



General Board of Church and Society of The United Methodist Church

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Family Planning Saves Lives

The United Methodist Church supports the right for men and women worldwide to have the ability to choose when, or if, to have children. This right is viewed as an important component of overall health care provisions. Access to family planning and health services prevents maternal and child deaths and enhances the delivery of healthy babies. Family planning makes sense! We urge United Methodists to use this resource as they advocate on behalf of the many women and men who currently lack access to these critical services.

Theological Statement

“The creation of the world out of chaos into order is the initial biblical witness. In this witness is the affirmation of the freedom and responsibility of humankind. We affirm God to be the Creator, the one who grants us freedom, and the one to whom we are responsible.

“God’s ongoing creative and re-creative concern for the universe is expressed through Jesus Christ, who has called us to find the meaning of our lives in dual love of God and neighbor. In this context, we live responsibly before God, writing history by the actions of our lives. The imperative upon the individual Christian and the Christian community is to seek patterns of life, shape the structures of society, and foster those values which will dignify human life for all.

“We are living in an age of possibility in which we are called under God to serve the future with hope and confidence. Christians have no alternative to involvement in seeking solutions for the great and complex set of problems facing the world today. These issues are closely interrelated: hunger, poverty, disease, lack of potable water, denial of human rights, economic and environmental exploitation, over-consumption, technologies that are inadequate or inappropriate, rapid depletion of resources, and continuing growth of population. None can be addressed in isolation.” (From Resolution #159 in the 2004 *Book of Resolutions*)

What is family planning?

One widely utilized definition of family planning is “A program to regulate the number and spacing of children in a family through the practice of contraception or other methods of birth control.” A more expansive definition includes language about counseling, access to modern, safe and effective contraceptives and maternal health services.

What does The United Methodist Church say about family planning?

The United Methodist Church has a long-standing position in support of family planning. Family planning allows families to space their children, prevent the spread of disease, reduce abortions and enhance the overall quality of life.

Resolution #25, “Responsible Parenthood,” speaks to the importance of this issue. “Each couple has the right and the duty prayerfully and responsibly to control conception according to their circumstances. They are, in

our view, free to use those means of birth control considered medically safe. As developing technologies have moved conception and reproduction more and more out of the category of a chance happening and more closely to the realm of responsible choice, the decision whether or not to give birth to children must include acceptance of the responsibility to provide for their mental, physical, and spiritual growth, as well as consideration of the possible effect on quality of life for family and society.

“To support the sacred dimensions of personhood, all possible efforts should be made by parents and the community to ensure that each child enters the world with a healthy body and is born into an environment conducive to the realization of his or her full potential.”

The resolution encourages churches and society to “make information and materials available so all can exercise responsible choice in the area of conception controls. We support the free flow of information about reputable, efficient, and safe nonprescription contraceptive techniques through educational programs and through periodicals, radio, television, and other advertising media. We support adequate public funding and increased participation in family planning services by public and private agencies, including church-related institutions, with the goal of making such services accessible to all, regardless of economic status or geographic location.”

Resolution #159, “World’s Population and the Church’s Response,” recommends that all United Methodists:

- Urge that United Methodist medical and mission facilities and programs provide a full range of reproductive health and family planning information.
- Call on governments and private organizations to place a higher priority on research aimed at developing a range of safe, inexpensive contraceptives that can be used in a variety of societies and medical situations. Promote greater understanding of attitudes, motivations, and social and economic factors affecting childbearing.

Family planning is not abortion.

Family planning prevents unplanned pregnancies thereby preventing abortions. According to the Alan Guttmacher Institute, every year nearly 80 million unintended pregnancies occur worldwide. More than half of these pregnancies end in abortion. Access to information, education and services on voluntary family planning and contraception is essential in reducing unintended pregnancies and rates of abortion.

“The White House has affirmed President Bush’s commitment to U.S. family planning assistance efforts: [the President] knows that one of the best ways to prevent abortion is by providing quality voluntary family planning services.”
– Statement by Press Secretary Ari Fleischer, January 22, 2001

Who Uses Contraceptives in the United States?

- Virtually all women (98%) aged 15-44 who have ever had intercourse have used at least one contraceptive method.
- Overall, 62% of the 62 million women aged 15-44 are currently using a contraceptive method.
- 31% of the 62 million women do not need a method because they are infertile; are pregnant, postpartum or trying to become pregnant; have never had intercourse; or are not sexually active.
- Thus, only 7% of women aged 15-44 are at risk of unwanted pregnancy but are not using contraceptives.
- Among the 42 million fertile, sexually active women who do not want to become pregnant, 89% are practicing contraception.

(Source: Mosher, W.D., et al., “Use of contraception and use of family planning services in the United States: 1982-2002,” Advance Data from Vital and Health Statistics, No. 350. 2004.)

Which Methods Do Women and Men Use?

- 64% of reproductive-age women who practice contraception use reversible methods, such as oral contraceptives or condoms. The remaining women rely on female or male sterilization. (Source: Mosher, W.D., et al., "Use of contraception and use of family planning services in the United States: 1982-2002," Advance Data from Vital and Health Statistics, No. 350. 2004.)
- Men utilize condoms or sterilization.

Unmet Need for Family Planning in Developing Nations

According to the World Health Organization, despite the increase in contraceptive prevalence, some 137 million women still have an unmet need for contraception. Overall, 29% of women in developing countries have an unmet need for modern contraception. The highest proportion, several times the level of current use, is in sub-Saharan Africa where 46% of women at risk of unintended pregnancy are using no method.

Why support family planning?

- *Prevents unwanted pregnancies and reduces abortions.* Every year nearly 80 million unintended pregnancies occur worldwide. More than half of these pregnancies end in abortion. Twenty million of these abortions are carried out under illegal and often unsafe conditions. An estimated 150 million women in developing countries say they would prefer to plan their families but are not using contraception, and another 350 million women lack access to effective family planning methods. Each year, more than 500,000 women worldwide die from pregnancy or childbirth-related causes, almost all of them in the developing world.
- *Protects young people.* Sexual activity and childbearing early in life carry significant risks for young people all around the world. Teen mothers face twice the risk of dying from childbirth than do women in their twenties, and their children are more vulnerable to health risks as well. Every year, almost half of all new HIV infections and at least one-third of all new sexually transmitted infections occur to people younger than 25.
- *Prevents transmission of diseases.* Voluntary family planning and other reproductive health services can help couples avert high-risk pregnancies, prevent unwanted childbearing and abortion, and avoid diseases such as HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections, which can lead to death, disability, and infertility.

As followers of Christ we are called to bring health and wholeness to all God's people. United Methodism's founder, John Wesley had a burning passion for health and the desire to see people have access to goods and services needed to live life abundantly as well as faithfully. Speaking out in the public square on behalf of the marginalized and those who lack services is one way to achieve a world of justice and freedom from pain and suffering.

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