

Problem Pregnancy

**When No
Choice Is Easy**

For the Pregnant Woman

Pregnancy can be a time of great excitement and also a time of great anxiety. For some women pregnancy is the culmination of years of anticipation. For you, the news of a pregnancy may bring conflicting emotions, which if left unresolved can leave you in a state of confusion and despair. You may even feel that you must keep your pregnancy a secret, if people around you—family and friends—are disapproving and nonsupportive.

You may be feeling very lonely as you make important decisions about the future. How do you go about making these decisions? Where can you turn for help?

Although you may feel very alone right now, you are not. God is present with you in all circumstances of your life. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) cares about you as a child of God and would like to support you as you make decisions about this pregnancy and your future. The church is here to offer help and information, not to judge.

This resource discusses three options for you to consider:

- **Keeping the baby**
- **Making an adoption plan, or**
- **Having an abortion**

You are strongly urged to read this entire resource before making any decisions. Consider seeking guidance from a pastor or counselor. May you be guided by the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit when no choice is easy.

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the Holy Spirit when no choice is easy.*

This resource has been developed for women facing the news of a problem pregnancy in a variety of difficult circumstances regarding their pregnancy — e.g., being regarded as a minor, or being the victim of rape or incest, or if there is a congenital anomaly in the fetus.

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General Assembly Mission Council

Keeping the Baby

Parenthood is a special relationship that is both a privilege and a responsibility. Parenting is a vocation (a job), not an avocation (a hobby). The rewards and challenges last a lifetime. Pregnancy and motherhood can also be a fulfilling and meaningful part of life.

The church recognizes that the decision to keep a baby involves a lifetime commitment. The decision you make about your pregnancy will affect you and your baby in deep and lasting ways. The church can be a community of support and encouragement for you as you raise a child. If keeping the baby is what you decide, we urge you to seek medical care immediately. Good prenatal care is essential in delivering a healthy baby.

Because of the challenges of parenting, you may be feeling overwhelmed with the idea of being a mother. You may feel unsure of your ability to be a good mother or of your financial ability to provide an adequate home, food, and clothing for the baby. These feelings may be even stronger if you believe that the baby has serious health conditions.

Resources are available to strengthen your ability to deal with a problem pregnancy. You are not the first one to face a situation like yours; there is wisdom in the experiences of others. Guilt, shame, anxiety, and even anger can be resolved through God's loving embrace and the arms of a church community.

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Making an Adoption Plan

You may feel, for whatever reason, that you are not able to raise a child. One possible solution for you in this situation is adoption.

Some families feel giving a child up for adoption is a betrayal of family loyalty or is even against the will of God. But we read in the Bible the story of a mother who, because she loved her child so deeply, gave her child to another woman. Because of circumstances beyond her control, Moses' mother knew that she would not be able to raise him to adulthood in her care. So, she created a plan whereby he might be adopted into a family that could provide that care (Exodus 2:1–10).

Adoption may be the most loving and responsible thing for a mother to do. As you consider the option of adoption, you may feel fearful or you may have questions about who will care for the baby. Even though adoption may be emotionally very painful for you, it may be the best choice for the baby, and qualified adoption referral organizations are prepared to help.

Adoption provides an opportunity for your baby to be born and to be raised in a community of care. For you, it provides an opportunity to put your life back in order and to plan your future.

The best way to be sure that the adopted baby will be cared for properly is to deal with a certified adoption agency. The agency personnel can explain the type of care available for your baby. Your counselor or pastor can connect you with an adoption agency and support you during and after the adoption process. If you decide to make an adoption plan, we urge you to seek prenatal medical care early, so that you may deliver a healthy baby.

Having an Abortion

There are no easy answers with a problem pregnancy. With the first two options, you would have a baby. A third option is not to have a baby. While Presbyterians do not agree on when human life begins, we do have deep respect for human life. The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has recognized that in certain circumstances abortion can be morally acceptable. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) believes that each woman has the ability and the responsibility to make good moral choices regarding a problem pregnancy and that abortion ought to be an option of last resort.

As you are making this very important and difficult decision, you may hear different messages even from people in the church who want to help you. Some may tell you that no matter what the situation, abortion is wrong. Others may suggest that you should think about abortion only if you have been raped or are the victim of incest. Some may say that you should consider abortion only if your physical life is in danger. Others may say that if you believe you have a severely deformed baby, you should consider abortion. Some people believe that early abortions are more acceptable than those occurring closer to viability, when life could possibly be sustainable outside the woman's womb. Still other people may say that abortion should be considered if you believe that there is no way you can provide care for a baby.

Problem pregnancies are the result of and are influenced by so many complicated and unsolvable circumstances that the church does not have the wisdom or the authority to address each situation. However, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) does offer guidance based on reflections and discernment. Abortion is a serious decision and should not be considered as "an easy way out." Abortion should not be used as an alternative to contraception. Abortion should not be used for gender selection or to obtain fetal parts for transplantation. Abortion should be your decision only when you have considered it carefully, along with the other two options, keeping the baby or making an adoption plan.

If abortion is what you decide, you should proceed immediately to get medical advice and counseling in preparation for this procedure. Abortion is safest when done during the first 13 weeks of pregnancy. In some states, abortion can be performed legally only in the first six months of pregnancy. Consult with your local doctor.

Additionally, the church has expressed grave moral concern about a particular late term abortion procedure, intact dilation and extraction (commonly called "partial birth" abortion), and has stated that this procedure is appropriate only to save the life of the pregnant woman.

Making Your Own Decision

Presbyterians believe that God alone is Lord of the conscience. As you deal with the difficult decisions before you, know that God is with you in this process. No decision is easy, but you must make a decision. There are many questions involved. As you consider the following questions and begin moving toward your final decision, know that the church wants to help you and support you.

God loves you and values you, no matter what the circumstances in your life and no matter what decision you make. You are precious in God's sight. Nothing can change that. The following questions may help you move toward your own decision.

How do I feel about being pregnant?

- Do I want to have a baby at this time in my life?
- Can I handle the responsibilities of raising a child?
- Will the baby's father be supportive of a decision to have the baby? If not, how will I proceed?
- Can I provide the love and emotional support a growing child needs?
- Do I want a baby so that the father of the child will stay with me or in order to have someone who needs me that I can love?

- Will I regret keeping the baby?
- How will I feel about the limits motherhood will put on my free time and future plans? Will I have to quit school or my job?
- Can I count on any support from the father or his family? Can I count on support from my own family?

How do I feel about giving the baby to someone else?

- Am I not at this time ready or able to raise a child? Is adoption a way that I can give a baby to someone else who could not otherwise have a child?
- Could someone else give the child a better home than I can at this time in my life?
- Will the baby's father be supportive of a decision to allow the baby to be adopted? If not, how will I proceed?
- Will I regret planning for adoption? Can I handle the emotional feelings of giving the baby away?

How do I feel about having an abortion?

- Do I feel I have good reasons for having an abortion?
- Will the baby's father be supportive of a decision to have an abortion? If not, how will I proceed?
- Will I have the emotional support that I need during and after the abortion?
- How will I pay for an abortion?
- Will I feel regret? If so, can I handle the emotional feelings of having had an abortion?

And, you may have other questions. The church recognizes the difficult situation created by problem pregnancies. We urge you to be open and honest about your concerns.

Understanding the Choices

You probably have already been given all sorts of advice about what to do. If not, you will be. Some of that advice is helpful, and some is not. Some people, even your parents or your partner, may want to make your decision for you. You must make that final decision about what you are going to do. Do not let anyone pressure you or limit your options as you make your decision. There are people in your community, including within your church, who care about you and who are available to help you.

Whether you decide to keep the baby, make an adoption plan, or have an abortion, you will need some expert advice about medical, legal, and other matters. Below are some suggestions about where to find that help.

- pastor (your own or another)
- campus minister or chaplain, if you are in college or in the military
- physician
- school counselor
- employee assistance programs
- welfare social worker
- hospital social worker
- certified adoption agency
- other certified counselor or psychologist
- family planning clinics

The Church wants you to feel its love and support, no matter what you decide. Remember that you are a person who is valuable in the sight of God. As the familiar hymn tells us, "There's a wideness in God's mercy, like the wideness of the sea. There's a kindness in God's justice, which is more than liberty. There is no place where earth's sorrows are more felt than up in heaven. There is no place where earth's failings have such kindly judgment given." You are not alone. God is with you, and nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Resources

Available from Presbyterian Distribution Service (PDS)

Call (800) 524-2612 or visit www.pcusa.org/store to order. The resources are free, however there is a charge for shipping and handling.

Problem Pregnancy — When No Choice is Easy

PDS# 27-526-10-001

Problem Pregnancy — There's Always a Father.

Does the Father Have a Problem Too?

PDS# 27-526-10-002

Problem Pregnancy — When Pregnancy Involves Loss

PDS# 27-526-10-003

Problem Pregnancy — When You Need Wisdom

PDS# 27-526-10-004

***Report of the Special Committee on Problem Pregnancies
and Abortion: Do Justice, Love Mercy, Walk Humbly (Micah 6:8)***

(policy statement and study paper)

PDS# OGA-92-017

***The Covenant of Life and the Caring Community and Covenant Creation:
Theological Reflections on Contraception and Abortion***

(policy statement and study paper)

PDS# OGA-88-109

On Late Term Pregnancy

(2006 policy statement of the General Assembly, Item 10-01)

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