

# The Protestant Churches on Abortion: Complex, Contradictory, and Challenging

By Kathleen Sweeney

The history of the Protestant churches' witness on the abortion issue in the last 30 years has been complex, contradictory, and challenging. In the early 1970s, there was a sudden capitulation to the secular pro-abortion persuasion on the part of several mainline Protestant denominations. This has been a scandal to the many pro-life believers who found themselves at odds with their denominational leadership on a vital issue.

This unfortunate reversal led to the founding of pro-life groups within those denominations. As the timeline on page 16 indicates, these churches - with the notable exception of the Southern Baptists - have not yet come back to their life-affirming position. However, pro-life resolutions continue to gain increasing support. (The vast majority of these pro-life groups are members of the National Pro-Life Religious Council. See below and story, page 8.)

At the same time, other Protestant churches, such as the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, maintained strong pro-life policies.

Some of this complicated and ongoing battle within Protestant churches is captured in the timeline and the story that follows.

## Early Reform Christian Leaders Established Pro-Life Tradition

There are ample examples of Reform Christianity's consistent teaching that abortion is a serious and unconscionable sin. Here are some of the statements from the Reform tradition:

John Calvin, 16th century Reformation leader, wrote in his commentary on Exodus 21:22:

*...the unborn, though enclosed in the womb of his mother, is already a human being, and it is an almost monstrous crime to rob it of life which it has not yet begun to enjoy. If it seems more horrible to kill a man in his own house than in a field, because a man's house is his most secure place of refuge, it ought surely to be deemed more atrocious to destroy the unborn in the womb before it has come to light.*

Martin Luther, founder of the Lutheran Church, spoke out several times on behalf of the child in the womb:

*Surely at such a time [conception], the order of nature established by God in procreation should be followed.*

More recently, Protestant theologian Karl Barth wrote during the years of Holocaust in Germany:

*The unborn child is from the very first a child. It is still developing and has no independent life. But it is a man and not a thing, nor a mere part of the mother's body.... He who destroys germinating life kills a man.... The fact that a definite NO must be the presupposition of further discussion cannot be contested, least of all today.*

## The Contradictions Begin

Until the late 1960s, Protestant churches were virtually unanimous in opposing abortion. The child in the womb was surrounded with protection. As an example, the Presbyterian Church (USA) stated in 1962 and reaffirmed in 1965 the following statement:

*The fetus is a human life to be protected by the criminal law from the moment when the ovum is fertilized.... [A]s Christians, we believe that this should not be an individual decision on the part of the physician and couple. The decision should be limited and restrained by the larger society.*

Despite this strongly pro-life 1965 statement, the Presbyterian Church

(USA), in every statement and resolution since 1970, has supported free and open access to abortion without legal restriction. Almost simultaneously, the United Methodists (1970), the Lutheran Church in America (1970), the United Church of Christ (1971), the Disciples of Christ (1971), and the Southern Baptist Convention (1971) adopted policies allowing abortion as a decision of the woman or the couple. (Fortunately, the Southern Baptist Convention has now come back to a strongly pro-life position.)

For example, the Episcopal Church at its 1964 General Convention stated, *"The Church continues to condemn non-therapeutic abortions...."* Yet its 1967 General Convention approved abortions where "the physical or mental health of the mother is threatened seriously," and in cases where the child would be born with disability or was conceived in rape. In 1976, the Episcopal General Convention reaffirmed this statement and went further: It expressed "unequivocal opposition to any legislation on the part of the national or state governments which would abridge or deny the right of individuals to reach informed decisions in this matter and to act upon them."

However, in 1988 a resolution passed which declared that "All human life is sacred...from inception until death....We regard all abortion as having a tragic dimension....We emphatically oppose abortion as a means of birth control, family planning, sex selection, or any reason of mere convenience...."

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), formed in 1988 through a merger of the American Lutheran Church, the Lutheran Church in America, and the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches, issued a statement in 1991 which speaks of the sanctity of human life. However the statement provides three cases for allowing abortions: rape and incest, fetal disability, and threat to the life of the mother. In addition, the ELCA leadership has interpreted these cases to be "illustrative, not all inclusive" and opposes laws that "deny access" to abortion. Moreover, the church's health care plan for pastors and for church workers pays for elective abortions.

A turnaround in a pro-life direction occurred in 1980 in the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). The SBC expressed opposition to use of tax money for non-therapeutic abortions and favored legislation "and/or a constitutional amendment prohibiting abortion except to save the life of the mother." Resolutions in 1982 and 1984 strengthened pro-life policies; its 1988 resolution states that most Southern Baptist churches opposed *Roe v. Wade*. From 1987 on, the Christian Life Commission (now known as the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission) of the SBC made opposition to abortion, except to prevent the death of the mother, a firm policy, and encouraged churches to develop crisis pregnancy ministries.

One mainline denomination which did not falter is the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS). In 1971, despite the collapse of so many other Protestant churches' pro-life policies, LCMS resolved that willful abortion is contrary to the will of God. Since then this pro-life denomination has worked to develop alternatives to abortion and pastoral approaches to help women and families in this matter. The LCMS has also supported legislative efforts to obtain protection for unborn children. In the Lutheran family of churches, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS Lutheran) has also been strongly pro-life, as are a number of smaller denominations.

Many evangelical, fundamentalist, and independent Bible churches are very pro-life in their views. They oppose abortion on demand and would support pro-life legislation. However, these churches do not usually have a

See *CHURCHES*, Page 16

# THE STRUGGLE FOR LIFE WITHIN THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

By John Brown, Jr.

"I find it hard to believe that a UCC pastor attended the March for Life!" This recent comment by a staffer of an evangelical family ministry is perhaps not untypical of many people today who, if they know anything of the United Church of Christ (UCC), consider it hopelessly pro-choice on life issues. While, given our history, this conclusion is hardly surprising, pro-lifers are making inroads.

Though only constituted as a denomination in 1957, the UCC has, in fact, been consistently in favor of abortion since the early 1970s. Even before that, a number of UCC clergy participated in the Clergy Consultation Service, founded by a UCC pastor as a nationwide illegal abortion referral system.

The United Church Board for Homeland Ministries voted in 1970 to support a "woman's right to choose the legal option of abortion." In 1971, the General Synod of the UCC, the national representative body of the denomination, considered a Proposal for Action called "Freedom of Choice Concerning Abortion." This proposal supported a woman's right to choose abortion in the early months of pregnancy, and called upon local congregations to work for the repeal of abortion laws. It passed overwhelmingly.

In the early 1970s the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries joined a number of other church organizations in support of the Supreme Court cases which led to the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision legalizing abortion. In 1973 the Homeland Ministries also became a founding member of the Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights, a Washington-based lobbying group that supports abortion on the basis, it says, of religious freedom.

Subsequent synods have continued to support the right to abortion. Though euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide have not yet been given synod approval, they have been discussed in that forum, and there are many leaders and pastors within the church who are in support.

These actions are ironic when viewed in light of the theological and social action history of the UCC and the four theological traditions which compose it. These four streams, Evangelical and Reformed, Congregational and Christian, have exerted a major influence on the social and political life of this country.

For example, there is the impact of Congregational-Puritan congregations and covenants in New England on the American political

system, the founding of the American Missionary Society and its support for the modern missionary movement, the support given to the abolition of slavery and the founding of hundreds of schools for black Americans, and the considerable resources and support given to the modern civil rights movement.

The Rev. Richard John Neuhaus, editor of *First Things* and a participant in the civil rights movement, has asked how it is that, considering their profound concern for the human rights of African-Americans and the poor, the leaders of that movement (which included many pastors and leaders of the UCC and other mainline churches) ended up opposing the human rights of the unborn.

The answer is too complex to attempt to answer fully here, but several issues can be discussed which help us appreciate why pro-lifers continue to have difficulty in promoting the sanctity of human life within the United Church of Christ.

One is the theological stance of the leadership and educational institutions of the denomination. The UCC "claims as its own the faith of the historic Church" and all that this means in terms of the authority of Christ, the Bible, and the work of

the Holy Spirit. In practice, however, the Bible and the creeds have been increasingly interpreted from a liberal perspective, which is to say, from a modern cultural perspective. This has diminished greatly their authority, and has often led to a selective use of Scripture based not so much on the truth of the passage as its applicability to a particular social cause.

A second factor, closely related to the first, has been what some call the "feminization of theology." This attempt to view theology and the Bible in the light of women's concerns has been exploited by pro-abortion forces to increase support for abortion within the UCC.

The principle of local autonomy is the third factor. This highly valued principle means that local congregations own their own property, and are encouraged to set their own agendas and standards theologically, educationally, and financially. Churches which oppose UCC actions, for whatever reason, can by congregational vote leave the denomination. Hundreds of congregations have done so in the last 30 years. Over 25% of UCC membership has been lost in this time

Continued on next page

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period. Many of those who have left were supporters of pro-life issues.

A fourth is the struggle pro-life pastors face. Such pastors know that they will get no support from conference or national leaders. Not surprisingly, there is no seminary, denominational board, or social ministry that is unequivocally pro-life.

Moreover, because many congregations are in need of spiritual renewal, it often happens that there is relatively little support for pro-life concerns, at least in the initial stages of renewal. The pastors who are concerned for encouraging renewal often face the dilemma of tackling social issues such as abortion knowing that this may be upsetting to members of the congregation, and thereby possibly undermining efforts to bring about a growth in congregational spirituality.

Despite these factors, concern for life issues and other theological and spiritual matters has continued to grow.

In 1977 two organizations were formed to work for theological and spiritual renewal within the United Church of Christ. Focus Renewal Ministries has emphasized individual and congregational renewal. The other, Biblical Witness Fellowship (BWF), has taken a more confrontational role with the UCC on a variety of social and political matters, and has also promoted a greater concern for missions.

In 1985, at an annual convention of the Biblical Witness Fellowship, a number of concerned pro-lifers sought to place more emphasis on the life issues, particularly abortion. At that time, however, not all BWF supporters and board members were pro-life. It was decided therefore that a new organization might provide the best means of working on pro-life concerns.

The organization founded in response to this initiative is now called Friends for Life (FFL). In its 13-year history FFL has attempted to influence the denomination in a variety of ways.

It began by establishing a means of communication -- producing a newsletter and building a mailing list. Another ongoing effort has been directed toward making a pro-life witness at the general

synods through book tables, newsletters, pro-life banquets, pronouncements, workshops, and personal contacts. Encouraging similar activities at conference meetings has also been attempted. A book of essays, *Affirming Life*, was written and published in 1991.

In 1987 FFL became a member of the National Pro-Life Religious Council (NPRC), a coalition of denominational and religiously oriented groups that speaks out on pro-life issues and supports pro-life ministries.

Acting on an idea presented at an NPRC meeting, Friends for Life, in conjunction with a group in the Penn Southeast Conference of the UCC, began work on a local ecumenical pro-life venture to help women. A group of 10 congregations -- UCC, Methodist, Catholic, and Evangelical -- have covenanted together to provide support for women facing a crisis pregnancy who choose to bear their children.

Each church has pledged to provide at least one service, whether housing, food, or counseling centers. Hopefully, other local communities of churches will establish similar programs.

At the present moment another direction is being considered. For a number of reasons, FFL's board of directors is considering working more closely with BWF. Since 1985 BWF has become strongly pro-life while continuing to give strong support to missions and spiritual renewal within the denomination. Moreover, BWF has a budget and membership far larger than FFL at its peak.

*The Witness*, BWF's feisty newsletter, reaches every UCC congregation and instrumentality, and would enable the pro-life message/witness to be heard throughout the denomination in ways not possible for FFL in earlier times. BWF, on the other hand, would benefit from the contacts and relationships FFL has built up over the years, and would enable it to speak more clearly on the life issues.

**Struggle Only Begun**

The struggle for life within the United Church of Christ, given the theological and sociological difficulties we face, is necessarily a multi-

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faceted one. There is a growing consensus that spiritual renewal, if it is to be biblical, must face the issues of abortion, euthanasia, and genetic engineering.

The members of our churches will all face these issues at one time or another. On the other hand it is understood that the life issues cannot be dealt with without worship, fellowship, prayer, and study.

The ongoing effort to bring change on the life issues within the United Church of Christ is somewhat akin to that of the pro-life movement to bring about change within our nation. Though there have been some victories, the UCC and the United States as a whole continue to promote a "culture of death."

It is increasingly clear that our efforts within the UCC must be integrally related to the efforts being made by other religious

groups, as well as those committed to political change. The issues we face are global issues, far beyond the resources of any one pro-life denomination or pro-life group.

Speaking as a Christian, I believe that God may well be using these troubling issues as one means of drawing the various groups committed to the historic Christian faith into a substantial and cohesive unity. Despite the considerable differences among the various Christian traditions, there remains enormous common ground on the fundamental truths of faith and life.

Together they could better witness to the truth of the faith, and more effectively contribute to a growing "culture of life," wherein every human being, young or old, male or female, disabled or able-bodied, born or unborn, would be respected and cherished.



**Witness** FROM PAGE 10

spoken in Jesus Christ for life and love. And God, not the erring denomination, will prevail in the end. The pro-choice orientation, built without solid theological foundation, will collapse in time—but in God's own time. Therefore, the pro-life witness can and should be not only wise but also patient.

Lovingly speaking and demonstrating the truth about life and abortion, in an unfriendly denomination, also demand the courage to lead. In our day, most leaders of most institutions want more than anything else to be liked by those they lead. In our day, it is not just the teenagers who want to be popular. For example, many politicians base their policies exclusively on their polls. Unfortunately and likewise, many church leaders base their teaching on their less formal polls.

Therefore, in a hostile environment, if one is to speak God's truth about life and abortion with wisdom and in love, one must—possess the courage to lead. Real courage. Persistent courage. Truth-based courage. Lacking such courage, one will remain wordless and speechless about life and abortion. With such courage, the Gospel of Life can and will go forth, even in a pro-choice denomination.

The pro-life pastor and layperson in a pro-choice denomination have all kinds of opportunities to address the gift of life and the sin of abortion. She could write a pro-life article for her church newsletter. He could have a luncheon conversation about life and abortion with his pastor, who happens to be absolutely quiet about the matter. She could visit and encourage the congregation's teenager who was recently discovered to be with child. He could teach his Sunday School class a lesson on how the Church Fathers, from the beginning, have understood life to be a gift.

She could speak a pro-life word to another church member in a friendly conversation. He could support the local problem pregnancy center, and encourage his congregation to do the same. She could compose, with some good

**Compassionate**

FROM PAGE 9

If the wall of protection is to be restored around the most vulnerable in the human family -- unborn children, those with disabilities, and people of all ages in the last days of their lives -- then today's spiritual leaders must lead. They must show a personal and pastoral moral courage that calls their entire flock to the task.

Many church leaders know in their hearts that by their silence they are accomplices to something ghastly. They know deep down

that they have chosen comfort over controversy and opted for what is popular over what is prophetic. But settling for peace within a congregation that is built on a truce instead of on the truth, in time, serves neither God nor man.

This country is in trouble, but this country is going nowhere unless the church goes there first. To get through the chaos that characterizes our time, congregational and parish leaders must either move ahead or continue in old, stifling patterns. What the church needs is strong, passionate, courageous leadership and

women who will serve as midwives to bring new life into the work and witness of the church. It's no mystery that if that happened the struggle for the sanctity of human life would have a happy ending for women, children, and the country.

*Dr. Jean Garton is the co-founder of Lutherans for Life and served as its national president for 17 years. She is an international speaker and author and currently serves as a member of the Board of Directors of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.*

help from her friends, various pro-life resolutions to be considered by the legislative bodies of her congregation and/or denomination. He could write a letter to his local newspaper to commend a recent article that advanced the culture of life or to critique a recent article that advanced the culture of death.

She could talk to her daughter(s) and son(s) about the importance of protecting the mother with unborn child and the unborn child within mother. Out all of these words and deeds demand the courage provided by God, by God's Spirit, by God's Truth. Without God's gift of courage, the pro-life pastor or layperson will fall into the rut of compromise, and

the life-advancing, life-enhancing word and deed on abortion will not be spoken and done.

**THE GOAL: FAITHFUL WITNESS**

The immediate goal of a pro-life witness in a pro-choice denomination is not to change the world or even the denomination. If that is our goal, we are doomed to defeat before we begin. For we, on our own, will change neither the world nor our denomination in short order.

The goal of offering pro-life witness in a pro-choice denomination is simply to tell the truth, wisely and lovingly, about the Gospel of Life. To prepare for this witness,

those involved must be grounded, well grounded, in the truth of the Gospel of Life.

Again, our goal is truthfulness. We entrust the results of our attempts at truthful witness in the hands of God, who has won the victory in Jesus Christ and whose total victory we await.

*Rev. Stallworth is the pastor of Rose Hill United Methodist Church. In addition, he is the editor of Lifewatch, a quarterly newsletter which concerns the United Methodist Church, the gift of life, and the problem of abortion. If you would like a free subscription to Lifewatch, please write to: Lifewatch, 512 Florence Avenue, Dothan, AL 36301.*

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The Choose Life newsletter, a bi-monthly publication with a circulation of about 28,000, provides news of interest to church-based pro-life groups, suggested prayers, and bulletin inserts for church use. Workshops and materials on how to get churches involved in the pro-life cause are provided for pastors and lay people. The Outreach Department is committed to calling all religious Americans to a clear dedication to defending the weak and most vulnerable of God's creation, those who cannot protect themselves without our help.

*Ernest Olhoff, director*

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Pastor gives brief pro-life sermon and announces formation of a pro-life committee

Pastor criticized by pro-abortion church members for his pro-life sermon  
*Move ahead 1 space*

Have pro-life church members thank Pastor for his pro-life sermon

Organize a pro-life church committee and plan pro-life activities for the upcoming year

## Starting a Pro-Life Committee in Your Church

Every church in America, regardless of denomination, should have its own active pro-life committee. Starting church-based pro-life committees is usually a simple and direct process, if you follow these guidelines:

- **Overcome the Inertia - - MAKE IT HAPPEN - - Start at Square #1 - -** Determination and polite persistence can make all the difference between success and failure. Above all else, develop a strategy to build a committee in your church and stick with it.
- **Identify Other Pro-Lifers in Your Church - -** Finding one or more pro-life church members to work with you will be a great help in building a functioning church-based pro-life committee.
- **Obtain Support from Your Pastor - -** Plan a meeting with your Pastor and consider the following key points in advance:
  - How does your Pastor respond to new activities in the church?
  - What is your Pastor's present position on abortion?
  - Anticipate concerns he may have and have answers ready.
- **Have a meeting with Your Pastor - -** Present your proposed pro-life activities in a way that your Pastor is most likely to endorse. These should including the following:
  - Prepare a pro-life sermon.
  - Support the formation of a church pro-life committee.
  - Develop a reconciliation program for women who have had abortions.
- **Support Your Pastor When He Is Criticized for Giving a Pro-Life Sermon - -** Have pro-life church members profusely thank your pastor after he has given a pro-life sermon and encourage him to continue his pro-life activities.
- **Form a Church Pro-Life Committee - -** Identify two to four pro-life people to form the leadership of the committee. Plan on regular meetings and fix a date (such as the first Tuesday of each month). At your first meeting plan a calendar of events and activities for the upcoming year. Be sure to include educational activities and petition drives on partial-birth abortion (petition forms are available from NRLC).
- **Conduct a Variety of Pro-Life Projects - -** Conduct several pro-life projects, including baby showers for abortion alternatives groups in your area. In addition, appoint someone on the committee to establish a liaison with your local National Right to Life-affiliated chapter. One key project your church group should consider in 1999 is to conduct a fundraising drive for National Right to Life's Partial-Birth Abortion Ban or Child Custody Protection Act Media Education Campaign. This will help NRLC continue to run educational ads.

Church-based pro-life committees are excellent ways to expand the pro-life base in your community. **DO NOT** assume that pro-life committees cannot be formed in denominations which are not pro-life. Many pastors within these seemingly pro-abortion denominations are very pro-life. With a little encouragement they can become very active pro-life leaders.

Find square #1, pray and begin. Be patient, expect success, and be politely persistent. Above all, never stop trying. The Bible is filled with stories about how patience and persistence eventually are rewarded.

Pastor unreceptive  
**STOP**  
*go back 3 spaces*

Have meeting with Pastor

Plan meeting with your Pastor

Identify more pro-life church members

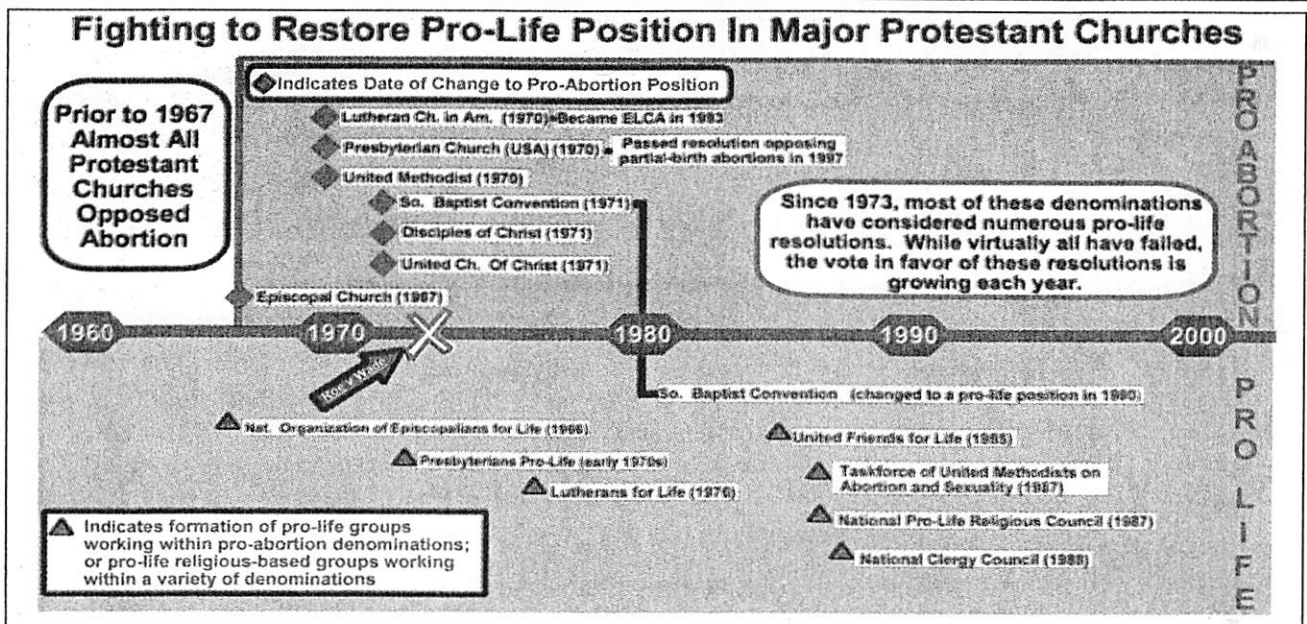
**START**  
Square  
#1

Ask Pastor to start an outreach ministry to help heal women who have had abortions

New Pastor appointed  
**STOP**  
*go back 13 spaces*

Conduct partial-birth abortion educational program and use NRLC's PBA petition forms

Conduct fundraising activity to help NRLC raise money for its partial-birth abortion media education ad project



## Churches

FROM PAGE 14

national or regional denominational structure for making resolutions or policies on the abortion issue.

### Denominational Pro-Life Groups Bear Witness

Concern about liberalized abortion policies in their churches led pro-life clergy and lay members to form pro-life groups within denominations. The Episcopalians for Life was one of the first. Founded by Bishop Joseph M. Harte of Arizona in 1966, it subsequently incorporated under the name **National Organization of Episcopalians for Life (NOEL)** in 1983. NOEL's work to change the church's stance on abortion succeeded in getting the 1988 resolution passed. (See graphic above.) This resolution represented a substantial change in tone from the earlier position endorsing abortion on demand as a woman's "right." NOEL continues to be an active pro-life presence at Episcopal conventions, supporting numerous pro-life activities and pro-life legislation.

**Presbyterians Pro-Life (PPL)**, formed in the 1970s, has been a consistent and strong voice in the Presbyterian church seeking to move church policies in a more pro-life direction by submitting resolutions to each General Assembly and by organizing PPL chapters in local churches and regions. It was good news for PPL when the Presbyterian Church (USA) at its 1997 General Assembly became the first mainline Protestant denomination to come out in opposition to partial-birth abortions.

**Lutherans for Life (LFL)** is a pan-Lutheran organization begun in 1976. Its mission is to witness to the sanctity of human life through education based on the Word of God. To that end, LFL has developed a network of state affiliates and local chapters in order to provide avenues to educate the Lutheran community about the sacredness of God's gift of life and also to call Lutherans to action and service. LFL produces resources covering a wide range of life issues. It also promotes acts of love such as its *Healing Hearts* hotline for post-abortive women, *Place of Refuge* for those in crisis pregnancies, and the *Campus Life Project*, which reaches out to young men and women on college campuses. LFL publishes the quarterly magazines *Lifedate* and *Living*.

In 1987, nine United Methodist pastors and lay people formed the

**Taskforce of United Methodists on Abortion and Sexuality (TUMAS)** to be an educational ministry to work with clergy, laity, and congregations concerned with protecting unborn children and their mothers from abortion. TUMAS hopes to see the United Methodist Church return to the "way of life" instead of choosing the "way of death." It has submitted numerous pro-life resolutions to the General Conference, which revises church law and teaching every four years. In 1991, a statement known as *The Durham Declaration* set forth a Methodist scriptural position on the sanctity of human life and was signed by hundreds of Methodist clergy and laity. TUMAS and its publication, *Lifewatch*, continue to provide strong witness and action, out of the church's tradition, on behalf of the Gospel of Life.

**United Friends for Life (UFFL)** in 1985 called together members of the United Church of Christ (UCC) to make an effort to open the eyes of UCC leadership to the biblical truth on abortion. Yet the resolutions forwarded to the General Synod were defeated and the denomination continued to affirm support for *Roe v. Wade* and a woman's "choice" for abortion. As the UCC appeared to stray far from God's laws, many pro-life members and churches left the affiliation or remained independent from it. In consequence, UFFL opened its membership to those in other churches outside of the UCC who wished to support pro-life witness and ministry. UFFL continues, under the leadership of Rev. John Brown, to support pro-life legislation and resolutions, and to encourage crisis pregnancy work, pro-life networking, and opportunities to speak out on pro-life issues.

The **Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC)** of the Southern Baptist Convention is involved in several issues important to Christians and has been particularly strong in support of pro-life legislation. This commission has been an organized entity for most of this century. Formerly known as the Christian Life Commission, it was restructured in 1953 and again in 1997 when it took its present name. Dr. Richard Land has served as president and CEO of the commission since 1988, and strengthened its pro-life outreach. The ERLC publishes two magazines: *Salt and Light*. It maintains a full-time office in Washington, D.C., to interface with national government on issues vital to Christians.

See DENOMINATIONAL, Page 17



## Denominational FROM PAGE 16

### Groups Supporting Denominational Pro-Life Organizations

The National Clergy Council, formed in 1988 as an association of church leaders from all Christian confessions, joined together to give a moral and biblical witness to public policy makers in Washington, D.C. It supports pro-life legislative efforts and is involved in a variety of pro-life activities. The council sponsors an annual National Memorial for the Pre-Born service.

Formed in 1987, the National Pro-Life Religious Council (NPRC) is a coalition of the denominational and church-based pro-life groups whose

goal is to strengthen their witness and effectiveness both within the churches and outwardly to the secular society. This ecumenical unity has fostered mutual understanding and support and enabled joint undertakings, such as the pastors' conference, *Building a Ministry for Life*, which took place last October. (See pages 8 and 11.)

These efforts represent a dedicated, faithful work which bears fruit in many ways which do not necessarily make headlines, but which do contribute to a vibrant pro-life movement. They are a beacon that facilitates the ministry and witness necessary to recall our country to full protection for unborn children and to healing for those families victimized by abortion.

## 38 Million Abortions since *Roe v. Wade* Decision

FROM BACK COVER

The report, "Abortion Incidence and Services in the United States, 1995-1996," is authored by AGI Deputy Director of Research Stanley K. Henshaw. Published in the November/December issue of *Family Planning Perspectives*, it shows the number of abortions dropping substantially from 1990.

For 1995, AGI counted 1,363,680 abortions, its lowest figure since 1977, and a 15% drop from 1990 when AGI recorded 1,608,600 abortions, its highest total ever. In 1996, according to AGI, the number of abortions increased by just over 2,000, edging up to 1,365,730.

Combining all of AGI's abortion numbers reported since 1973 and extending the 1996 AGI abortion figure as an estimate for the number of annual abortions for 1997 and 1998, the total is 36,903,280 abortions through 1998.

However, AGI says that 3% of all abortions go unreported. Factoring that in and the total number increases to 38,010,378 abortions since the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision.

The latest AGI report also spotlights the dwindling number of abortionists in the U.S. In 1982, according to Guttmacher, there were 2,908 "abortion providers." In 1996 there were just 2,042 -- a drop of nearly 30%. Declines have been greatest in hospitals (50%) and private physicians (34%).

Henshaw suggests that this drop in the number of abortionists and the accompanying shift to mega-clinics (those performing a thousand or more abortions a year), a figure which has held steady from 1982 to 1996 at about

440, may be due to "high costs of small-scale abortion provision" and "possibly" anti-abortion sentiment discouraging some hospitals or private physicians from performing abortions. Yet the report fails to note other significant factors that may be involved. These include growing physician discomfort with abortion and the general lack of respect abortionists encounter among their medical peers, which causes many to leave or stay out of the abortion business. (See *New York Times*, 1/8/90, *Washington Post*, 1/22/95.)

The report also offers evidence of a decreased demand for abortion. For instance, the abortion rate (the number of abortions per 1,000 women of reproductive age) dropped from 28.8 in 1982 to 22.9 in 1996, according to AGI. Likewise the abortion ratio (defined by AGI as the number of abortions per 100 pregnancies that end in either an abortion or a live birth) dropped from 30 in 1982 to 26.1 in 1996. While Henshaw presents his statistics in such a way as to imply that declining abortion numbers, rates, and ratios are a function of a declining number of abortionists, or "reduced access," he never fully explores the equally plausible interpretation suggested by the data -- that there may be fewer abortionists because of a reduced demand for abortion.

It should also be noted that it was during this same time period that NRLC was successful in getting substantive parental involvement and "right to know" legislation passed in several states (22 and 14, respectively),

as well as legislation instituting waiting periods and limits on taxpayer funding of abortions. The national campaign to stop partial-birth abortion has also been extremely effective in raising overall public consciousness regarding the humanity of the unborn child, certainly contributing to the decline. Moreover, the influence of thousands of right to life chapters and crisis pregnancy center and the distribution of millions of pieces of educational literature also surely contributed to the overall reduction in demand for abortion.

It is interesting to note that the slight increase in the number of abortions seen from 1995 to 1996 corresponds with the testing of the two-drug chemical abortion technique known as RU 486 conducted in the U.S. from October 1995 to Labor Day 1996. This was not lost on Henshaw. He writes,

The availability of these methods [RU 486 and methotrexate, another chemical abortion method that came into use about the same time] may have encouraged more physicians to provide abortions, may have increased the number of women seeking abortions or simply may have replaced surgical services.

While there were just over 2,100 chemical abortions performed during the 1995-1996 RU 486 trials, a great many more women may have been drawn into the clinics by the promise of easy, safe abortions (despite the publicity, RU 486 abortions are neither safe

nor easy), inflating the numbers for 1996.

Henshaw notes, "Early medical abortion [i.e., chemical abortions] has the potential to expand the availability of abortion services in areas without surgical abortion providers."

A 1997 survey conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation bears Henshaw out. According to the Kaiser survey, 54% of obstetrician/gynecologists said they were "very" or "somewhat" likely to prescribe RU 486 for their patients seeking abortions. Ominously, this included 45% of those ob/gyns who were not currently performing abortions. High percentages of family practice physicians (45%) and physician assistants (54%) also expressed interest in offering RU 486 if it obtains final government approval.

However, pro-lifers have made a difference. The numbers show that. But the abortion lobby is anxious to expand business and revitalize the industry with promises of "new and improved" abortion techniques.

Our answer? The truth. Make sure people continue to hear the truth about abortion and especially about the new chemical abortion techniques (they're unsafe, painful, messy, protracted, and they still kill unborn babies) and we should see the numbers drop again.

#### FOOTNOTE:

1. For detailed information on chemical abortions, contact the NRL Educational Trust Fund and ask for the factsheet "RU 486: Risks and Dangers."

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## Shepherding the Shepherds

By Bishop Joseph F. Naumann

For 10 years, I had the privilege to serve as the pro-life director for the Archdiocese of St. Louis. One of the many joys of my work in our church's pro-life apostolate was the opportunity to collaborate with people of different denominations and faiths who shared a deep respect for the sanctity of human life.

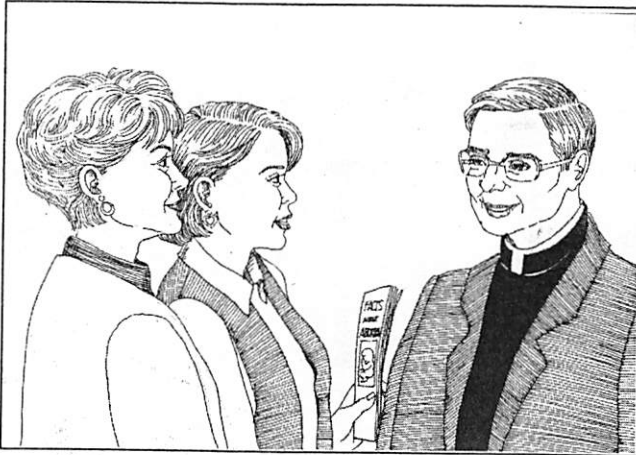
It is the belief of Christians that the death and resurrection of Jesus is a pattern for all life. We look, then, even at the most tragic events with an expectation that God will draw forth new life. I believe that one of the blessings that God has raised up from the tragic evil of legalized abortion has been to bring together people of many different faiths, working shoulder to shoulder, to restore a reverence for the sacredness of human life.

In working with dedicated pro-life people from a variety of denominations, there was often a common concern regarding the best manner to engage those pastors and rabbis who had not manifested much interest in pro-life issues. Most frequently, the clergyman in question belonged to a denomination that was supportive of efforts to recover a respect for human life. It was usually not a question that the pastor did not accept church teaching on the sanctity of human life, but rather that among all the other demands competing for his attention, pro-life rarely became a priority.

My first advice was to pray for the pastor that the Holy Spirit would open his heart to recognize the needs of his people in areas pertaining to pro-life. I also urged concerned pro-lifers to pray for themselves that the Holy Spirit enlighten them how most effectively to awaken their pastors.

After this period of prayer for the pastors and for themselves, I suggested that they approach the

## Working Ecumenically Paves the Way For An Effective Pro-Life Witness



pastor with an invitation to take the lead on a particular pro-life project. Before extending this invitation, I suggested that the parishioners reflect on what aspect of pro-life ministry the pastor seems to have the greatest interest.

In my experience, most pastors are naturally drawn toward the more "pastoral" elements of the pro-life movement's work. Often, you will find that they are very eager to provide alternatives to abortion.

Several years ago, a Lutheran pastor who was a member of St. Louis Clergy for Life developed a model for congregations to publicly identify themselves as a place of "refuge" for someone experiencing a crisis pregnancy. Many churches might choose to link with a local Birthright or another crisis pregnancy center and through them "adopt" an expectant mother and her child. I find pastors and parishioners often become very energized when they become engaged in helping an individual through a crisis pregnancy. In the process, they become much more aware of the plight of those babies whose mothers do not make it to the crisis pregnancy center.

Similarly, many pastors and rabbis are very open when asked to become involved in an outreach to those who have participated in an abortion and who now deeply regret their choice. Helping post-abortive parents face honestly the truth of abortion in light of the reassuring truth of God's mercy is often an eye-opening experience for a pastor. The opportunity to participate in a "Project Rachel" training seminar, or similar post-abortion ministry program, makes him keenly aware that the child is not the only victim of the abortion. Working through guilt and grief of post-abortive mothers, fathers, grandparents, and clinic personnel makes obvious how the scars of abortion cut across the entire society.

Sometimes clergymen shy away from preaching about abortion because of their concern for the pain that their sermon might occasion in those who have had an abortion. But when pastors, priests, and rabbis fail to speak up this allows the young and the vulnerable in particular to assume that abortion must not be "all that bad," since they never hear about this evil in their place of worship.

Often after pastors have become

involved with a post-abortion ministry, they are keenly aware how tragic are the consequences when pastors fail to teach clearly and effectively about the evil of abortion. It becomes apparent to them that a failure to preach boldly about abortion can make parishioners vulnerable to choosing the "easy" solution to a personal or family crisis.

Moreover, being involved in the lives of post-abortive men and women may remove a pastor's or rabbi's nagging concern that he doesn't have the "right" to preach about abortion.

Another way to bolster clergymen's confidence in their ability to provide pastoral leadership on the life issues is to invite them to join you in attending pro-life educational and motivational events within the community. Providing them with information that can help them become thoroughly conversant with the life issues is another important way to offer assistance.

Here, I would counsel to be careful not to overwhelm pastors with a large volume of material. Select the material that will be the most helpful and most informative for the rabbi or pastor. Look for information that is concise enough to be able to be included in church publications or material that could serve as excellent illustration in a sermon or homily.

As you become better acquainted with your clergyman, there may be opportunities to influence his preaching. Some ministers are very concerned about the turmoil that preaching about abortion may cause with some members of the congregation. Help them realize that if you extend the principle not to preach about sins that directly impact members of the congregation, it results in preaching only about other people's sins.

When pastors have gained expe-

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## Jewish Opposition to Partial-Birth Abortion Gain Momentum at Conference

By Liz Townsend

The growing outcry in the Jewish community against partial-birth abortion gained momentum with a November conference that brought together Jewish and Christian leaders to discuss points of agreement between the two faiths and ways they can work together to restore the sanctity of life to American society.

"The conference was a tremendous success," Chris Gersten, president of the Institute of Religious Values, told *NRL News*. "People stayed hours after it was over, networking and continuing the discussion."

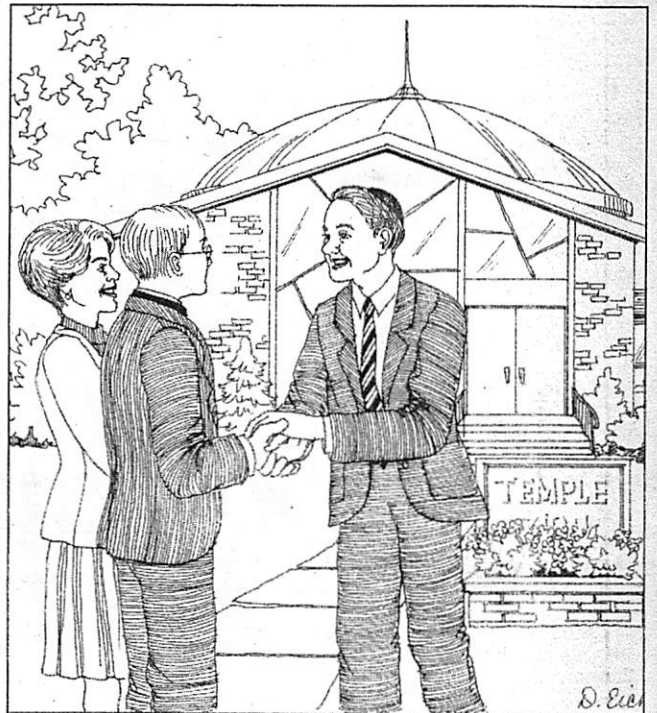
Gersten said that the dialogue in the Jewish community and between Jews and Christians will continue in the months ahead. A video and monograph of the conference will be available, bringing the discussion to a wider audience. Other conferences will be held in several locations around the country.

Actor and law professor Ben

Stein, who gave a well-received luncheon speech at the conference, agreed to serve as chairman of a new project to continue the dialogue on Jewish involvement in reducing abortion. A federal political action committee, called Christians and Jews for Life, is being organized.

The Institute of Religious Values began the effort to bring the Jewish community together to oppose partial-birth abortion last year by sponsoring an open letter signed by 100 rabbis opposing President Clinton's veto of the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act. A similar letter signed by prominent Jewish women followed the rabbis' letter.

The institute organized the November 12 conference with the Columbus School of Law at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., where it was held. The conference, titled "Affirming the Sanctity of Human Life: Exploring How the Jewish Community Can Work to Reduce



### Ecumenical FROM PAGE 19

rience in post-abortion ministries they tend to find new opportunities for spiritual healing and pastoral counseling. As a result of their post-abortive ministry, some will decide to invite congregants who have participated in abortion to pray that this day's sermon may help save others from going through the pain and sorrow they know all too well.

Many pastors, priests, and rabbis are least comfortable with the political dimension of pro-life. Yet most appreciate that they have a responsibility to help form the consciences of their parishioners. If a pastor is doing his job in this area, he will help his congregation understand the moral importance of the issue and the priority it should assume in their selection of elected representatives.

A clergyman cannot from the pulpit tell the congregation to support a particular candidate. If he has done his job in helping the congregation understand the truth and importance of the life issues, parishioners will be able to make the proper applications with the choices presented to them.

Helping any individual better understand the life issues is well worth the investment of time and energy. But assisting a pastor or rabbi appreciate the importance for society will have an even greater impact, for in helping him incorporate pro-life into his pastoral ministry, we have not only influenced him, but we have also indirectly touched the many lives his ministry touches.

Abortion," featured panel discussions on topics ranging from how abortion is viewed in Jewish law, the facts about partial-birth abortion, post-abortion reconciliation, and the religious perspective on euthanasia and assisted suicide.

The first panel, titled "Abortion and Jewish Law - - The Religious Tradition," featured respected rabbis from the Orthodox, Reform, and Conservative traditions in Judaism. The speakers set the tone of the day with a serious and in-depth discussion, and provided a basic grounding in the view of life issues from all aspects of Judaism. The rabbis, despite approaching their religion from three different ways, all agreed that those of Jewish faith should play a prominent role in reducing the number of abortions, especially partial-birth abortions.

Rabbi Barry Freundel, an

Orthodox rabbi from the Kesher Israel Congregation in Washington, D.C., began the discussion by speaking about the status of the unborn child in Jewish law and the balance between the child and the mother. While the unborn baby is inside the mother's womb, Jewish tradition does not treat both of them as entirely equal in all cases.

Freundel asserted that in extreme cases when the mother's life is in serious danger if the pregnancy continues, abortion is "permitted, perhaps even required."

But this requirement has clear limits, Freundel insisted: "There is an end to that which is the partial-birth abortion kind of issue, when the majority of the fetus has emerged, when the head

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## Ministering to the Post-Abortive Woman

### "Shepherds, Behold your Flock"

By Olivia L. Gans

After more than 25 years of legal abortion one would think that people would now have a real understanding of the difficulties encountered by women who have had abortions and how to help them. This is absolutely not the case, even, unfortunately in clerical circles. While that may seem a bold statement to make it is the truth.

During the course of the last 15 years of pro-life activity I've had the important and humbling task of addressing numerous clergy representing a wide variety of faiths. Usually I have been asked to share my own abortion experience.

It has always amazed me how often mine is the first real woman's story many of the participants have heard. What this proves to me is both how very hard it is for women to speak to others about this subject and how mothers and fathers of aborted children are in desperate need of spiritual support or guidance. Church is often the last place some of us would think of going to for help. This is a sadness that our clergy must change.

Many women have turned to a variety of self destructive behaviors including drugs, alcohol, sex, rebellion, and other means to vent anger and relieve pain. Their hearts are searching for that peace that comes only from the loving presence of the Creator Himself in their tragic lives. The

One who made our unborn children also made us and that love that made us continues, despite our foolishness.

Many of us have seen that heavenly love for the first time in the holy and kind ministry of our pastors. We can thank God for them. Yet what is the difference that makes it possible for some to seek His forgiveness and real healing while others fade in and out of the painful life they are trying to live?

By and large, women who have had abortions struggle with many of the same issues - - grief, despair and alienation - - that others experience with a death or loss but with a profound added component: This death experience was caused by their own personal rejection of or confusion about the life they carried. Their behavior and sinful actions created the seemingly inescapable situation in which they currently suffer.

In my experience, one of the main reasons that women who have had abortions stay locked in their silence is the simple fact that they don't hear others speaking about their circumstances in a realistic way. Some are even attempting to go to church but keep this last great secret because what they hear there doesn't fit in with what they feel.

In most cases they never hear any words about abortion, either positive or negative, from the pulpit so they think they must be the

odd ones. No one else seems to be thinking about it, so why am I?

What do women need to hear? Voices filled with compassion, truth, and hope that can be found in those who have confronted their own muddled self-image and discovered that forgiveness is possible. They need to believe that the people who speak to them actually believe that their lives have the same value in God's eyes as the lives of their discarded, but not forgotten children.

Many believe that God will not hold out a hand to them because they would not hold out a hand to themselves. They may feel hatred toward themselves because they have been allowed to believe that God doesn't love them. Hearing the receiving and forgiving voice of the shepherds makes it much easier to seek the ultimate source of the compassion that will rescue them from inescapable pain.

It may come as a surprise that there are women in church pews all over America who have confessed all other kinds of awful sins but can not tell anyone about the big one, abortion. It is as if there is, somewhere deep in the bruised hearts of these mothers, a sense that this is seriously different from other things she may have done. After all, as Scripture says in Isaiah, "Shall a mother forget the child of her womb? Yet even should she forget I will not forget you."

Pastors need to ponder, as the



Left to right: Fr. Marcus Pollard, associate pastor, St. Louis Catholic Church; Olivia Gans, director, American Victims of Abortion; Fr. Peter West, Priests for Life.

woman may have, that she is the mother who forgot. For her to believe that God will forgive her is an enormous jump. Few of the mothers are able to believe that having broken that most marvelous of bonds, the one used by the Creator to describe His bond to us, that He still may have a purpose for their lives.

Imagine her amazement when she learns that God does love her and has true desire to lead them to the paths of peace. (Jeremiah 29:11-14) For most women, that path involves going through a period of true grief. The vast majority of these women have never openly shed tears for the little ones they can never hold.

Few of them have encountered religious leaders who they truly felt would look at them and not be shocked if they told the truth of their distress. In fact some of them have left meetings with their shepherds sometimes feeling more alienated than before.

It is hard for these women to really trust anyone so they often hedge their bets, they hold some of the cards back because they don't feel completely safe. It is interesting to note, however, just how often the desire for a spiritual perspective is the force behind the first effort to reach out for help.

That puts much of the onus on the clergy to open the doors. But who better to extend that hand of invitation than the clergy?

I would say to clergy, preach often and joyfully about the triumph of God over sin and despair! Tell the truth to your congregations about the harm done by abortion to unborn children and to the hearts of all who are involved, moms, dads, doctors, etc.

If you don't know the facts, do your homework; the books are out there aplenty. Take time to develop the healing ministries being widely developed by pro-life groups and churches across the country. Preach about them often. Only you, who have been chosen, called by name to shepherd, can do this marvelous thing.

Most importantly, expose your-

See FLOCK, Page 23