted the report of its Committee on Responsible Marriage and Parenthood holding that abortion could not be “an individual decision on the part of the physician and couple. Their decision should be limited and restrained by the larger society.”

The UPCUSA Assembly – 1966

In 1966 the UPCUSA organized the Task Force to Study Sexuality and the Human Community, which reported to the 1970 Assembly, reversing the 1962 position: “Abortion should be taken out of the realm of the law altogether and be made a matter of the careful ethical decision of a woman, her physician and her pastor or other counselor.”

The 182nd General Assembly – 1970

Presbyterians have struggled with the issue of abortion for more than 30 years, beginning in 1970 when the General Assembly, the national governing body of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), declared that:

“the artificial or induced termination of a pregnancy is a matter of careful ethical decision of the patient . . . and therefore should not be restricted by law . . .”

In the years that followed this action, the General Assembly has adopted policy and taken positions on the subject of abortion.



The 195th General Assembly 1983

THE COVENANT OF LIFE AND THE CARING COMMUNITY

AND

COVENANT AND CREATION: THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON CONTRACEPTION AND ABORTION

The 195th General Assembly (1983)
received the reports and adopted the
policy statements and recommendations

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Office of the General Assembly
100 Witherspoon Street
Louisville, KY 40202-1396

OGA-88-109

The 195th General Assembly – 1983

A strong commitment to the value of and responsibility for life underlies these policy recommendations. Options for human choice-making at the beginning of life are many, offering persons the opportunity to be co-laborers with God in the development of their families. The potential for abuse and dehumanization is also present, challenging Christians to thoughtful decision-making. Genetic research brings promise for relieving suffering and enhancing life, but it also raises the threat of idolatry in the search for the “perfect human being.” While abortion may be a morally responsible choice and must remain available, it cannot become ordinary. In times when funds to programs that provide services to the poor and underprivileged are being slashed, the church must speak out against these cuts. The church must challenge the abuses of justice in access to medical care, which it sees in cuts in Medicare, Medicaid, and policies that deprive the poor, the very young, and the elderly of programs that provide nutrition and basic services designed to prevent disease. Great care must be given to decisions at the end of life so that the wishes of persons who are dying are heard and respected. Caution must be taken so that prolonging life does not become idolatrous. In all these areas, the church must defend life as God’s good gift, affirm the responsibility of persons to make decisions about its quality and use, and recognize that each individual life is finite in its earthly tenure.

The General Assembly Mission Council

Original 1984; Revision 2010

Abortion should be considered only after carefully weighing the other two alternatives—having and raising the baby or planning for adoption. The church’s position is that none of these three options is always an absolute. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has deep respect for human life. It also recognizes that in certain circumstances abortion can be a morally acceptable decision to make. However, the church also considers abortion an option of last resort.

What Does the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Say?

The basic Reformed tenet is that God alone is the Lord of the conscience. That belief undergirds long-standing church policy in support of a woman’s ability and responsibility, as 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, which allows for a woman to consider a range of options with regard to reproduction.

The General Assembly Mission Council

original 1984; 2010 revision (continued)

What Does the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Say? (continued)

“In life and in death, we belong to God.” Life is a gift from God. We may not know exactly when human life begins and have but an imperfect understanding of God as the giver of life and of our own human existence, yet we recognize that life is precious to God, and we should preserve and protect it. We derive our understanding of human life from Scripture and the Reformed tradition in light of science, human experience, and reason guided by the Holy Spirit. Because we are made in the image of God, human beings are moral agents, endowed by the Creator with the capacity to make choices. Our Reformed tradition recognizes that people do not always make moral choices, and forgiveness is central to our faith. In the Reformed tradition, we affirm that God is the only Lord of the conscience—not the state or the church. As a community, the church challenges the faithful to exercise their moral agency responsibly.

The General Assembly Mission Council

original 1984; 2010 revision (continued)

What Does the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Say? (continued)

We affirm that the lives of viable unborn babies—those well-developed enough to survive outside the womb if delivered—ought to be preserved and cared for and not aborted. In cases where problems of life or health of the mother arise in a pregnancy, the church supports efforts to protect the life and health of both the mother and the baby. When late-term pregnancies must be terminated, we urge decisions intended to deliver the baby alive. We look to our churches to provide pastoral and tangible support to women in problem pregnancies and to surround these families with a community of care. We affirm adoption as a provision for women who deliver children they are not able to care for, and ask our churches to assist in seeking loving, Christian, adoptive families.”

Discussion Questions

- Were you aware of the changes in the tenets of the Presbyterian Church (PCUSA) regarding the issue of abortion since 1962?
- How do you interpret the various statements of PCUSA over the last 65 years?
- What do you see as the major changes to policy recommendations throughout the years?

Dream a World

- Lord,
 - We live in a broken and sinful world
- We pray and work for a world that is closer to what God intends for God's Creation,
 - where every child conceived is desired and every pregnancy is met with joy,
- where every birthed child is loved and cared for and raised in a household and a community
 - that meets their physical, emotional, spiritual, and cultural needs.
- We dream of your promised abundant life
- Amen

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Books

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- Kira Schlesinger: Pro-Choice and Christian—Reconciling Faith, Politics and Justice. 2017

Articles

- Presbyterian Mission Agency: “Abortion/Reproductive Choice” 2016
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- Judith Jarvis Thompson: “*A Defense of Abortion*”. 1971
- Michael Gazzaniga: “The Ethical Brain” New York Times June 6, 2005

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- Problem Pregnancy – When You Need Wisdom: Helping Others Face Problem Pregnancies. General Assembly Presbyterian Church, original 1984, revised 2010
- The Report of the Special Committee on Problem Pregnancies and Abortion: Do Justice, Love Mercy, Walk Humbly (Micah 6:8), 1992.
- On Late Term Pregnancy – the decision of the 2006 General Assembly, Item 10-01



REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE

Is

Maternal Mortality

deaths/100,000 live births (prenatal & 1 year postnatal)
Commonwealth Fund 2020

Netherlands	1.2
Australia	2
Japan	2.7
Germany	3.6
Norway	3.7
U.K.	6.5
Sweden	7
Switzerland	7
France	7.6
Korea	11.8
New Zealand	13.8

U.S.	24
U.S. Hispanic	18
U.S. White	19
U.S. Black	55

0.43deaths /

100,000 legally induced Abortion in U.S

Why are our women dying?

- ❑ Only country without universal healthcare
 - 8 million reproductive age women have no health insurance

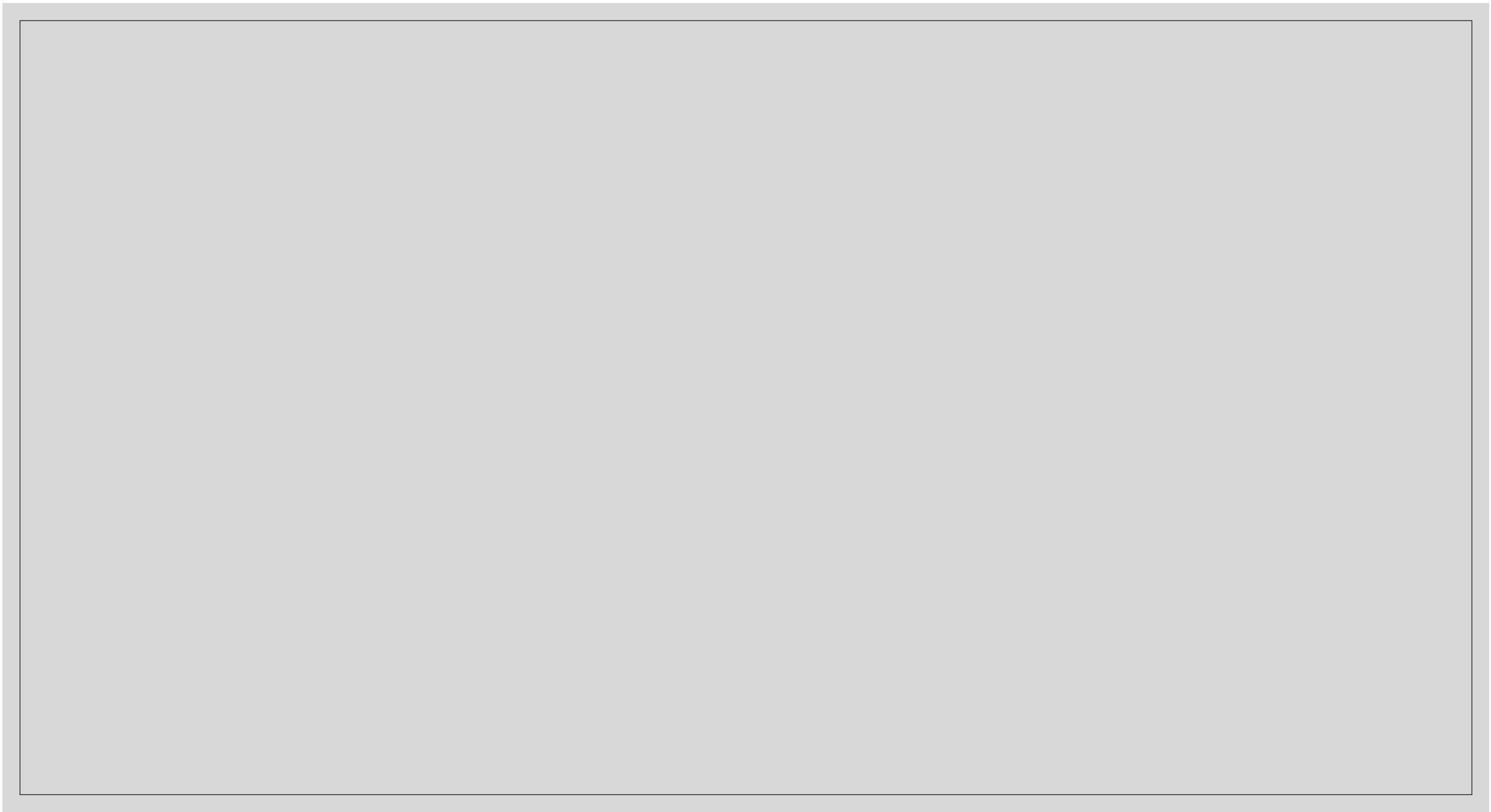
- ❑ Many more postpartum deaths

- ❑ Many fewer Maternity care providers
 - ❑ Far fewer midwives

- ❖ Postpartum comprehensive care
 - ❖ Provider home visits
 - ❖ Guaranteed parental leave

Reproductive Rights with Social Justice

- All fertile persons and persons who reproduce and become parents require a safe and dignified context for these most fundamental experiences.
- Achieving this goal depends on access to specific, community-based resources including high-quality health care, housing and education, a living wage, a healthy environment, and a safety net for times when these resources fail.
- Safe and dignified fertility management, childbirth, and parenting are impossible without these resources.
- This is a human right



Context Matters

Jeremiah 1:4-5

Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you

.....appointed you a prophet

Jeremiah selected as a prophet

Amos 1:13

Punishments....ripped open pregnant women in Gilead

God will punish Israel's enemies for brutality of war

Luke 1:39-41

Elizabethchild leaped in her womb

Past quickening

Proof Texting

Psalm 139

*13 For it was you who formed my inward parts:
You knit me together in my mother's womb.*

16 Your eyes beheld my unformed substance:

*19 ...slay the wicked
Depart ...men of bloodshed*

Psalm 137:9

19 How blessed will be the one who seizes and dashes you little ones against the rock

Luke 12:7

Even the hairs of your head are counted

Abundant Life

I came that they may have life and, and have it abundantly

John 10:10

An abundant life for women includes being able to plan her family with her partner and having access to the health care that helps them do.

What do other religions say?

Conventional Wisdom says Religions are invariably antichoice when it come to contraception with abortion as backup. This tends to be the Orthodox position.

All Religions respond to the sacred and sanctity of life. They value children but also respect the earth.

In an underpopulated world, Ancient religions thought fertility a sign of divine favor Both Aristotle and Aquinas said the number of children should not exceed the provisions of the community.

Religious Coalition for Reproductive choice

www.rcrc.org

Race & Eugenics

❖ Physician campaign against Abortion in 20th C. focused on decreased fertility of white protestants

Control of Black Women's Fertility

- Forced Breeding through rape and forced marriage until emancipation
- Moynihan report of 1965: Poverty blamed on "matriarchal" family structure
- Anti-miscegenation laws (interracial marriage)

Sterilization

- Indian Health Service sterilized 42% of native women between 1968-1980 (80% on one reservation)
- Hospital abortion included sterilization
- Criminals or Feeble minded
- Out of wedlock birth
- On MEDICAID or Welfare

White Women needed approval from 2 MDs & a psychiatrist, already have many children, older