24 May 2019

With an increased number of state legislatures passing laws to severely curtail access to abortion, the Advocacy Committee for Women’s Concerns (ACWC) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is compelled to advocate for continuation of safe, legal abortion rights nationwide.

We do so as part of a Reformed theological history that endeavors to discern the activity of God in all the events of life. Our particular part of the Christian tradition seeks to be informed by changing cultural contexts. In the last 50 years, the PCUSA has affirmed our ability to re-form our teachings about women through deliberate theological reflection. Repeatedly, Presbyterians have affirmed that women are created in the image of God, fully endowed with the capacity to make moral decisions. We realize that we must seriously address the realities of women’s lives, including women’s access to reproductive options.

In 1970, our General Assembly declared that “the artificial induced termination of a pregnancy is a matter of careful ethical decision of the patient…and therefore should not be restricted by law.” In 1973, the U.S. Supreme Court declared in Roe v. Wade that state laws that criminalize abortion violate the due process right to privacy in the 14th Amendment of the Constitution. This includes a woman’s qualified right to terminate her pregnancy, as spelled out in the Court’s trimester guidelines.

ACWC stands on the policy positions that have been held in place by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). In a substantial 1983 paper on beginning and end of life decisions, our General Assembly affirmed “women’s ability to make responsible decisions, whether the choice be to abort or to carry the pregnancy to term.”

In 1992 the General Assembly adopted a policy on problem pregnancies and abortion that said:

“…the considered decision of a woman to terminate a pregnancy can be a morally

acceptable, though certainly not the only or required, decision; and…

we do not wish to see laws enacted that would attach criminal penalties to those who seek

abortions or to appropriately qualified and licensed persons who perform abortions in

medically approved facilities…”

In a 2018 statement advocating religious freedom without discrimination, the General Assembly stated its understanding of Christian faith to be “in support of freedom of the individual conscience in matters of reproductive rights.”

Although we speak through the policies of our faith tradition, we also take seriously that 58% of Americans say abortion should be legal in all or most cases (60% of women, 57% of men), while only 15% think it should be illegal in all cases (2018). Furthermore, 69% of Americans do not want Roe v. Wade to be overturned (2016). (Pew Research)

We are particularly compelled to advocate for the poor and women of color who are disproportionately affected by lack of access to abortion services. All health care in the United States must be seen through the lens of life-endangering inequalities, such as distance and financial resources. These inequalities are unjust and must be addressed.

As we consider the biblical mandate to “choose life,” we choose to affirm women’s lives as valuable, as endowed by God to be agents of their own well-being, and as granted by society to have the right to make decisions about their bodies without governmental interference. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) stands with women who do not want to go back on the movement that gave women these rights in the 1970s. We as ACWC are part of that continuing movement.

We are grateful to be part of a denomination that advocates for the dignity of women as full human beings, capable of understanding the rights and responsibilities involved in procreative decision-making. We appreciate our ministry partner, Presbyterian Women, for the following statement and their continued support of women's rights everywhere:

“Presbyterian Women in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Inc., guided by the actions of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) General Assembly and committed to advocating for the rights of women worldwide, fully supports the Advocacy Committee for Women’s Concerns of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)’s position on safe, legal abortion rights.”

Also, on May 20, Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the PCUSA, the Reverend Dr. J. Herbert Nelson II, released a statement on abortion that further emphasizes our theological stance. That statement can be found here:

<https://www.pcusa.org/news/2019/5/20/abortion-debate-grows-stated-clerk-reminds-church-/>

