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Abortion - the hard choices

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CSBQ Discussion Paper

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(see also [CSBQ statement on Abortion](#))

ABORTION – THE HARD CHOICES

What is it like to be a young woman facing an unplanned pregnancy?

My boyfriend shouts, 'It's all your fault!' and vanishes. The anxiety, the fear, the sense of being alone. The horror on my parents' faces when I hesitantly tell them. 'What will the neighbours say? You must get rid of it immediately - no-one need ever know - we can be just like we were before.' I feel so confused - what is the right choice? A small voice inside me says, no matter what I do I will never be the same as before ... It's all so hard ... I phoned Birthline today, and Linda spoke to me - she was helpful without being pushy ... I'll see her tomorrow so that we can talk over what is the best way forward for me.

(Birthline SA is one of the national pregnancy support services, telephone 08 8363 1444. Pregnancy support services advertised in other states are: VIC 03 9370 3933; NSW 02 9413 1341; WA 08 9459 4777; TAS 03 6224 2290; ACT 02 6247 5050; elsewhere 1800 134 863)

We as the Lutheran Church of Australia feel great empathy with women who have an unplanned and initially unwanted pregnancy. Many women in this situation feel pressured into an abortion because they see no real alternative. The poor may see only a bleak future, and the teenager may see her life as ruined, if they continue a pregnancy. Many are not adequately counselled and are not offered sufficient assistance to continue the pregnancy and to care for the child if they so prefer. Some women who do opt for an abortion later deeply regret this decision.

We believe that a woman considering an abortion deserves full information about what is happening inside her body, including the stage of foetal development, the process of abortion, and the physical and emotional risks of the procedure. She should have access to quality counselling on the alternatives to abortion, and access to adequate support services if she wishes to continue the pregnancy. All of us need correct information on all our alternatives if we are to exercise true freedom of choice. Many women will need ongoing support to stand up to partner and family pressure.

As Lutherans we believe that the human embryo is a member of the human family, created by God in his own image. We find significance in the fact that our Lord Jesus chose to enter the human world as an unborn baby.

Modern medical imaging shows us that a new human life begins at conception, when the egg and sperm fuse to form a new human being with its own unique genetic code. Three weeks after conception, a beating heart can be seen on an ultrasound scan. Another three weeks and a rapidly growing brain can be seen. Another three weeks and the foetus has a recognisably human form and can be seen to be male or female. Photographs like those by

Lennart Nilsson in the book *Being Born* by Sheila Kitzinger (Random House, 1990) illustrate this marvellous progression very clearly.

It is not surprising that from early times the Christian church has been opposed to abortion. Unborn babies are living human beings, and we believe that we do not have the right to end their lives when we please. However, this does not mean that decisions about abortion are ever simple. In the very few pregnancies where the mother has a life-threatening illness, or where pregnancy has resulted from rape or incest, or where the baby has a lethal abnormality, making the best choice can be even harder.

The Lutheran Church of Australia pledges its support to medical and nursing staff who because of their religious beliefs refuse to take part in an abortion except in exceptional circumstances. We also aim to help those who in good conscience refuse an abortion, even though they know that making this choice will present them with ongoing difficulties. Having advised what is morally right, we recognise the need to back up that advice with practical help - to love, encourage and stand beside those who make the hard choices, and to become channels of God's peace and care for them.

We see it as unfortunate that a culture for abortion has developed in Australia, with more than one in four pregnancies being terminated, despite the ready availability of contraception. Another concern is the increasing trend of antenatal screening leading to the abortion of the foetus with any disability. By extension, this can be seen as devaluing the lives of people who have a disability, of implying they should not have been born.

We are concerned with the mistaken belief of some women that abortion will make them 'un-pregnant', that it will restore them to who they were before their unintended pregnancy. But a woman is never the same once she is pregnant, whether the baby is aborted or kept, fostered or adopted. Groups such as The Caring Foundation (www.caringfoundation.com) find that abortion is not in a woman's own self-interest, and that a choice of life offers hope and a positive, expanded sense of self.

While we take a stand against abortion, we recognise that ultimately the pregnant woman must make her own choice as to whether to continue an unplanned pregnancy. We want to be welcoming, to offer comfort, and to help provide emotional healing to women who have had an abortion. Post-abortion grief can take years to emerge, and we wish to be messengers of hope to those who might otherwise despair. We know that we, with all people, often make mistakes and choose wrong paths in life. We also remember that our Lord Jesus Christ has taken all our sins on himself, and that he offers forgiveness and life to those carrying a burden of guilt, from whatever cause.

CSBQ statement on Abortion