

ABORTION—A CONTINUING CRISIS

An Update to

Abortion in Perspective (1984)

a report of

THE COMMISSION ON THEOLOGY
AND CHURCH RELATIONS

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ABORTION IN PERSPECTIVE (1984)

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THEOLOGY AND CHURCH RELATIONS

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

February 2026

Abbreviations

AE	Luther's Works
LC	The Large Catechism
SC	The Small Catechism



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INTRODUCTION

At its 2023 convention, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) adopted Resolution 3-01, “To Encourage and Support More Fervent Teaching, Proclamation, and Efforts to Promote Culture of Life among God’s People.” It referred to “the reality of legalized abortion” and then “*Resolved*, That the Synod in convention give thanks to God for His unending mercies, especially in overturning *Roe v. Wade*, thus preserving the lives of many unborn children.” Resolution 3-01 also emphasized the need to continue to promote a “culture of life” in keeping with John 10:10.¹ In addition, the convention adopted Resolution 11-04, which noted that “methods and means of elective abortion have changed dramatically since the publication of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) 1984 report *Abortion in Perspective*.” Resolution 11-04 then asked the CTCR to “address the changing nature of abortion.”²

Thanksgiving for the U.S. Supreme Court’s 2022 *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization* ruling is certainly appropriate in that the decision allows states to protect the lives of unborn children. Such action by government is fully consistent with the scriptural understanding that the gift of human life begins with conception in the womb (Psalm 139:13–16; Jer. 1:5; Isaiah 49:1), together with Scripture’s teaching that the most basic responsibility of government is to promote what is good and deter evil (Rom. 13:1–4).

The need for the Synod to address abortion once again has become more evident in the years since *Dobbs* and the Synod’s 2023 convention. Abortion law is now complicated by the fact that *Dobbs* returned abortion legislation to individual states. Any consideration of the morality of specific abortion rulings must now contend with the many unique twists that occur state by state.

Since *Dobbs*, we must also reckon with the fact that both public support for abortion and the actual number of abortions have increased in the United States.

1 LCMS, *2023 Convention Proceedings*, 129.

2 LCMS, *2023 Convention Proceedings*, 223–24.

Personal autonomy and sexual “freedom” seem increasingly to be preferred over the Lord’s gifts of life and love, and increasing numbers of Americans have accepted the malicious trope that “abortion is healthcare” (all the while ignoring the health of the unborn).

As of this writing, several national polls have all shown that support for elective abortion has increased since the *Dobbs* decision. The polls indicate an increase in overall support for legal abortion but with much stronger increases among women and Democrats. The Gallup organization summarizes its 2025 survey: “The net result is that the gender and partisan gaps in Americans’ views on abortion are at historical highs, and the country as a whole has moved slightly left in its abortion views. . . . The public opinion landscape remains more accepting of abortion than it was prior to *Dobbs*.”³ However, while support has seemingly increased, opinions on this volatile issue shift constantly, and the initial jump in support for abortion in virtually all cases that came immediately after *Dobbs* has now declined somewhat.⁴

Regrettably, support for abortion is also high among those claiming to be Christian. A 2022 Gallup study, published before the *Dobbs* decision, found that only 56% of Protestant Christians and 54% of Roman Catholics considered abortion morally wrong.⁵ Unsurprisingly, recent Gallup polling also noted that opposition to

3 A higher percentage of women than men support legal abortion in most or all cases. Similarly, those identified as Democrats are more supportive than Independents or Republicans, and more Independents than Republicans support legal abortion. Lydia Saad, “Gender Gaps on Abortion Reach Historic Highs,” Gallup Social and Policy Issues, June 9, 2025, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/691370/gender-gaps-abortion-reach-historic-highs.aspx#:~:text=In%20May%202025%2C%2081%25%20of,have%20followed%20the%20same%20pattern>. Gallup’s polling indicates that immediately after *Dobbs* there was an initial spike in those who identified themselves as pro-choice (55% said they were pro-choice in May 2022), but by May 2025 the percentage who said they were pro-choice had declined to 51%, while those who identified as pro-life had increased to 43% (from a low of 39% in 2022). See the similar polling by Pew Research, which also reported that about two-thirds of Americans approved of medication abortion: “Broad Public Support for Legal Abortion Persists 2 Years After *Dobbs*,” May 13, 2024, <https://www.pewresearch.org/?p=166526>.

4 Scott Barkley summarizes the findings of a May 2025 Gallup report: “A majority of all Americans (55 percent) feel abortion should be legal only under certain circumstances, while 30 percent say it should be legal under all circumstances. That represents a shift from last year, when 35 percent responded that it should be legal in all cases and 50 percent said only in certain circumstances” (“Church Attendance Continues to Indicate Stances on Abortion,” *The Baptist Press*, June 24, 2025, <https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/church-attendance-continues-to-indicate-stances-on-abortion/>).

5 Frank Newport, “Personal Religiosity and Attitudes Toward Abortion,” Gallup Polling Matters, May 13, 2022, <https://news.gallup.com/opinion/polling-matters/392648/personal-religiosity-attitudes-toward-abortion.aspx>.

abortion rises among both Protestants and Roman Catholics who attend church most frequently in comparison to those who attend less frequently.⁶

While attitudes about abortion fluctuate, moral truth is resolute. Our Creator ultimately determines right and wrong. Thus, despite current attitudes, since the days of the early church, and long before court decisions that allowed doctors to forsake protecting fetal life and instead to kill the unborn, Christian teaching consistently opposed abortion.⁷ While the nuances of our understanding about nascent human life may vary through the ages, the matter is, and ought to remain, simple and straightforward. Dietrich Bonhoeffer says it succinctly: “The simple fact is that God certainly intended to create a human being and that this nascent human being has been deliberately deprived of his life. And that is nothing but murder.”⁸

Such stark simplicity is shocking for many, if not most, people today. Even many Christians, including a great many Lutheran Christians, have failed to recognize the implications of the confession that God is Creator of heaven and earth and so the Creator of all people through the miracle of conception, pregnancy, and birth. Sadly, too many avowed Christians do not gratefully acknowledge all children as a gracious gift of God.⁹ Therefore, as 2023 Resolution 11-04 affirms, our Synod is to teach every person to embrace once again the words of the Small Catechism “that God has made me” and that He has given me all that I am and have “out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me.”¹⁰ The Commission here seeks to confess the never-ending truths of Scripture about the gracious gift of children and acknowledge the consequent responsibility to protect them throughout their lives, from conception onward, for they, too, are our neighbors (Matt. 22:39).¹¹

6 Barkley, “Church Attendance Continues to Indicate Stances on Abortion.”

7 “The language of the Christians from the very beginning was widely different [than other persons in antiquity on the practice of abortion]. With unwavering consistency and with the strongest emphasis, they denounced the practice, not simply as inhuman, but as definitely murder” (W. E. H. Lecky, *History of European Morals: From Augustus to Charlemagne*, 2 vols. [Longmans, Green, & Co., 1911], 2:20, 22 [first published in 1869]).

8 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, trans. N. H. Smith (Simon & Schuster, 1955), 174.

9 Gilbert Meilaender, “The Child as a Gift of God,” LCMS Document Library, <https://resources.lcms.org/reading-study/ctcr-paper-the-child-as-a-gift-of-god/>.

10 SC, Apostles’ Creed, First Article.

11 See also SC, Fifth Commandment.

ABORTION: PAST TRUTHS, CURRENT CHALLENGES

This report will largely reaffirm long-standing LCMS views about abortion as articulated in two CTCR reports. One report, *Abortion: Theological, Legal, and Medical Aspects*,¹² was published prior to the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision, which made abortion legal in the entire country. The second report was published in 1984: *Abortion in Perspective*.¹³ In this section, we briefly summarize the previous reports and consider some of the significant changes in medicine and the law since their publication.

Medical Perspective

The practice of medicine is changing constantly. Medical research and techniques advance without pause. Medical practice is also increasingly affected by changes in law, insurance coverage, and culture. Consequently, the values physicians hold cannot be assumed. For example, the time-honored Hippocratic oath has undergone numerous changes in recent decades, one of which is the removal of its original rejection of the practice of abortion. Any discussion of a “medical perspective” on abortion, therefore, is destined to need revision and updates almost as soon as it is written.

The CTCR’s 1971 report was published two years prior to *Roe*. It considered abortion from three perspectives: theological, legal, and medical. While prioritizing theology, the report asserts: “All three sections are agreed on the point that non-therapeutic abortion is wrong.”¹⁴ It noted the changes in the American

12 CTCR, *Abortion: Theological, Legal, and Medical Aspects* (The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1971). Abbreviated as *Abortion 1971*.

13 CTCR, *Abortion in Perspective* (The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1984). Abbreviated as *Abortion 1984*.

14 CTCR, *Abortion 1971*, 4.

Medical Association's position on abortion and the prohibition of abortion in the Hippocratic oath. In the report's discussion of the challenges presented by abortion for the Christian physician, we note that the counsel offered is rightly focused on the pregnant woman, but somewhat less concerned with her unborn child. Regrettably, the brief report is also overly permissive toward the possibility of "therapeutic abortion." It wrongly accepts the American Medical Association's definition of therapeutic abortion from 1968, which included an abortion "to prevent the birth of a severely crippled, deformed, or abnormal infant."¹⁵ The report rightly questions "abortion as a response to *suspicions* that an abnormal child may be born," but fails clearly to assert the immorality of such abortions—which are nothing less than eugenics.¹⁶

After *Roe*, the CTCR engaged the subject of abortion much more thoroughly in *Abortion 1984*, again considering the same three aspects but in different order, moving from the medical perspective to the legal to the theological. In the first section, significant attention is given to the beginning of human life, unfolding God's "fearful and wonderful" (Psalm 139) work from a medical perspective, describing the astonishing process of fertilization and human development from the cellular level onward. "Given time and the proper environment this new cell will undergo constantly changing yet continuous development marked by the terms embryo, fetus, infant, child, adolescent, adult."¹⁷ The report continues from there to distinguish between "spontaneous" abortions (that is, miscarriages) and intentional, induced abortions designed explicitly to end the pregnancy. It describes the procedures (such as dilatation and curettage or D&C, saline abortion, hysterotomy) that are utilized to end the unborn child's life and remove her body from her mother's womb.¹⁸ It also describes consequent risks to the life of the mother both during and after an abortion.¹⁹ Further discussion in this medical section considers amniocentesis, the intrauterine device as an abortive device,

15 CTCR, *Abortion 1971*, 2 n. 1.

16 CTCR, *Abortion 1971*, 5 (*italics in original*).

17 CTCR, *Abortion 1984*, 7.

18 Hysterotomy, which is an incision into the womb, may also be used for legitimate medical care in a C-section.

19 CTCR, *Abortion 1984*, 8–9.

advances in fetal therapy, and the ethical dilemmas for physicians that have resulted from liberalized abortion law.²⁰

The cascade of challenges wrought by *Roe* has not diminished after the *Dobbs* decision's ruling that abortion law should be returned to the states. As a result, *Abortion 1984*'s consideration of abortion is outdated. In the sphere of medicine, abortion procedures have changed markedly. Earlier, as the 1984 report indicates, abortions were an in-clinic surgical procedure. Today well over half of all abortions are medication abortions. The prevalence of the latter is due in large measure to the practice of online health exams and consultations (telehealth). And subsequent to the *Dobbs* ruling there has been an increase in medication abortion.²¹ Even in a state without abortion clinics, women can access physicians online who prescribe medication abortions. These matters will be further addressed below in "God Has Made Me: A Lutheran Theology of Life."

Legal Perspective

In 1971, the CTCR said: "Lutherans committed to taking Scripture seriously regret the hastening drift toward drastic relaxation of legal restraints on the practice of abortion."²² The Commission did not foresee that there would be no "hastening drift" but a sweeping approval of abortion only two years later in 1973's *Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Bolton* decisions.²³

In 1984, the CTCR addressed abortion once more after a decade of legal decisions, beginning with *Roe*. While acknowledging that Christians often legitimately vary in their opinions about legal matters, the report emphasized the "great moral significance" of abortion.²⁴ The report carefully noted that the Supreme Court's decisions in *Roe* and then *Doe* did not explicitly approve of abortion on demand, but that was

20 CTCR, *Abortion 1984*, 9–17. Of course, several of the procedures listed can be used for other medical care and not simply for abortion.

21 Rachel K. Jones and Amy Friedrich-Karnik, "Medication Abortion Accounted for 63% of All US Abortions in 2023—An Increase from 53% in 2020," Guttmacher Institute, March 2024, www.guttmacher.org.

22 CTCR, *Abortion 1971*, 3.

23 The texts of both decisions, from January 22, 1973, are available at the Library of Congress. *Roe* is at <https://tile.loc.gov/storage-services/service/l/usrep/usrep410/usrep410113/usrep410113.pdf>. *Doe* is at <https://tile.loc.gov/storage-services/service/l/usrep/usrep410/usrep410179/usrep410179.pdf>.

24 CTCR, *Abortion 1984*, 19.

the practical effect. In *Roe* no limits were placed on abortion in the first trimester. Beyond that time, abortions were allowable in order to protect the “health” of the mother, which *Doe* defined expansively.²⁵ Since health was defined broadly enough to cover a woman’s “preferred life-style and social well-being,” the court’s supposed limit on abortion within only the first two trimesters became meaningless.²⁶

The court did later rule in 1979 that its trimester framework required modification because of improvements in maternal care that moved viability into the second trimester.²⁷ *Abortion 1984* further discussed Supreme Court rulings that allowed restrictions on government funding of abortions, rejected a father’s right to object to an abortion, and also rejected any right of parents to oppose a minor daughter’s abortion.²⁸

The final part of *Abortion 1984*’s legal perspective offered “Possibilities Worthy of Christian Support” in the wake of *Roe v. Wade*. Because *Roe* never provided a moral justification for abortion, Christians could and should emphasize the moral questions abortion raises. Possibilities for future political involvement included a focus on viability as a potential area of further abortion restrictions and on legal attempts to allow further parental involvement when a minor child sought an abortion.²⁹

It should be obvious that the primary legal change between 1984 and the present is the *Dobbs* decision, which returned abortion law to the states. That decision renders moot much of what the Commission said in 1984 with regard to U.S. abortion law as a whole, but the concerns expressed in 1984 regarding the nation may now be relevant to many of the individual states. Because of *Dobbs*, abortion law in the United States has become far more complex, with some states prohibiting all abortions, others prohibiting most abortions, some allowing most abortions, and others allowing abortion in all circumstances.³⁰

25 *Doe v. Bolton* struck down Georgia’s abortion restrictions. It also redefined health as inclusive of not only physical well-being but also psychological, emotional, familial, and age-related factors.

26 CTCR, *Abortion 1984*, 20–21 and n. 16 there.

27 CTCR, *Abortion 1984*, 20–21.

28 CTCR, *Abortion 1984*, 21–23.

29 CTCR, *Abortion 1984*, 23–24.

30 See Allison McCann and Amy Schoenfeld Walker, “Tracking Abortion Laws Across the Country,” *The New York Times*, January 6, 2026.

Theological Perspective

At one time, every state in the United States restricted abortion, allowing it only in carefully limited circumstances when doctors determined that the mother could not survive if the pregnancy continued. Abortion in such cases was considered a tragic consequence of medical procedures necessary to spare the life of the mother. Such restrictions were consistent with the English common law tradition, which was heavily influenced by the concept of natural law and biblical understandings of justice. While it was not explicitly Christian, common law was consistent with biblical theology's emphasis on the value of human life.³¹ Beginning already in the 1960s, various states began to allow abortion. Then *Roe* delegitimated the inherent value of the life of an unborn child, and the natural law perspective virtually disappeared from abortion law. Even *Dobbs* deals with abortion without much attention to its moral dimension.³²

Abortion 1984 provides four theological principles: (1) Human life, at every stage of its development, is valued by God. (2) Human lives are entrusted by God to our care. (3) There are limits to human freedom. (4) Moved by their hope in God, Christians must be a people glad to receive children into the human family.³³ We reaffirm the helpful theological principles articulated in the 1984 report. They are fully scriptural, consistent with the Confessions, and of enduring worth in present discussions about abortion. Moreover, while focused on abortion, the principles are also helpful in consideration of other life-related subjects such as end-of-life decisions, medical assistance in dying (MAID), in vitro fertilization (IVF), and contraception.³⁴

We also note that while *Abortion 1984* addressed the theological perspective after first considering medical and legal perspectives, that order does not in any way imply greater to lesser importance. On the contrary, it indicates that the Word of God must always have the final say. Our Creator's scriptural words must ultimately

31 See the helpful discussion of natural law in CTCR, *The Natural Knowledge of God in Christian Confession and Christian Witness* (The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2013), 28–32.

32 A brief, although very slanted, discussion of how abortion law has changed in the United States is available online: Indira Babic and Emilie Richardson, "Abortion in America: A Visual Timeline," ABC News, June 24, 2022, <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/abortion-america-visual-timeline/story?id=85588254>.

33 CTCR, *Abortion 1984*, 27–32.

34 On end-of-life decisions and MAID, see CTCR, *Christian Decision-Making and the End of Life* (The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2023).

shape His people's thinking and judgments, not human technology, human perspectives on law or morality, or any purely human view.

Therefore, as this report continues, its foundation is explicitly theological. It addresses medicine, law, and other “practical” matters, but always in light of the theology of life provided by Holy Scripture and echoed in the Lutheran Confessions and, particularly, in the catechisms.

GOD HAS MADE ME: A LUTHERAN THEOLOGY OF LIFE

The church's witness to the world about abortion or other matters of medical ethics begins not with the science of fertility, genetic testing, in vitro fertilization, or moral claims about them but with God's Word as stated in the First Commandment and confessed in the Creed. The Small Catechism calls to mind simple and straightforward truths that a child can confess—things that are “most certainly true,” such as this truth: “God has made me.”³⁵

The catechism provides no specific casuistry to complex questions about reproductive technology. But it does provide a worldview ordered by the reality that God is Father, Son, and Spirit and that we are His created beings. We are created together with all creatures, yet not as mere animals, but as people intended to bear His image and therefore forbidden to hurt or harm other people (Gen. 9:6). From their very conception, we dare not destroy others as if they are mere “*some-things*”—a “clump of cells,” a “product of conception,” or a “potential life.” Rather, we welcome them as “*someones*,” equal, irreplaceable persons with whom we now live in relation.

God Has Made Me: The Gift of Life

“I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul”³⁶

God created our first parents male and female. He then brought Eve to Adam to become one flesh, blessing them to be fruitful and have dominion over the rest of

35 SC, Apostles' Creed, First Article.

36 The subheadings in this section are from Luther's explanation of the First Article in the Small Catechism.

creation. These fundamental truths are simple, but it seems evident that they have not effectively shaped the thinking of many Christians. As the introduction indicates, a notably high level of support for elective abortion among self-identified believers serves as a stark reminder that many have accepted anti-biblical perspectives about human life. Christians also often desire personal autonomy, sexual liberation, and reproductive anarchy above godly marriage and gratitude for the gift of children.

Since *Dobbs*, pro-abortion activism at all levels has increased and intensified, emphasizing stories of rare “hard cases” of rape and life-threatening pregnancies. Thus, while abortion has been restricted at the level of some state houses, such decisions are threatened at the ballot box as the emotionally manipulative deception of abortion advocates distracts a majority of the populace from the facts and faith of God’s created order. In the face of such threats, it is important for pastors and laity alike to be regularly reminded of both the moral and legal truths behind and surrounding abortion on demand. Those in positions of political leadership must be equipped to respond to mischaracterizations and lies about the unborn. Although some political leaders steadfastly defend the unborn, others must be reminded of their responsibility and authority to protect and defend human life.

The Word of God and sound reason always face competing claims. Satan’s confusion and obfuscation are, sadly, effective. As Gilbert Meilaender has observed, our thoughts and ideas about abortion and other such matters “are shaped by reasoned argument and reflection less often than we like to imagine.”³⁷ Because these “background beliefs,” as Meilaender refers to them, “are commonly held at a kind of prearticulate level,” it is necessary “to call to mind simply and straightforwardly certain basic elements in a Christian vision of the world—to remind ourselves of how contrary to the assumptions of our culture that vision may be.”³⁸ While deeper consideration of abortion in its broader anthropological and ethical setting is also required, the first task of God’s people is an unswerving confession of biblical truth.

While those who argue to keep abortion legal emphasize it as medically and morally complex,³⁹ Scripture reveals human life simply as God’s gracious gift.

37 Gilbert Meilaender, *Bioethics: A Primer for Christians* (Eerdmans, 2013), 1.

38 Meilaender, *Bioethics*, 1.

39 Note the range of views on the morality of abortion from section 2 of a 2022 Pew survey: Pew Research, “America’s Abortion Quandary,” May 6, 2022, <https://www.pewresearch.org/?p=70447>.

Children are graciously given to us by the Lord to replenish and bless His creation (Gen. 1:28; 9:1). Moreover, their lives receive ultimate meaning in the one child, Jesus Christ, who was born of woman in human flesh (Psalm 127:3; Gal. 4:4; Phil. 2:7). As Luther's Small Catechism explains, according to His good and gracious will, God is the Creator of every person, including children, the Giver and Preserver of their bodies and souls, eyes and ears, reason and senses.⁴⁰

God creates children to live the life He has given on this earth for the days or years He gives them, and then, finally, to live with Him eternally (Psalm 139; John 10:10–16, 27–30; 1 Tim. 2:1–6). God does this without any merit or worthiness in us. The value of the life He bestows is not based on health, abilities, social standing, or any accomplishment (Acts 10:34; Rom. 2:11), but rather in His own divine goodness, mercy, and love through the one-flesh union of man and woman (Gen. 2:24). And, ever more graciously, God seeks to redeem His human creatures from sin and death for eternal life by His Son's innocent suffering and death, to which we are joined through baptismal rebirth and renewal (Rom. 3:21–28; 6:1–14; Titus 3:4–8).

As gifts of God, children are not given to parents for their pleasure or preference—as if they were possessions or products.⁴¹ Rather, parents have a God-given vocation to provide for their children's daily needs and teach their children to fear, love, and trust in God (see LC I 168–178; Col. 3:20–21; Rom. 8:26; 13:1–5; 1 Peter 2:4–5).

“Without any merit or worthiness in me”

Our Creator's life-giving work is always gracious, that is, it is “without any merit or worthiness in me.” This directly impacts the abortion conversation. Life is *given*, not earned, produced, or even decided by us. Each child is a gift of our gracious God. This is God's rightful claim over each life He gives. And if He bestows worthiness—or, better, worthwhileness—then worth is not ours to determine. His love for each person from conception bids us to love each person also, with a love that flows from faith in Him who loved us all (1 John 4:19).

Ethicist Brian Brock says, “This emphasis on seeking the divine claim and faithfully responding to it gives Christian action a new assurance, lending a peacefulness to the Christian life. . . . In being bound to concrete neighbors by Christ, we

40 SC, Apostles' Creed, First Article.

41 Meilaender, “The Child as a Gift of God.”

are freed from returning to ask whether it is too costly or risky to love them and can instead ask much more seriously what it would take to love them well.”⁴²

Thus, we may not consider ourselves free either to produce a child through whatever means necessary or destroy a child for whatever reason is at hand. Nevertheless, Meilaender notes that we can and should assure those who suffer or struggle either with an unexpected pregnancy or involuntary childlessness “that the story of Jesus is true—that the negative and destructive powers of the universe are not the ultimate powers whom we worship.”⁴³ God’s grace and mercy are “without any merit or worthiness” in us. Because of God’s creating and redeeming work, diminished human capabilities, capacity, or accomplishments no longer condemn.

Such grace invites bold virtue, not moral indifference. Specifically, it leads to courageous love for someone we might rather abandon, including every unborn child but also, in particular, the unborn child whose life is tragically marked by rape, incest, or birth defects. Again Meilaender: “To counsel the acceptance of the unwanted—acceptance even of the suffering it brings—is not to encourage mothers or fathers to be ‘victims.’ Rather, it is to call for the strength that virtuous action requires.”⁴⁴ The Christian is directed to confess with Mary, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38). Understanding that suffering can have meaning, even though we would not choose suffering for ourselves, the church finds occasion to offer a mysterious and profound witness to the world.⁴⁵

The church therefore understands that the weakest and most vulnerable, such as the unborn child society deems “unwanted” or “defective,” are, as Brock suggests, “precisely the humanity through whom God will confront a world come of age. In them is revealed again what it means to be creatures, those whose very being is *received*. We either project our definitions and plans onto others or we discover and receive ourselves as persons as we lower our defenses to love the given other.”⁴⁶ The church bears witness in the world to the love of God in Christ for the

42 Brian Brock, *Christian Ethics in a Technological Age* (Eerdmans, 2010), 190.

43 Meilaender, *Bioethics*, 8.

44 Meilaender, *Bioethics*, 45.

45 Meilaender, *Bioethics*, 7–8.

46 Brock, *Christian Ethics*, 369.

least and lowliest of humanity. We love those whose lives are judged by the world to be worthless.⁴⁷

Many who support abortion at early stages of human development argue that the young life lacks those characteristics necessary for personhood and human dignity. Terms that accurately bestow human identity—for example, “baby” or “unborn child”—are replaced by cold and impersonal terms such as “product of conception.” The refusal to acknowledge human life includes arguments such as the claim that because so many zygotes never implant and countless embryos miscarry, it is impossible to consider the zygote in this early stage of development a human person.⁴⁸ Another argument suggests that while a developing blastocyst still has the potential to segment and “twinning” occur, we cannot consider such a one an individual “somebody.”⁴⁹

As such arguments are waged in the public square’s policy debates, our ever-increasing knowledge of early embryological development may help us respond. We now know, for example, that the location of the child’s head and feet is established at the time of conception, thus already indicating a unique human person with his or her own unique human body. Less scientific, but perhaps more effective, is Meilaender’s reminder that while the one-hour-old person may not yet have the appearance of a one-year-old, this little human being does look “very much as we did when we were that age. He lacks many of the capacities we take for granted as adults, but then so did we at that stage of our life—and so we may again at a future stage of our development.”⁵⁰

Personhood is not a characteristic acquired or achieved at some point in a human being’s developing life. A human being is a person throughout her life simply because personhood is given in God’s creation of her. God’s gift of life itself, together with the dignity therein, is given “without any merit or worthiness in me.” It is not earned by individual achievement, nor is it bestowed by society. Oswald Bayer makes the important observation that “because this dignity is bestowed by

47 See Rom. 3:10–12, 23–24.

48 For example, see Kathryn Kavanagh, “Most Human Embryos Naturally Die After Conception—Restrictive Abortion Laws Fail to Take This Embryo Loss into Account,” *The Conversation*, September 1, 2022, <https://theconversation.com/most-human-embryos-naturally-die-after-conception-restrictive-abortion-laws-fail-to-take-this-embryo-loss-into-account-187904>.

49 Cf. David DeGrazia, “Moral Status, Human Identity, and Early Embryos,” *Journal of Law, Medicine, and Ethics* 34, no. 1 (2006): 49–57.

50 Meilaender, *Bioethics*, 38.

God, it disallows every human requirement. In this absolute gratuity lies the decisive viewpoint for the formation of ethical judgment; human life is recognized (pre-socially) and to be recognized (socially) as unconditional, without having to justify itself through specific properties, merits, or self-acquired ‘dignities.’”⁵¹ Moreover, for the Christian, the significance of our Redeemer’s incarnation cannot be overstated. Not only did we look like that zygote at one time, so did Christ. In His life as embryo, newborn, child, man, the Son of God has sanctified every stage of human life from womb to tomb.

“He richly and daily provides me with all that I need”

Luther’s Small Catechism is for use in the home as well as the church. Each chief part follows a common heading: “As the head of the family should teach it in a simple way to his household.” The first “catechist” for children is the parent, whose trusted voice teaches little ones to say, “God has made me.” “He provides for me and defends me.” In such a way the defense of human life begins with the provision of the family.

The catechism is a treasured tool in teaching God’s care of human life. Beginning with the foundational truth that He has made us, it teaches us that He also wonderfully provides for and protects our bodily lives. As Luther lists such daily needs as clothing, shoes, food, and drink, he assumes the truth that parents and countless others, known and unknown, are God’s servants in such preservation and support. In the Large Catechism, Luther reminds us never to forget that we owe gratitude “for benefits and every good that we have from our parents.”⁵² Then he tells parents not to “think that this matter is left to your pleasure and arbitrary will,” for their responsibility is to provide for both the material and spiritual well-being of the children God has given into their care and keeping.⁵³

In such ways the family reveals God’s creating work. “So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion’” (Gen. 1:27–28). As man and woman “become one flesh” (Gen. 2:24), they are God’s creating instruments, working

51 Oswald Bayer, “Self-Creation? On the Dignity of Human Beings,” *Modern Theology* 20, no. 2 (2004): 279.

52 LC I 127.

53 See LC I 167–169, quotation here from 169.

through the marriage He institutes and blesses to give life. To acknowledge marriage and the life God gives is to condemn abortion as murder and an attack on marriage, mother and father, and the one-flesh union given them.

Abortion opponents rightly insist that the woman must be cared for as well as the child. But that care ought not begin after someone has sought or succeeded in an abortion. It should begin before abortion is contemplated or sought. That is to say that the abortion debate requires consideration of marriage and procreation. To cherish the unborn child is to cherish the whole of human life and, in particular, the one-flesh union that brings forth new life.

The one-flesh union of marriage, profoundly manifest in the gift of sexual intercourse and marital openness to welcoming children, is more than an individual action or the necessary ingredient for making babies. Marital intercourse is God's intended way of giving life to the world. The mutual self-giving of husband and wife in the one-flesh union of matrimony becomes, by God's grace, life-giving. Any child given to such a union cannot but be received as exactly that—a gift received. There is no *choice* to be made. The husband and wife are free joyfully to receive this gift of God with thanksgiving and trust. This means that, while elective abortion is indeed a sinful attack on a human life, it is furthermore an attack on marriage, an attack on the one-flesh union by and into which the Lord wills to give this life, an attack on the relation between Christ and the church, an attack on the image of God in which man was first created and by Baptism re-created, and finally an attack on the loving Triune God.

Marriage is a bulwark against abortion. Not only Christians but also many non-Christians, guided only by the law written on their hearts (Rom. 2:14–16), realize that having children is a primary reason for marriage. They seek to provide for and protect their children, from conception throughout life. Conversely, wherever marriage is scorned, forsaken, discounted, or misunderstood, abortion is an inevitable corollary. Married women are significantly less likely than unmarried women to seek abortions as a result.⁵⁴ The effort to support and encourage faithful marriage within the church and the greater society is consequently necessary.

The church's advocacy for marriage, however, must be exercised carefully. Christian truth requires us to discourage sexual acts outside of marriage as part of our defense of marriage. But this truth should always be accompanied by the

54 Robert Rector, "Marriage, Abortion, and Welfare," The Heritage Foundation, May 22, 2023, <https://www.heritage.org/welfare/report/marriage-abortion-and-welfare>.

reminders that the children conceived outside of marriage are as cherished by their Creator as those conceived within marriage.

Moreover, as we teach the beauty of chastity, we ought to do so with humility. No one is without sexual sin. There is, sadly, more than a little unchastity in the church, and of the most scandalous and horrific nature, with far too many well-known examples of clergy sexual abuse as the prime example. Here the Law must be preached, but let it be done in a way that not only opposes sin but also understands how prone we are to sin's seduction. And let the Gospel's promises of welcome and cleansing for all repentant sinners be emphatic.

Sadly, far too many Christians have joined the majority of Americans who accept sexual relationships outside of marriage. Consequently, most pastors find that many of the couples who want to marry are cohabiting. This is no surprise since so many Americans view cohabitation prior to marriage (or even in lieu of marriage) as morally acceptable—and even as an accepted way to determine “compatibility.”⁵⁵ Many within the church have accepted the myth that sexual restraint before marriage and opposition to cohabitation are nothing but old, worthless ideas. And the widespread nature of these views means that a purely polemical approach risks alienating not only many unmarried people but also many married couples. Yet even as we must be sensitive to such possibilities, we cannot be silent about the truth.

“He defends me against all danger and guards and protects me from all evil”

The Lord defends, guards, and protects us from danger and evil not only through marriage and family but also through the work of government, which God appoints to resist evil and promote good (Rom. 13:1–4). Lutheran theology speaks of God's rule by means of human government in contrast with His rule within the church. That is, God rules through temporal authority with the “sword” of lawful government (Rom. 13:4). In the church, however, He rules through the means of grace with “the sword of the Spirit,” the Word of God (Eph. 6:17). Both swords—government's rule and the rule of God's Word in the church—are gracious gifts, and both are necessary as we continue to wrestle with abortion. While the fight

55 Juliana Horowitz, Nikki Graf, and Gretchen Livingston, “Marriage and Cohabitation in the U.S.,” Pew Research Center, November 6, 2019, https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2019/11/PSDT_11.06.19_marriage_cohabitation_FULL.final_.pdf. See also CTCR, *A Chaste and Decent Life: An Update to Human Sexuality (1981)* (The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2023), 6–7.

must continue in the public square, we finally are not wrestling “against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12). Yet this priority given to God’s work in the church cannot lead us to disrespect the legitimate work of human government.

The legal arguments of *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization* require some attention. The ruling addressed the question of whether the Fourteenth Amendment’s due process clause protects a right to an abortion. Attorneys for Jackson Women’s Health Organization argued that it does, appealing especially to *stare decisis*—the legal principle that gives precedence to previous decisions, arguing that they should usually be followed. *Stare decisis* was a significant factor in the *Casey* decision that, together with *Roe v. Wade*, was overruled.⁵⁶ But the court’s opinion, authored by Justice Samuel Alito, was that those decisions had to be overruled:

The Constitution makes no reference to abortion, and no such right is implicitly protected by any constitutional provision, including the one on which the defenders of *Roe* and *Casey* now chiefly rely—the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. That provision has been held to guarantee some rights that are not mentioned in the Constitution, but any such right must be “deeply rooted in this Nation’s history and tradition” and “implicit in the concept of ordered liberty.”

The right to abortion does not fall within this category. . . .

Stare decisis, the doctrine on which *Casey*’s controlling opinion was based, does not compel unending adherence to *Roe*’s abuse of judicial authority. *Roe* was egregiously wrong from the start. Its reasoning was exceptionally weak, and the decision has had damaging consequences. And far from bringing about a national settlement of the abortion issue, *Roe* and *Casey* have enflamed debate and deepened division. It

56 The *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* (505, U.S. 833, June 22, 1992), or simply *Casey*, decision replaced *Roe*’s trimester standard with one of fetal viability and found that state restrictions on abortion were possible as long as they were not a “substantial obstacle” or “undue burden” to obtaining an abortion prior to viability. Thereby the right to an abortion was protected, but a clearer path was open for states to limit abortion. The text of the decision is available at <https://tile.loc.gov/storage-services/service/lj/usrep/usrep505/usrep505833/usrep505833.pdf>.

is time to heed the Constitution and return the issue of abortion to the people's elected representatives.⁵⁷

As a result, the *Dobbs* decision gave the opportunity for the temporal authorities at the state level to defend the most vulnerable of our society. Disappointingly, this has occurred only in a minority of states. As of January 6, 2026, twenty states retain bans on abortion, ranging from banning it in almost all circumstances to abortion limitations that are stricter than those allowed under *Roe v. Wade*. In contrast, thirty states and Washington, DC, have legal abortion with varying or no limits. Nearly all the states with legal abortion have added new protections for so-called abortion rights since *Dobbs*, and several have even enshrined abortion protection in their state constitutions.⁵⁸

Many have noted that some politicians, claiming to be Christian, were quick to speak against abortion when *Roe* kept it out of their direct political control. After *Dobbs*, some of those same federal politicians now avoid talking about abortion, happily deferring it entirely to the states. At the state level, those that have enacted a partial ban have varying gestational limits, from six weeks to twenty-four weeks.⁵⁹ While this might be politically expedient, it is important to note that well over 90% of abortions happen within the first fifteen weeks of pregnancy, within the legal windows provided by many states that have otherwise banned abortion.

Even worse than the desire to avoid the topic of abortion is the level of both dishonesty and virulent support for it. Rhetoric used by abortion supporters ignores the fact that most abortions involve healthy women who simply do not want to bear a child and instead primarily characterizes the act as an unfortunate but necessary measure for women in dire situations.⁶⁰ In addition there are many examples of abortion advocates joyfully celebrating the heinous act as an empowering victory for women to be claimed without shame or regret.⁶¹

57 Samuel Alito, *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, Majority Opinion, <https://constitutioncenter.org/the-constitution/supreme-court-case-library/dobbs-v-jackson-womens-health-organization#:~:text=In%20Dobbs%2C%20the%20Supreme%20Court,law%20and%20overturned%20Roe%20v.>

58 McCann and Walker, "Tracking Abortion Laws."

59 McCann and Walker, "Tracking Abortion Laws."

60 See, e.g., NPR Staff, "New Abortion Laws Changed Their Lives: 8 Very Personal Stories," National Public Radio, June 23, 2023, <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2023/06/23/1183878942/abortion-bans-personal-stories-dobbs-anniversary>.

61 See, e.g., "Shout Your Abortion," <https://shoutyourabortion.com/stories/>.

Worse than any boasting about abortion is the rising use of so-called “medication abortion” (also referred to as “pill abortion,” though this should be distinguished from a different over-the-counter abortifacient, Plan B One-Step).⁶² Pill abortion has the potential to undermine the efforts of the states that have near-total bans. It is one of the primary reasons that the actual number of abortions in the United States has increased since *Dobbs*.⁶³ Most abortions in the United States now are not surgical but “medical” by pill.⁶⁴

Pill abortion usually consists of using two different drugs, mifepristone and misoprostol, which the Food and Drug Administration has approved for use within the first ten weeks of pregnancy and the World Health Organization has authorized for use up to twelve weeks.⁶⁵ Another option for pill abortion is the use of only the second drug, misoprostol.⁶⁶ A study published in January 2025 has suggested the use of ulipristal acetate as an alternative to the abortion pill mifepristone. Ulipristal acetate, the active ingredient in the prescription morning-after pill Ella, was shown to be an effective abortifacient when taken in twice the dose as contained in Ella and followed by misoprostol, the second drug used in pill abortion.⁶⁷ All three of these drugs can be taken at home. Some states with a near-total ban on abortion have sought to curtail access to and use of pill abortion, but prescribers and providers of these pills have already found ways around the restrictions, including accepting an address that is not the home address of the one seeking the abortion. Eight states have adopted a “shield law,” protecting doctors within their states from prosecution by states that have banned abortion when those

62 Although medication or pill abortion is different from Plan B One-Step, both are morally unacceptable. Each prevents the possibility of birth for a human child and contravenes the creating work of God.

63 Karen Diep, Bryana Castillo, et al., “Abortion Trends Before and After Dobbs,” KFF (The Kaiser Family Foundation), January 7, 2026, updated July 22, 2026, <https://www.kff.org/womens-health-policy/issue-brief/abortion-trends-before-and-after-dobbs/>.

64 Jones and Friedrich-Karnik, “Medication Abortion Accounted for 63% of All US Abortions in 2023.”

65 “The Availability and Use of Medication Abortion,” KFF (The Kaiser Family Foundation), March 20, 2025, updated May 14, 2026, <https://www.kff.org/womens-health-policy/the-availability-and-use-of-medication-abortion/>.

66 “How Do I Have an Abortion Using Only Misoprostol,” Planned Parenthood, accessed February 11, 2026, <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/abortion/the-abortion-pill/how-do-i-have-an-abortion-using-only-misoprostol>.

67 Bethany Halford, “Ulipristal Acetate Can Be Used in a Medication Abortion Regimen,” *Chemical and Engineering News* (C&EN), February 7, 2025, <https://cen.acs.org/pharmaceuticals/emergency-contraceptive-ulipristal-acetate-used/103/web/2025/02>.

doctors prescribe and mail abortion pills to individuals in states where abortion is banned.⁶⁸

The rising use of pill abortion in the United States and globally, while promising privacy and ease of access, also has unmentioned consequences.⁶⁹ Its proponents boast of convenience and comfort, a simple, personal regimen of prescribed “medication” akin to countless other pills swallowed in silence. In reality, society, politicians, and the medical professionals pretending to care for mothers and fathers abandon them further with pill abortion by sending them away to hide the violent act behind a bathroom door and then suffer the consequences alone. In developing countries where medical oversight is greatly diminished, the dangers of these increasingly available pills are unspeakable.⁷⁰

Penultimate political victories against abortion should be sought in the civil realm. Given the *Dobbs* ruling, such work will largely focus on different states and vary accordingly. Our political leaders, especially those who are members of our churches, should be equipped and encouraged to work for the minimization of abortions. They must be well acquainted with current information about both legislation and medical matters, and they must be emboldened to speak plainly and publicly against this atrocity. However, given the differing realities of the fifty states, the manner of opposition must vary, and it is important to realize that there

68 “State Shield Laws: Protections for Abortion and Gender-Affirming Care Providers,” KFF (The Kaiser Family Foundation), July 2025, <https://www.kff.org/state-health-policy-data/state-indicator/shield-laws/>.

69 For a helpful summary of medication abortion and a thoughtful critique, see Rachel Roth Aldhizer, “The Case Against the Abortion Pill,” *First Things* (May 1, 2024): 33–39, <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2024/05/the-case-against-the-abortion-pill>. At least one woman has died after a medical abortion. See Kate Quiñones, “Abortion Pills and Medical Negligence Killed Woman, Not Pro-Life Laws, Doctor Says,” EWTN News, September 18, 2024, <https://www.ewtnnews.com/world/us/abortion-pills-and-medical-negligence-killed-woman-not-pro-life-laws-doctor-says?redirectedfrom=cna>. It should also be noted that these drugs are harsh medications with warnings that they may cause everything from significant discomfort and nausea to severe pain in women who use them.

70 The Ethics and Public Policy Center, which advocates for Judeo-Christian values in government, “analyzed insurance claims data from 865,727 mifepristone abortions (2017–2023).” The analysis found that medical complications occurred in 10% of women who had medication abortions. See “New Study on the Abortion Pill Reveals Significant Risks to Women,” Amnion Pregnancy Care Medical Center, June 10, 2025, <https://amnionpregnancycenter.com/new-study-on-the-abortion-pill-reveals-significant-risks-to-women/>.

will or may be different opinions about how best to advocate for the unborn and to reduce abortions.⁷¹

In This Christian Church: God's Rule Through His Word

The Church's Proclamation of Law and Gospel

Given the changing political and medical circumstances around abortion, it is all the more important that the church consistently retain and rigorously promote central truths of Scripture: God is the Creator of every life; human life begins at conception (when egg and sperm unite); intentionally ending a life that God has given, as willful abortion does, violates God's will and Law. Therefore, the church's ministry and pastoral care continue to be of utmost importance. These truths must continue to be declared to the world and faithfully taught to God's people in the church. We cannot assume that all Christians know or believe these truths, since so many people are impacted by abortion, whether through the experience of self, family, or friends or because of the deluge of lies that have deceived both Christians and non-Christians alike into thinking of abortion as medical care.

While such truths of God's Law must be proclaimed, the church's highest priority is the proclamation of the Gospel—the assurance of forgiveness of sins to all who believe.

Thanks be to God, the church is equipped for such a task. The church's call to oppose abortion is by no means the first time the church has faced a grave social evil. A brief historical example may be instructive. Early in the sixteenth century, Christians in Germany faced an imminent military threat from Ottoman forces, or "the Turk." In his 1529 treatise *On War Against the Turk*, Luther writes that there are two men, and only two, who are given to wage war against an enemy attacking (politically) innocent life: the emperor (that is, the political ruler) and the individual Christian. Each man fights with the weapons he is given. Although the temporal authority must engage both politically and militarily, Luther says the Christian should show up to war first. The Christian, "with his army," fights against the devil, "a spirit who cannot be beaten with armor, muskets, horses, and

71 CTCR, *Church, State, and the Love of Neighbor in a Secular Society: A Supplement to Render unto Caesar . . . and unto God* (1995) (The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2026). The CTCR's new report on the church-state relationship includes the reminder that the Synod's biblical theology regarding elective abortion has not changed, but the "dynamics of opposing abortion" must address changing circumstances in law and medicine.

men.”⁷² The Christian wields no physical sword since he does “not wrestle against flesh and blood, but . . . against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12). The Christian preacher fights by exhorting “people to repentance and to prayer.”⁷³ This happens as people hear the condemnation of the Law and the call to repentant faith, as can be seen throughout Scripture.⁷⁴ Because the second part of repentance is faith, and the activity of faith is prayer, Luther continues that people must be urged to pray, reminded of God’s promises to hear and answer prayer and encouraged by “examples from the Scriptures which show how strong and mighty a man’s prayer has sometimes been.”⁷⁵ Only prayer can win the spiritual war against Satan, who kills souls with lies, murders bodies, and disregards the estate of marriage and the home where new life is given, protected, and nurtured.⁷⁶

He adds: “If you take out of the world *veram religionem, veram politiam, veram oeconomiam*, that is, true spiritual life, true temporal government, and true home life, what is left in the world but flesh, world, and devil?”⁷⁷ Therefore, suffering the enemy “as God’s rod and wrath” against sin, the Christian fights against the enemy with repentance and prayer.⁷⁸

The sword of the Spirit wields the Word against the lies of the enemy, changing the very hearts of people with the hammer of God’s Law and the life-giving Word of His Gospel. It seeks to correct immoral public policy and to guide penitent Christians in ways that uphold godly marriage and preserve and protect the unborn and others who are vulnerable. Christian faith brings strength for the public and the politicians alike from outside of their own reason and senses. The pastor thus preaches repentance to the judge and the criminal, the physician and the patient.

The Church’s Ongoing Catechesis and Pastoral Care

We have earlier shown that many Christians today have been deceived by the claims of those who advocate for and support the abortion industry. The church

72 Martin Luther, “On War Against the Turk,” AE 46:170.

73 AE 46:171.

74 AE 46:171–72. Luther cites Genesis 7 and 19, Jeremiah 18, Psalm 7, together with the examples of David, Ahab, Manasseh, and Peter.

75 AE 46:172–73.

76 AE 46:177–82.

77 AE 46:182.

78 AE 46:184.

must always catechize—seeking to instruct and often reform the hearts and minds of such individuals so that they can receive the Gospel of forgiveness in repentant faith. Such catechesis extends from pulpit and classroom to pastoral guidance and individual counsel.

The proper use of Law and Gospel in pastoral care and counsel will neither affirm sinners in their guilt nor explain it away (e.g., “You didn’t know any better,” “It’s just a mistake,” “It’s okay”). Rather, we seek to help people to true repentance and absolution. Abortion should neither be minimized nor made to seem unforgivable. The Law of the Lord brings us to confess our sins to God, who “is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

William Willimon has rightly noted that “a major difference in the pastoral care of previous ages of the church and that of our modern era is the switch from care that utilized mostly corporate, priestly, liturgical actions to care that increasingly limited itself to individualistic, psychologically-oriented techniques heavily influenced by prevailing secular therapies for healing, personal fulfillment, and self-help.”⁷⁹

John Pless reminds the church and her servants of the primary place of Word and Sacrament, including confession and absolution, in caring for souls: “The pastoral care of the individual is done in the context of the congregation gathered around word and sacrament. . . . In catechizing his people the pastor will need to make it clear that confession/absolution is the ordinary means of pastoral care in the church. It need not be reserved only for extraordinary circumstances or situations.”⁸⁰

It is essential, then, that in pastoral care we repeatedly teach that the child’s life is a gift of God. It is also necessary to emphasize that God not only gives life but also preserves it. “He also gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, *wife and children*.” He promises to provide mothers and fathers “with all that [they] need to support this body and life”⁸¹—not only for the parents but also for the child they have been given. Such assurances should not glibly ignore the very real economic and social challenges that cause so many to regret rather

79 William H. Willimon, *Worship as Pastoral Care* (Abingdon, 1979), 35–36. See also John T. Pless, “Your Pastor Is Not Your Therapist—Private Confession: The Ministry of Repentance and Faith,” *Logia* 10, no. 2 (2001): 115–20.

80 Pless, “Your Pastor Is Not Your Therapist,” 116, 118.

81 SC, Apostles’ Creed, First Article (*italics added*).

than rejoice in a pregnancy. The church's teaching is more easily heard when it is accompanied by emotional, economic, and physical help in facing such worries.

As is always the case, the Word of God is at the center of pastoral counsel. Verses such as Psalm 139:16 ("Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in Your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.") and Jeremiah 1:5 ("Before I formed you in the womb I knew you.")⁸² speak necessary truths, but they may be received as both Law and Gospel. They both forbid the idolatrous destruction of life in the womb, and they also assure us that the life of the little one yet unborn is already known and loved by God.

God's forgiveness bestows faith, and faith looks to the Lord for all things needful. That is, faith prays. So the pastor prays with those he serves, asking the Lord to guide our hearts and minds by the faith God has given, asking for godly wisdom and the strength of the Spirit through His Word. There are unique circumstances surrounding both the temptation to abort and actual abortions; however, ultimately abortion requires the same remedy as other sins: repentance and forgiveness. Regardless of our sin, each of us can live freely again only as we are forgiven, so that we may walk by faith according to the gracious will of God, trusting Him to give strength for each day and rejoicing in His mercies that are new every morning.

Repentance, confession, absolution, and prayer, held together, are the ordinary means of pastoral care. So it is that repentance, confession, absolution, and prayer are needed for anyone affected by abortion. All other expressions of pastoral and diaconal care flow from this divine service of God to His people *and direct them back to it*. This rhythm of the Christian life, as Luther called it, cannot be escaped on this side of the resurrection. Efforts to move past the need for forgiveness are fruitless. Those who seek a reasonable answer to every question or a secular solution for every problem are seeking ultimate meaning in penultimate actions. And that is idolatry. Nothing can replace the Lord's absolution.

As we await Christ's return, we continue to work and fight against the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh, all the while recognizing that we are not God and

82 The pastor may find it helpful, when rebuking or comforting from Jeremiah 1, to note that the Lord makes this promise to a prophet who did not "feel" like doing what the Lord had sent him to do, even cursing the day of his birth. Yet the Lord works through even reluctant prophets to accomplish His will.

therefore waiting patiently for the full and final salvation of the Lord, trusting in His mercy and not our own efforts or accomplishments. This, indeed, is how the Christian learns to relate to the world—by living in one’s Baptism and returning to that Baptism through confession and absolution.⁸³

83 Brock, *Christian Ethics*, 371: “The gospel liberates by informing humans that they are not responsible to empirically define humanity, and can therefore gratefully receive human life as a gift. . . . Only a community that has ‘tasted and seen’ resources beyond itself can embrace such a claim, and only such a community is given the faith to ask for the wherewithal to care for those who have been given.”

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Pastoral Considerations

The scriptural and confessional theology of life in the previous section has already provided numerous pastoral considerations. The following considerations therefore provide additional attention to the work of the pastor, as the servant of the Word, with respect to abortion. In this approach, however, we do not wish to ignore the fact that pastors serve within the Body of Christ, not alone. So while “pastoral care” is directly linked to the pastor himself, another called worker in auxiliary ministry, perhaps a deaconess, may also assist in spiritual care for those struggling with abortion. And, in addition, in many cases individual laity will be the avenue for the church’s teaching about abortion to be shared with someone who needs it.

Abortion in Sermon and Teaching

The sanctuary and classroom are primary settings for the pastor’s work. There Law and Gospel—the central truths of Scripture—are preached and taught. There people learn the commandments, the creedal truths of God’s creating, redeeming, and sanctifying work, together with the generous invitation to pray with bold confidence as our Lord has taught us. There the gathered hear the call to repentance and the declaration of forgiveness for Christ’s sake.

The faithful pastor who gently and persistently shares the simple truth that it is God who gives and preserves life wields a greater power than any government official. And, while pastors wield only the sword of the Spirit, they arguably wield a greater power for the common good than any who wield the sword of earthly government, for the Spirit of God is greater than any worldly power (1 John 4:4). The church’s ministry bears heavenly fruit as joy in heaven overflows when any lost sheep, any lost son or daughter, is brought home to Christ and His saving truth (Luke 15). These are eternal blessings, but the earthly blessings that flow from

the church's proclamation should not be discounted. The ministry of the gathered church helps the redeemed to see why Christianity has always treasured the lives of all people both here and in eternity—including the unborn. Thereby millions of little ones have been born without the threat of abortion because their mothers knew they were bearing children in accord with God's gracious will. And, therefore, preaching and teaching about abortion cannot be neglected.

To preach and teach about abortion is to tell the truth. The stewards of Christ's mysteries are gently and persistently to affirm the Lord and giver of both physical and spiritual life. Gentleness is not timidity. Let people hear the joyful truth that in the mercy of our Father's creation, our lives are all precious, including the life of every child from the time of conception onward, the life of every pregnant woman, the life of every person. And let the application of that truth be explicit—it is wrong to take the lives of those so precious to God. Where government has endorsed and enabled the death of the unborn, that, too, is a truth that must be told and condemned.⁸⁴

Abortion should not be treated as an isolated topic in church teaching. The doctrine of marriage and a proper understanding of the commandment against adultery are bulwarks against abortion. The Sixth Commandment is rightly understood as Luther explains: "We should fear and love God so that we lead a sexually pure [chaste] and decent life in what we say and do, and husband and wife love and honor each other."⁸⁵ Despite the fact that the command to sexual purity or chastity may be the least popular of all God's commands today does not mean that it is any less important now than it always was. To be disciplined sexually is a virtue in itself. It is also a practical barrier against "unwanted" or "accidental" pregnancies—especially pregnancies outside of marriage. Chastity is both a curb against sexual sin and also a curb against the sin of abortion. It is a command for all, married or unmarried, but chastity before marriage protects the lives of the unborn, and a chaste and godly marriage rejoices in life in the womb.⁸⁶

84 To preach the immorality of abortion is not to endorse a political party or candidate simply because no party or candidate is bound to a single political issue or policy. Individual Christians will prioritize among the many issues presented by parties and candidates. We should therefore not be surprised to find that our churches have devoted members who faithfully confess one faith but are led to differing conclusions about political life.

85 SC, Sixth Commandment. See also *Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation* (Concordia Publishing House, 2017), 14, 93–104.

86 For further reading, see John W. Kleinig, "A Case for Chastity," *Logia* 6, no. 2 (1997): 23–27, and the CTCR report *A Chaste and Decent Life: An Update to Human Sexuality* (1981).

The fact is that the majority of those having abortions in the United States are unmarried women.⁸⁷ The relative rarity of abortion for married women is not difficult to understand. Marriage provides obvious social and economic advantages that single parenthood cannot match. Pregnancy within marriage is often or usually intentional. The woman is not facing the challenge of being a single support and caregiver for the infant. The creational fact that “it is not good to be alone” is never more evident than during pregnancy (Gen. 2:18). Such truths require us to teach about abortion within the context of the whole of a biblical understanding of sexuality and marriage.

How such teaching occurs will vary. There may be occasions that call for a specific focus on abortion, but addressing this matter in an ongoing way within the big picture of God’s gracious will for sexuality and marriage should never be neglected. Abortion can also rightly fit into teaching about creation, about the responsibilities of citizenship, and about the organizations the congregation may consider supporting (for example, adoption agencies or crisis pregnancy centers). Teaching about abortion certainly belongs in catechesis both for adults and for youth. The most important thing is that abortion not be relegated to a place as an unmentionable topic in order to keep peace at all costs. It can and must be addressed sensitively in the pastor’s teaching and preaching, but it ought not be ignored.

Abortion in Counsel and Confession

While abortion inevitably impacts women, it does not involve only women. The father of the child that was or may be aborted is certainly affected, and some may seek the counsel of the church, especially since no state in which abortion is legal allows the father any say in whether an abortion is to happen.⁸⁸ Laws vary in different states regarding the legal status of parents of a minor child who is considering an abortion, but in many cases they, too, cannot prevent an abortion.⁸⁹ Thus,

87 Jeff Diamant, Rebecca Leppert, and Besheer Mohamed, “What the Data Says About Abortion in the U.S.,” Pew Research, March 25, 2024, <https://pewrsr.ch/3TRbxDV>. Pew’s 2024 report provides 2021 data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control indicating that unmarried women had 87% of all abortions.

88 The Supreme Court has permitted neither consent nor notification of the father. See *Planned Parenthood v. Danforth* 428 U.S. 52 (1976) and *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* 505 U.S. 833 (1992).

89 A wide variety of state laws and policies exist as of this writing. See “Minors’ Access to Abortion Care,” Guttmacher Institute, November 24, 2025, <https://www.guttmacher.org/state-policy/explore/minors-access-abortion-care>.

parents may also seek the pastor's counsel. As we will emphasize in the following with reference to women, in cases involving others impacted by abortion, the greatest sensitivity and compassion is called for in the church's ministry.

Given the simple fact that only females bear children and only males can rightly hold the pastoral ministry, many women may be uncomfortable speaking to their pastors about abortion or skeptical of any counsel he may offer. Pastors who have shown themselves to be trustworthy, compassionate, and empathetic in their preaching and in the whole of their pastoral care will be more likely to gain the trust of women. A pastor who has served long enough to have catechized young girls may be one whose counsel they later seek as young women. Congregation members who have confidence in their pastor's character and integrity will also be more likely to encourage a pregnant woman with an unwanted pregnancy to share her dilemma with the pastor.⁹⁰

When a pregnant woman seeks her pastor's counsel, this may indicate some clarity of conscience about the nature of abortion and the human being God has created in her womb. Or she could be there because of pressure from a family member or another significant relationship. Whatever the reason for her presence, the pastor's challenge is to gain her trust, showing that his concern is for her as well as the unborn child. Respectful listening is vital to gain such trust. He cannot minister effectively without unhurried, caring attention to the circumstances that have resulted in a pregnancy that is a crisis rather than a joy. Such circumstances are numerous. She may be unmarried and feel unable to support a child. She may be pressured to abort by a boyfriend, a husband, or her parents. She might be a woman who was deceived or coerced or trafficked into prostitution or pornography.⁹¹ She may be ashamed that she is considering abortion or, alternatively, insistent that abortion is not wrong. Every case will be unique, but the pastoral task will be uniformly difficult.

Yet one thing is clear—the pastor must gently but firmly do whatever he can to discourage abortion. Therefore, it is important to offer practical aid to a woman contemplating abortion. The pastor may know faithful women—deaconesses, called female teachers, or other competent, loving women—who would be available to

90 See Beverly Yahnke, "Recovering the Art of Spiritual Care: Need, Deterrents, and Pastoral Responses," *Concordia Journal* 51, no. 4 (Fall 2025): 11–28.

91 "Resource Spotlight: Committee Opinion on Pornography, Sex Trafficking, and Abortion," AAPLOG, <https://aaplog.org/stories/resource-spotlight-committee-opinion-on-pornography-sex-trafficking-and-abortion/>.

listen and respond to a troubled pregnant woman and offer guidance and support to her throughout the pregnancy. He may know of women who faced unwanted pregnancies and can be trusted to provide support and encouragement from a feminine perspective.⁹² It is also vital to be able to offer specific resources such as crisis pregnancy centers, housing resources available to pregnant girls and women, and adoption agencies. Hopefully he can offer a congregation's benevolence fund or other sources of immediate financial aid when that is necessary. Knowledge of a state's Safe Haven laws may also be vital in some circumstances.⁹³

Online resources can often be a starting point for helping a pregnant woman, including but not limited to LCMS Life Ministry (<https://www.lcms.org/how-we-serve/mercy/life-ministry>) and Lutherans For Life (<https://lutheransforlife.org/life-issues/crisis-pregnancy/>).

In other cases—and perhaps more frequently—a woman who has had an abortion may seek the pastor's counsel. Often the guilt and remorse she feels over the abortion is crushing. Pastoral sensitivity is critical as he acknowledges the reality that all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory (Rom. 3:23). He also acknowledges the confusion and fears that accompany unexpected pregnancies, the lies of the purveyors of abortion, and the persuasiveness of those who counsel pragmatic actions to "resolve" a present "problem pregnancy." Therefore, the pastor listens with understanding, not harsh condemnation. God's judgment against sin—including the sin of abortion—cannot be denied, but neither is the gracious promise of forgiveness. The Word of Christ to another sinner echoes through the pastor: "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more" (John 8:11). So also repentant David was forgiven for his sin with Bathsheba—a sin that led to the death of their first child (2 Samuel 12). The woman who anointed Jesus—a woman whose scandalous life caused her to be scorned and an outcast—was graciously forgiven (Luke 7:36–50). So also to every repentant sinner, including the woman who aborted her child, comes the Word of Jesus: "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace."

92 Among such women may be both some who refused abortion and some who had abortions. Obviously, suggesting the woman considering abortion speak with others requires the utmost discretion and confidence that whoever is suggested will retain complete confidentiality and fully supports biblical teaching about the sin of abortion.

93 Safe Haven or similarly named laws allow a woman to surrender her newborn child anonymously, without legal consequences, to a hospital, police station, or certain other places or persons. She is not subject to prosecution in such cases.

In such cases, the pastor's most powerful aid may be individual confession and absolution. Having heard the grief she is sharing, he has the perfect opportunity to share with her the rite of "Individual Confession and Absolution" as it appears in *Lutheran Service Book* (pages 292–93) or informally. The word of forgiveness spoken directly to a sinner is of inestimable worth.

A woman who has aborted a child may also, in light of the doctrine of original sin, be plagued with the question: "Was my unborn and unbaptized child condemned because of my action?" While there is no explicit biblical answer to this specific question, Scripture is not without consolation to a woman who is grieving the death of her unborn child. The death of the unborn is not a reality confined to abortion. Although a woman who chose to abort her child is by no means the same as one who suffered a miscarriage, there is comfort for every repentant person, and that is also the case here.

We should first note that while Scripture teaches that the sins of a parent may directly affect their children (Ex. 20:5; note the son who dies as a result of David's sin in 2 Samuel 12), it denies that God condemns the child for the father's or mother's sin (Ezek. 18:20; 2 Cor. 5:10). The tragic fact that countless thousands of children have died before birth must be considered in light of God's promise that in a fallen world God still works all things together for good to those who love Him because He first loved us (Rom. 8:28; 1 John 4:19). God works for good also in the case of someone who turned from their sin to God and His love in Christ. God also graciously promises mercy to a thousand generations of His people (Ex. 20:6), despite the sin that is passed down through the generations. David's sin—a sin that resulted in the death of his infant son—was forgiven, and he was assured that his little son was awaiting him in the life that is to come (2 Samuel 12, especially verse 23). Psalm 139 (especially verses 13–16) assures each person that the good and gracious will of God is at work in them from the moment of conception, for "in Your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them." And while we know that saving faith is given through Baptism, we do not deny that faith also comes by means of God's Word active in other ways according to His mysterious will. That can indeed include the unborn, as the faith of the unborn child, John, in the womb of Elizabeth is revealed when he leaps for joy in the presence of the Savior in Mary's womb (Luke 1:41).

Lutheran Service Book: Pastoral Care Companion is an invaluable resource for pastoral counsel.⁹⁴ It offers guidance on the matter of pastoral care and abortion that bears repeating here:

Whether a pregnant woman is contemplating an abortion or has already aborted her unborn child, the situation is emotionally and spiritually challenging. As the pastor has opportunity to apply the Word of God, he must proceed with patience, love, and wisdom, choosing his words carefully and with discretion, being sensitive to the vulnerable position and/or the guilt and shame of the woman and others involved. At all times, the sanctity of human life must be upheld. If abortion is being contemplated, options other than abortion should be encouraged.⁹⁵

Abortion and the Church's Liturgy and Prayer

The grim reality of abortion in the United States should be a call for prayer as well as preaching, teaching, and counsel. God alone is our rock and salvation (Psalm 62), so we pray as both a community and as individuals “for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and *for all people according to their needs.*”⁹⁶ Prayer is a powerful and necessary aid in every situation of pastoral care and counsel. Moreover, regular public petitions for those struggling with an unexpected or an unwelcome pregnancy are certainly in order. We regularly remember those who are sick or injured; those suffering psychologically and emotionally should not be forgotten. Luther wrote about the powerful prayers of mothers for the children they were carrying: “Who can doubt that those Israelite children who died before they could be circumcised on the eighth day were yet saved by the prayers of their parents in view of the promise that God willed to be their God.”⁹⁷ And while a Christian woman, confused about abortion, or a woman without faith may not pray for the unborn baby they intend to abort, we can and should pray for these

94 Commission on Worship, *The Lutheran Service Book: Pastoral Care Companion* (Concordia Publishing House, 2007).

95 *Pastoral Care Companion*, 191.

96 Italics added. Note this recurring call to prayer in the weekly prayers offered for congregational use at <https://www.lcms.org/worship/planning-resources> for both the three-year and one-year lectionaries.

97 Martin Luther, “Comfort for Women Who Have Had a Miscarriage,” AE 43:249.

little ones, and we ought not reject the possibility that God would have mercy also on the child who is killed.

Abortion's awful reality should lead us also to pray for others. Prayers for medical people who face workplace challenges concerning abortion are in order. Christian doctors and other medical professionals need prayers that encourage them to decline to perform or enable abortions. Fathers of the unborn children who have been or may be aborted also need our prayers, as do other family members of both parents.

A congregation that knows and supports biblical teaching on abortion can make that evident in its life of worship and prayer. Liturgical observances can be a powerful reminder of the church's desire to preserve and protect human life. Many congregations celebrate Life Sunday on or about the third Sunday in January. Lutherans For Life regularly offers resources for the commemoration.⁹⁸ On a more regular basis, a pastor would do well to pray for pregnant women, for women considering abortions, and for the unborn. The Synod offers suggested prayers in its Life Library: "40 Prayers for Life: The Lord's Mercy Endures Forever."⁹⁹ Group Bible studies for men, women, and youth are appropriate settings for regular prayers for pregnant women and the unborn. And whenever the topic of abortion comes up in teaching and preaching, it is an opportunity to ask people to pray.

Certainly prayer should be especially emphasized when anyone has the opportunity to counsel a woman considering abortion. Again we call attention to the *Pastoral Care Companion* and the prayer it suggests:

God of all grace, out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy You have given us life and commanded us not to hurt or harm our neighbor in his body. Teach us to care for this unborn child whom You have created in Your image. Grant Your grace to *name of mother* that, by Your Word and Spirit, she may live according to Your will and have the courage to nurture and cherish her child. Surround her with those who will rejoice in this child, and provide for her needs of body and

98 See, e.g., the Lutherans For Life resources available from Concordia Publishing House: <https://lutheransforlife.org/resources/store/>.

99 See <https://resources.lcms.org/reading-study/life-library-sanctity-of-life-articles/>.

soul; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.¹⁰⁰

Political Considerations

The church and her pastors must always keep the proclamation of Christ and His saving Gospel above every other concern—including political matters. The fact that the pages of the New Testament give penultimate attention to Caesar, earthly government, and civil affairs (that is, politics) is in evident agreement with our Lord’s teaching: “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36; see also Phil. 3:20). While the church, speaking as an institution, must at times address political matters, her strongest weapon in the fight against Satan’s devastating lies and their corrupting influence in civil society is the Word that she is called to proclaim. Society’s ills—including unjust laws or oppressive policies against the poor, minorities, marginalized people, or the unborn—all flow from sin and its corruption of hearts and minds. The church’s weapon against such evil is not political power; it is the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17). We do well to remember that many Roman practices—such as disposing of unwanted infants, sexual immorality, supporting slavery, oppression of women, to mention only a few things—were ultimately undermined by the growing numbers of men and women for whom Jesus, not Caesar, was Lord.¹⁰¹

The apostolic witness to the world, in faithfulness to the truth of God’s Word, had to address specific matters of right and wrong—that is, biblical morality. It condemned sexual immorality, called for masters to treat slaves as brothers, required husbands to treat their wives with gentle love and not abusive arrogance, and upheld the necessity of care for the poor. All of these matters were at least tangentially “political” in that slavery was legal, marriage law favored men over women, and the poor had little legal recourse in Rome. Yet the New Testament’s counsel did not call for rebellion against such laws.

So how shall the church address abortion? Above all our teaching must emphatically condemn the practice of intentional abortion as immoral. (Although we can

100 *Pastoral Care Companion*, 193.

101 See Alvin J. Schmidt, *Under the Influence: How Christianity Transformed Civilization* (Zondervan, 2001).

and do allow that medical procedures that seek to save a mother's life—such as in the case of ectopic pregnancy—are not sinful acts, even if they may also result in the death of an unborn child.)¹⁰² Moreover, we cannot be silent about the fact that it is sin to approve of practices that purposefully hurt or harm our neighbor bodily. Especially in a democratic society, church members should be urged to condemn the intentional killing of the unborn and seek to minimize abortions. Laws that support abortion must also be condemned as immoral. These are political judgments that flow from the requirement that the Christian church is to be faithful to the Word in its teaching and in practice.

We should also acknowledge that how to oppose abortion most effectively is a complicated matter. The reality that the *Dobbs* decision has seemingly turned some people to favor the legality of abortion should give pause and make churches cautious about what political or legal changes they should publicly endorse with respect to abortion.¹⁰³ The CTCR's counsel for pastors and congregations has varied over the years as the political circumstances around abortion have changed. *Abortion 1971* was prepared prior to *Roe v. Wade*. After *Roe*, the Commission faced a new challenge. *Abortion 1984* carefully analyzed the political and legal factors at work without advocating a specific answer to the question "For what shall we labor in the public sphere?" At the same time, there was no ambiguity in the CTCR's defense of the truth that the well-being of the unborn must be included in considering the "common good" of a people.¹⁰⁴

While Christians may disagree about the policies or laws that best help and defend our little unborn neighbors—and so reduce abortions—no Christian can rightly deny the specific matter of abortion's sinful nature. Therefore, while the pastor preaches and teaches the truth about abortion, he also can and should encourage church members to be guided by Christian teaching and wisdom in their life as citizens. That includes, first, conscientious decisions about the candidates they

102 This is true notwithstanding the fact that abortion advocates stubbornly insist that all abortion is "health care" and frequently claim that an abortion is saving a mother's life even when she is in good physical health with a healthy child in her womb.

103 CTCR's *Render unto Caesar* speaks of "two extremes" when it comes to church activism in the public square. One is a submission to government that allows the state to control morality as well as laws (as was the case among Christian churches that supported Nazism). The other extreme is Christian attempts to model the state after some likeness of the kingdom of God (55–58). The report goes on to warn against the church engaging in political alliances and against any attempt to "Christianize" the state (60). See CTCR, *Render unto Caesar . . . and unto God: A Lutheran View of Church and State* (The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1995).

104 *Abortion 1984*, 42–43.

support. Members can be urged to voice their Christian convictions about abortion and other moral questions via phone calls, letters, emails, and visits with governing officials. Individuals and congregations are also frequently and rightly involved in activism. For example, many Lutherans participate in pro-life rallies, the March for Life, and “street counseling” outside abortion clinics.

Moreover, because abortion is, literally, a life-or-death issue and a sinful violation of the commandment against murder, the Synod has itself on certain occasions advocated for specific policies. One example of this was LCMS support for passage of a “Right-to-Life Amendment” to the U.S. Constitution.¹⁰⁵ As previously noted, however, since *Dobbs* the political landscape has changed. In particular, the focus is now on states rather than the country as a whole. In the present context, advocacy for change at the state level will require more specific attention and more variety synodically. In states with more permissive abortion policies, the goal may be to seek greater protections for the unborn and stricter regulations on abortion. In states with more restrictive policies, where abortion is prohibited entirely or is significantly curtailed, more attention may need to be paid to greater family services to help mothers or families struggling financially or medically with children whom they did not anticipate having. In politically mixed states, more discretion still is needed in whether to press for constitutional bans or similarly strict measures or to aim for more realistic alternatives in the short term. We will have to show greater charity to one another within the Synod when it comes to understanding that goals in different contexts will vary. There will be no one-size-fits-all approach to defending the unborn.

We dare not be silent on the fact that abortion is immoral and sinful. It is necessary to say that boldly, clearly, and consistently. However, politics does not involve only a single issue—or a single *moral* issue. For this reason, faithful Christians will differ on how best to protect the unborn while also addressing other matters of the common good. Christians will make different conscientious judgments about specific candidates to support, party affiliation, and so forth.

All this should remind us how great the need is for us to pray for the governing authorities, as we often do in the General Prayer (Romans 13; 1 Tim. 2:1ff.). Our prayers should include the petition that God would guide and direct their

105 Various versions of a Human Life Amendment were proposed between 1973 and 2007. None succeeded in gaining enough support in the U.S. Congress to be formally proposed to the states. See CTCR, *Render unto Caesar*, 86–90, for the reasoning that led to this example of direct political action by the LCMS.

decisions on abortion and other moral questions so that they act in accord with His will, even as we pray for Him to guide them in all other decisions. Let us pray as a matter of course in our worship. And let congregations consider holding special times of prayer for the unborn and for all those who have no voice in the threats they face.

Personal Considerations

Although many people, including many Christians, avoid engaging in personal conversations about abortion, there are times when that is impossible. The prevalence of abortion in American life and its prominence as a political issue mean that the topic will almost inevitably come up at times in our relationships. There may also be occasions in which one feels obligated to speak openly about it in defense of the truth.

God's Word provides wise guidance for our conversations, and especially where we find it necessary to discuss a sensitive subject. The Book of Proverbs urges us never to forget the power of words (Prov. 18:21) and so advises us to "guard" our tongues (Prov. 21:23). In the context of the emotions that so often accompany considerations of abortion, Solomon calls for a "soft answer" rather than a "harsh word" (Prov. 15:1). In a reminder that God's grace and mercy are made known through the vehicle of speech, both Old and New Testament urge gracious words of blessing (Prov. 16:24; Eph. 4:29; Col. 4:6; 1 Peter 3:9). All of this is to say that when we speak to family, friends, and others about abortion, the goal is not to win an argument (Titus 3:2). Our first obligation as Christians in every personal relationship, and therefore in every conversation, is that of love (Mark 12:31). This obligation to love extends also to a person who is hostile toward us (Matt. 5:44)—for example, someone who is supportive of abortion legalization or defensive about her own abortion or angry with Christians who oppose abortion—even as God so loved a sinful world and as Christ died for us while we were yet hostile sinners (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8).

Sometimes a conversation about abortion is focused only on morality or policies. But there may also be deeply emotional conversations, such as when a friend or family member is considering abortion. Perhaps the woman's openness to abortion is because a doctor has advised her that her unborn child is suffering or may suffer from a birth defect or abnormality. Often abortion conversations occur in a relationship with an unmarried pregnant woman—or with one facing poverty

or even homelessness. All such conversations will be ripe for upset, confusion, misunderstanding, and anxiety. To listen quietly and compassionately may be all that one can do constructively—especially in an initial conversation. Prayer for the Holy Spirit to guide and strengthen the pregnant woman is needed, as is a clear intention that the one listening seeks to continue to befriend and aid her. It is necessary to add, however, that the gentle, compassionate, and loving support that we are encouraging will not urge her to abort or lead her to forget that God has given life to her unborn child.

As is the case when a pastor or other church worker counsels someone about abortion, our individual personal conversations also require first that we listen respectfully. It is virtually impossible to consider a personal conversation about abortion that is not fraught with emotion and potential for misunderstanding. The believer who knows the evil of abortion will frequently be viewed as misguided and even hateful by those who consider themselves pro-choice. But we who are believers are also subject to misjudging and mischaracterizing someone who supports abortion rights—and that is even more true if such a person insists that abortion is a good thing. Nevertheless, love obligates us to listen in order to understand better. Respectful listening is not yet speaking the truth in love, but it may be the only way to gain a measure of trust that enables the abortion advocate eventually to be able to hear and perhaps understand the truth we seek to share. So we listen for the sake of sharing the truth of God with someone whom God has created and dearly loves (Eph. 4:15). Only when our conversation displays respectful love will we have opportunity to answer challenges and explain with “gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15) our hope that the life of every unborn child will be protected and that she or he can be welcomed into a family and, by God’s grace, into His church.¹⁰⁶

106 A helpful resource is “3 Ways to Talk About Life,” available at the LCMS Life Library, <https://www.lcms.org/how-we-serve/mercy/life-ministry/library/abortion>.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

At the time of this writing, the total number of unborn children who have died because of abortion in the United States since 1973 is about 83,000,000.¹⁰⁷ This is more than double the population of the largest U.S. state, California. *Abortion—A Continuing Crisis* seeks to bring clarity and further reflection to this ongoing moral crisis. In 1973, in *Roe v. Wade* the Supreme Court of the United States allowed abortion across the country based on a right of privacy. In 2022, the court adopted *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization* and overturned *Roe*, together with later decisions grounded in the same supposed right. The Synod therefore asked the CTCR to respond to these changes and further promote its firm opposition to abortion based on a “culture of life” that flows from the foundational truth that all human life is the work of God our Creator.

We have reviewed the Commission’s previous work on abortion and our steadfast affirmation that every child in the womb should be protected and never purposefully killed. We noted the ongoing challenges facing us and all who seek to defend the unborn in light of the court’s decision to defer abortion law to the states. Most important, our thoughts in the section “God Has Made Me: A Lutheran Theology of Life” are grounded firmly in the Sacred Scriptures and in our confession of Scripture’s teaching, especially in Luther’s catechisms. Following that important theological reaffirmation, we wrestled with “Practical Considerations” involving pastors and congregations.

Our highest priority as Christians must always be fidelity to Scripture’s teaching. That is true in all that we do, and so it is true in our consideration of abortion in the current American environment. But in addition to reaffirming our theology, much that we offer in this report comes in the form of counsel. Such counsel is

107 This estimate is consistent with data compiled by different sources, such as the Guttmacher Institute and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control as reported by Pew Research. See Diamant, Leppert, and Mohammed, “What the Data Says About Abortion in the U.S.”

given based on our theology and on reason in consideration of present realities. We offer it as counsel that we believe is godly and consistent with our teaching—but only as counsel.

We pray that God the Holy Spirit would use this report to strengthen the commitment to life throughout the Synod—and beyond. And, as we did in both 1971 and 1984, we pray for an end to the specter of abortion.

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