

2007 LIFEWATCH SERMON: “STRIVING FOR HOLINESS AND PEACE IN A WORLD OF ABORTIONS”

Dr. William J. Abraham preached the following sermon at the Lifewatch Service of Worship on January 22, 2007—which took place in Simpson Memorial Chapel at The United Methodist Building in Washington, DC. One of the most prolific theologians in United Methodism today, Dr. Abraham is the Albert Cook Outler Professor of Wesley Studies at the Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University. As you will discover, Dr. Abraham’s sermon demands—and deserves—more than one reading. (PTS)

“Strive for peace with all men, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.” (Hebrews 12:14, RSV)

+In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

THE PRO-CHOICE MOVE: MORALITY TO POLITICS

My first, serious, intellectual encounter with the issue of abortion happened thirty years ago. In 1976, I was teaching Christian ethics and the philosophy of education at Culham College just outside Oxford. I had gone over to the Student Union to get lunch and had settled down to eat. A small group of students approached me and asked me to sign a petition in favor of abortion. I recall my immediate reaction. I decided, on the spot, to challenge their petition by stating an assumption and by asking a question. I proposed that they were making an assumption: the petitioners were assuming that a baby in the womb is not that different from a toenail. The baby, they seemed to assume, is simply a body part. I then asked my question: given that a baby in the womb is radically different from a toenail, abortion is radically different from the removal of body parts; it is the

destruction of human life; so why should I sign their petition? The students were stunned. They could neither challenge my assumption nor answer my question. I recall this encounter as a moment of moral decision on my part, and I have stood by that decision for thirty years.

I begin at this point because the moral core of the debate about abortion hinges on the destruction of human life. Casting this debate as a debate about choice is a strategy of evasion and deceit. Of course there is a choice to be made: the crucial choice, in the case of abortion, is whether to destroy deliberately a human life. But, of course, this is not what those committed to the so-called “pro-choice” agenda will face. They want to turn the debate into a discussion about human freedom, about freedom to choose, on the part of the mother. They disguise the choice of destroying life in an abstract, political freedom to choose—which is then decked out in the language of rights. Their rhetoric creates a political world in which they are free to choose to destroy human life and then take a moral holiday.

We can make this point another way: pro-choice advocates really want to use the coercive power of the state to license the taking of innocent human life. They hijack the language of freedom and choice, and turn it into a cloak for violence and death. This shift is a clever one. But it is a necessary one: those in favor of abortion know that they are in severe difficulties if they stick to the first-order, moral issue at hand.

At the moral level, I have nothing new to add to the discussion of abortion. We all know that there is a distinction between the baby and the mother. We all know that, on scientific grounds, everything essential to human life is there from conception. We all know that destroying defenseless, innocent human life is morally evil. We all know that even to risk the deliberate destruction of human life is morally unacceptable.

Even those who have doubts about the humanity of the baby in the womb are morally on thin ice.

Suppose I look over at my neighbor's yard and see an object floating in the swimming pool. Suppose I am not sure it is a human life. The object floating in the pool looks like a big doll, so I am not sure it is a human agent. Would that excuse my not leaping the fence and doing all I can to save a potential human life? Of course not! Even where there are doubts and queries, moral requirements are clear. How much more so when the issue involves destroying or saving human life! How much more so when we are dealing with agents created in God's own image and redeemed at a terrible cost by the Savior of the world! It is small wonder that pro-choice folks want to get away from morality and move to evasive, quasi-political concepts.

THE CHALLENGE FROM HEBREWS: HOLINESS

Yet the move to the political is inescapable. It is that terrain that I want to explore with you. The sermon text—Hebrews 12:14—provides the core of what is at issue for us. For Christians, there is a double imperative. We are called to “strive for peace with all,” and we are called to a life of “holiness.”

Here I want to send two telegrams on how holiness makes Christians, on the matter of abortion, different from the general society. First, holiness (or being set apart by God) means that Christians maintain a resolute commitment to the life of the unborn over against death. Second and equally important, holiness means that Christians do all we can to take care of the women who are tempted to opt for abortion. We must reach out to them with counseling, medical care, adoption services, and the like. The Church across the ages has a long and honorable history in this arena, and we need to sustain it. The call to holiness is demanding and expensive.

THE CHALLENGE FROM HEBREWS: PEACE

The imperative I want to explore, in what follows, is the call to strive for peace with all. We cannot but be activists in opposition to abortion and in commitment to save life. We know that this provokes intense opposition on a host of fronts. So the call to strive for peace with all is not a casual affair. It requires fortitude and reflection. Again, we occupy hostile space, so the challenge to strive for peace is a real one. This is the challenge I want to ponder.

We can begin by considering the matter of public space.

The recipients of the Epistle to the Hebrews experienced a hostile public space. This letter was written to Jewish Christians who were tempted—by all sorts of insults, hardships, persecutions, property losses, and death threats—to turn away from the life of holiness given to them through Christ. In many

ways the choice for them was simple: faithfulness or martyrdom. Given that there was no real room for political engagement, given that the state felt free to kill those who did not share its theology, the choice was a stark one: Christians had to choose between life and death, as Hebrews makes all too clear.

OUR SITUATION

In the West today, our situation is radically different. The narrative and description of our public space, our context, are very important. Some think we have moved from primitive Christianity to Christendom, and now back again to primitive Christianity. If we think this way, then we will see ourselves back in the days of the stark choice between faithfulness and martyrdom. Those who love combat will naturally gravitate to this understanding of our situation.

However, we can immediately see that this take on our situation is patently false. Indeed the state today oversees the slaughter of innocents, but the state itself is not using its own lethal power to kill us. In fact, the state has learned, over time, the virtue of tolerance from the history of Christendom. Having once used the lethal power of the state for religious purposes, we Christians have long since learned from the Gospel itself to back off and give the state its own space. In this we come closer to St. Paul, who understands that the state, whether it recognizes it or not, has its own role to play under the judgment of God in history (Romans 13). The state has been happy to oblige and take the gifts we have offered it.

Moreover, the state of the United States of America has been smart enough not to impose a new theology upon us. There are two popular ways, in Christian circles, to contest the claim that the state has not been foolish enough to impose a new theology upon us. Some say we are living in a New Empire run by Christian fundamentalists, free-market capitalists, neo-conservatives, or some combination of the same. Others think we are in a Nation State that has its own secular ideology and idols. Either way we have to contend with state theologies that Christians should challenge at their foundations.

Both of these proposals are empirically mistaken. For one thing, the New Empire has no theological clothes: it exists in the eye of its beholders as a mixture of theology, economic theory, and political philosophy that cannot be said to be a state-imposed theology in any serious sense of that term. We can say the same about the ideology of the Nation State: the Nation State, as we have had it in the United States of America, simply does not have a theology. The very use of the language of secular ideology and idols shows the bankruptcy of any theological description of the Nation State, as we have known it. Our politicians, whatever they may say, are functional atheists. However, there is

something more deeply flawed in these analyses: both options are simply obsolete. They are false descriptions of the world we actually inhabit. We live neither in a New Empire nor in a Nation State.

The state in the West has itself changed dramatically in the last generation. It has moved from a Nation State to become a Market State. Nation States can control their boundaries, their economies, their cultures, and their security. They seek to provide, in varying degrees, healthcare, education, and old-age security. A cocktail of changes in communications, technology, socialism's fate, and globalization has undermined Nation States. In their place we have Market States. Market States concentrate on maximizing opportunity. They balance public and private means of delivering public goods, and they look to the market place and its practices as a criterion of success in what they do. This is true of Moscow, London, Tokyo, Brussels, Berlin, Dublin, Seoul, and so on. Politics and religion reflect the background music of the Market State. So we have market churches, market preachers, and market-research-driven politicians. Even philanthropy is now administered on the model of market practices. We can rant and rave against all this, but this is where we now live.

So, the stark choice for Christians in the United States is not between faithfulness and martyrdom, as it was for the first readers of Hebrews. The stark choice for us is between striving for peace with all or not. Today, striving for peace with all has to be done in a world that is full of contested views that ricochet in echo chambers of controversy morning, noon, and night. The old certainties of Empire and Nation State are gone forever, and we must now find our way in alien territory. Living in a Market-State democracy, we are at once free to engage in the exercise of our varied rights; yet in a pluralistic world, we have to share the exercise of those rights with people who have moral and theological convictions radically different from ours. We are in, but not of, the state. It is in this world that we must now strive for peace with all.

LET'S GET PRACTICAL: HOW?

How should we strive for peace with all people? Let me make three suggestions.

First, our top priority is to live into, and out of, the peace of God. This peace is a given, a matter of grace. Its origin has a name: the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The peace of God is given by the Son through the agency of the Holy Spirit. It has an order of salvation: justification, new birth,

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assurance, and sanctification. It has a community: the Church, the Body of Jesus Christ. This peace is mediated through a rich tapestry of materials, persons, and practices: the

Scriptures, the Creed, the saints, the teachers of the Great Tradition, prayer, the sacraments, and the like. Through all of these ways and means and media, we are given a peace “which passes all understanding” (Philippians 4:7). So we sally forth into the Market State with a peace that the world cannot give and cannot take away.

Beginning with God's peace, our work for life should be undertaken with the whole company of the Church across space and time. Each tradition, within the Church catholic, has its own contribution to bring to the common work for life. Roman Catholics bring a long, brilliant intellectual heritage. Baptists bring a sense of urgency and simplicity. Methodists bring a passion for conferencing and organizing. Pentecostals bring vibrant enthusiasm. All Christians should stand together, bear one another's burdens, bind up the wounds of their traditions, and work resolutely under the banner of the Gospel.

Second, we sally forth in the company of our brothers and sisters in other faiths. Of course, there will be differences between, say, Christians, Jews, and Moslems. Here we need to be theologically clear, if controversial. Contrary to what is commonly said, Christians, Jews, and Moslems believe in the same God. We all believe in one and only one Creator of the universe. And we all believe that human agents are precious creatures that come from the hand of God. Such claims are not a matter of political expediency. They are a matter of conceptual fact. Of course, Christians, Jews, and Moslems differ radically. We disagree on the content of divine revelation. We disagree on what God has done for the salvation of the world. And we disagree on how to articulate how God is best understood doctrinally. However, these differences should in no way undermine the crucial theological point that Christians, Jews, and Moslems share a common, if minimal, vision of God and human agents. It would be theologically wrong-headed and politically imprudent to ignore this. On the issue of life and abortion, we can work in peace together with other robust theists in our midst.

In fact, I think that the bursting of Islam into our midst—and I use the term bursting deliberately—is a momentous development in the

PLEASE JOIN US ON THE FIRST TUESDAY OF EACH MONTH IN PRAYING AND FASTING FOR LIFEWATCH'S CONTINUING MINISTRY.

West. This way of mentioning Islam, of course, opens up an enormous topic that cannot be pursued here. I, for one, have absolutely no illusions about the extraordinary challenges involved. However, it is now patently clear that the crowbar of history has shredded the common assumption, that secularism brings peace, that has governed our life in the West over the last century and longer. In other words, Islam has put itself in the pole position in the race to think afresh about the legitimacy and nature of democracy in the future. Religion is back in the public square, and we have no excuse for hiding away in sectarian sullenness or pride. The door is ajar, even though some want to slam it shut in our faces.

Third, we must move with caution. We can now afford to take a fresh and constructive look at the efforts to exclude our moral and theological convictions from the public square. Think of the leading secular principles that have been proposed for keeping us tongue-tied and house-trained. John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) argued that all arguments about government intervention be governed by considerations of harm. John Rawls (1921-2002) is generally understood to have insisted that all

voices in the public square should operate in secular mode in the sense that public statements be couched in terms that are understood by all rather than only by those tied to a particular religious tradition. According to Rawls, a veil of ignorance sets aside our particular identities and prepares us to participate in politics. More recently, Ronald Dworkin (1931-) has insisted on a principle of governmental neutrality—that is, that the state restrict itself to considerations of human dignity and, as a corollary, that the state seek to create a public order in which citizens are maximally free to live the lives they freely choose for themselves.

We can readily reel off the obvious problems embedded in the moves suggested by Mills, Rawls, and Dworkin. Each of these options smuggles its own conception of humanity and morality into its rules for political engagement in the public square. Moreover, the life of the state is embedded in a host of cultural and moral commitments that simply cannot be reduced to the minimalist, political principles developed by Mills, Rawls, and Dworkin.

However, we can still see the positive insights these traditions of political thought and practice carry. We should argue that governments should not apologize for intervening in cases where we cause harm to one another. One of the first duties of the

state is, in fact, to protect its people from harm. In our deliberations inside and outside the Church about political issues, we should rely on arguments that range across traditions. Not all of what we say will appeal to everybody, but we should certainly deploy genuine arguments that have to be taken seriously by everybody. And we should do all we can to avoid imposing, by legal means, our way of life on others. We learned long ago that coercion is a bad way to make progress in politics. So we should plunder the Egyptians (or the political philosophers!) in explaining our proposals in the public domain.

PRIVATE PASSIVITY, NO!
PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT, YES!

What does all of this have to do with striving for peace with all? The connection is this. We are in a fight for life. In this fight, there is a place for prophetic confrontation, for effective polemic, for appropriate protest, and for political engagement and action. Ironically, all of these options are made possible by the Market State. So we are not passive in our commitment to protecting the life of the

unborn. However, just as the call to holiness and the commitment to life are non-negotiable, so too is the call to strive for peace. If we are to strive for peace in the Market State, where

everything is contested, then we must be prepared to engage rigorously in the intellectual discussion that rages all around us. We should explore the valid insights of our opponents, while taking leave of their mistakes.

Let me put the point more generally. If we are to save lives, we cannot avoid the hard work of exploring fearlessly and comprehensively the moral, theological, political, and philosophical issues that must be addressed. In the Market State, we must win our way to life, in part, with the weapons of wit and wisdom. These are clean and honorable weapons. So there can be no excuse for short cuts and religious labor-saving tricks at this point. We must do all we can to be intellectually street-smart and virtuous in our public discourse and engagement. We must irenically and patiently love God and our neighbors with all our minds. Such living is the best, and the right, way to live. It is also a duty we owe to God and neighbor. Wit and wisdom are also a good contribution that we make to a world that all too readily takes to propaganda, spin, deceit, and even violence to resolve the differences that inevitably crop up in society. It is one way to uphold a Culture of Life and oppose a Culture of Death. Above all, the use of wit and wisdom is essential if we are to make the political progress that is an integral

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element in the saving of lives in the political world we inhabit. In the Market State, engaging the intellectual space and culture, within which decisions of life and death are made, is essential to saving life.

This kind of reflection may seem terribly abstract and far away from the horrors of abortion, from the urgent need to see our world abandon one of the great evils of our time. This observation is a dangerous half-truth that should be discarded without delay. Exactly the same objection could have been lodged against the writer to the Hebrews, who tells us to strive for peace and holiness. He knew that there were no quick fixes, in the political arena, to the saving of life. He and his readers rescued children left to die in the cold, and they argued the case for their convictions and practices in the public arena. Even in a hostile Empire that killed them, they stood their ground and eventually won over the political establishment to truth and goodness on a host of issues.

As I have mentioned, we no longer live in the world of either Empire or Nation State. In the providence of God, we occupy a radically different time and place. The state does not kill us. It is milder and smarter in its actions. It sanctions the slaughter of the innocents and wraps its evil in a cloak of rhetorical deceit about freedom of choice. The court chaplains of this holocaust, of course, are all too ready to provide spurious justifications for such evil. We long ago saw through their deceit and complicity. In this time and place we are irrevocably committed to a life of holiness. This is not a passive holiness. It is an active holiness that seeks to bring an end to the shedding of innocent blood. Not surprisingly, this is also a holiness that provokes vicious opposition.

In response to such opposition, we will keep our nerve, for we are also called to strive for peace. Striving for peace is a complex practice. Striving for peace calls for intentional immersion in the life of God. We begin there with a peace “which passes all understanding” (Philippians 4:7) as we move out into the political arena. Striving for peace in that arena requires joining hands across Christian churches and across other religions in defense of the life of the unborn. Striving for peace in that arena also requires active engagement in the political order informed by the deepest intellectual resources and skills we can muster. Happily, our current political arrangements permit such striving for peace. The grace of God makes possible such striving for peace. The evil of abortion makes imperative such striving for peace.

+In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.♥

THE BRIEF AND THE DECISION: UMC AND RCRC

The last issue of Lifewatch (December 1, 2006) contained “On The United Methodist Church and RCRC: A Brief to the Judicial Council.” It attempted to lay out the irrefutable truth that The United Methodist Church and the Religious Coalition on Reproductive Choice (RCRC) hold and advance significantly different positions on abortion. Therefore, according to the brief carried in Lifewatch, the Minnesota Annual Conference should not be allowed to join the Minnesota RCRC.

On October 27, 2006 the Judicial Council handed down Decision No. 1047 on this matter. The Council’s “Digest,” or bottom line, of the decision reads: “The Minnesota Annual Conference may officially join the Minnesota Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice.”

Furthermore, regarding Decision No. 1047, the Judicial Council’s “Analysis and Rationale” explains: “The Bishop’s [that is, Bishop Sally Dyck’s] decision of law is affirmed. Paragraph 161 (J) states that The United Methodist Church does not affirm abortion as an acceptable means of birth control and rejects it as a means of gender selection. It further states that the church opposes the use of late-term abortions known as dilation and extraction (partial-birth abortion) and calls for the end of this practice except when the physical life of the mother is in danger. This paragraph is clear on the church’s stance on abortion but it in no way prohibits a conference involvement with an organization that may differ with the position of The United Methodist Church.

“An annual conference may hold membership in organizations it determines to be appropriate to its work and not in violation of the Book of Discipline. Some examples of this include regional and state ecumenical bodies, organizations on various social issues such as prison reform, children’s initiatives and environmental concerns, Scouting programs, appropriate organizations in central conferences, and various other mission and outreach agencies.” (www.umc.org)

Of course the Lifewatch community is disappointed by this ruling. While respecting the judicial restraint that the Judicial Council seems to exercise in this decision, Lifewatch also believes this ruling is based on legal permissibility rather than on moral substance. In other words, this ruling is founded on church law only (actually, on the absence of church law only), while it neglects the church’s teaching and history, nature and mission. That is to be expected of the Judicial Council.

The Lifewatch community should not, however, be altogether dour and sour about this decision. After all, through it, the Judicial Council seems to

acknowledge that The United Methodist Church and RCRC have substantively different positions on abortion.

Reporting on Decision No. 1047, Neill Caldwell, of the United Methodist News Service, also discerned the Judicial Council's awareness of conflicts of purpose between United Methodism and RCRC. He wrote: "The Judicial Council... upheld Bishop Sally Dyck's decision that the Minnesota Conference may officially join the Minnesota Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice even if some of the group's stances disagree with the position of The United Methodist Church." (UMNS, November 6, 2006, www.umc.org, emphasis added)

If United Methodism's Judicial Council and news service are beginning to note that The United Methodist Church and RCRC are at cross purposes, progress is being made. It is slow, to be sure. But it is still progress. (Paul T. Stallsworth)♥

OUR RESPONSIBILITY AND YOURS

The Taskforce of United Methodists on Abortion and Sexuality—or Lifewatch—has a responsibility, a calling, a vocation. First and last, according to our mission statement, Lifewatch exists "to win the hearts and minds of United Methodists, to engage in abortion-prevention through theological, pastoral, and social emphases that support human life." Lifewatch gladly takes up this task each quarter by attempting to witness to the Gospel of Life through the pages of Lifewatch.

For nearly twenty years, Lifewatch has offered its witness to the Gospel of Life within, and beyond, The United Methodist Church. It has done so from a certain perspective, a particular point of view. The motivating and informing theology behind Lifewatch has been evangelical, orthodox, and ecumenical. To the careful reader, this has not been a secret.

Like it or not, some will not accept, let alone be persuaded by, the Lifewatch witness simply because

of Lifewatch's theological "baggage," as they say. That is unfortunate, but true. Whether or not Lifewatch's theological "baggage" is acceptable to every reader, still the sanctity of unborn human life has been taught throughout Christian history, and this sanctity impresses the conscience of every person, Christian and non-Christian alike.

Therefore, it is crucially important that those within the Lifewatch community—who have theological commitments that are similar to, and different from, those that appear in Lifewatch—take seriously the Gospel of Life, struggle with it, and proclaim it in their best terms. Your witness to the Gospel of Life, if it is to be authentic and persuasive to others, must arise from the most responsible theological position possible. Therefore, all are encouraged to mine each issue of Lifewatch for what is most faithful to the Gospel of Life.

In the political worlds of our society, it appears that some old assumptions and alliances are breaking down. Some Democrats are becoming more boldly pro-life. At the same time, some Republicans are drifting in the opposite direction. Similar phenomena are probably occurring in The United Methodist Church as well. That is, many United Methodists are probably becoming less predictable in their theological commitments. It well could be that some theologically liberal United Methodists are trending in a Gospel-of-Life direction.

With this in mind, remember your responsibility. Receive the Gospel of Life deeply into your thinking. But make it yours. And witness to it, out of your theological perspective and experience, with wisdom and love. Again, that is your responsibility.

Our responsibility, Lifewatch's responsibility, is to hold up the Gospel of Life, quarter in and quarter out, from the theological perspective we hold. We hope and pray this will help you, whatever theological perspective you might hold, to fulfill your responsibility. (Paul T. Stallsworth)♥

THREE MODEL RESOLUTIONS FOR YOUR 2007 ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Below are three model resolutions. We call them "model resolutions" because they are just that—models of resolutions that you are encouraged to edit, to add to, and/or subtract from. There is nothing sacred about the language or the content of the resolutions which we have put before you. In conversation with others in your Annual Conference, you can make these model resolutions yours, and present them to your 2007 Annual Conference for deliberation and decision. And through it all, may our Lord be with you. (Paul T. Stallsworth)

Victims of Choice Conference Early United Methodist Church, Early, IA

March 16/Friday
1-4 p.m. for Clergy Only and 5-9 p.m. for All

March 17/Saturday
10 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. for All

\$75.00 Registration (Includes Book and Meal)

For Additional Information:
Call (712)-273-5241 or Email:
enumc@ruralwaves.us

RESOLUTION:

AMEND THE BOOK OF DISCIPLINE'S
PARAGRAPH ON ABORTION (161J)

WHEREAS, the Church has consistently witnessed and ministered, through the ages, to protect the unborn human life and the mother from abortion;

WHEREAS, the United States Supreme Court's 1973 decision, Roe v. Wade, overturned state abortion laws and established abortion rights throughout the United States;

WHEREAS, from 1973 until 2002, over 42 million abortions have been performed in American society ("Facts on Induced Abortion in the United States," Guttmacher Institute, Facts in Brief, June 2006, www.guttmacher.org/pubs/fb_induced_abortion.pdf);

WHEREAS, a particular sentence in Paragraph 161J of The Book of Discipline (2004)—specifically, "In continuity with past Christian teaching, we recognize tragic conflicts of life with life that may justify abortion, and in such cases we support the legal option of abortion under proper medical procedures."—can be interpreted so as to identify United Methodist social teaching on abortion with the "pro-choice" legal position of Roe v. Wade;

WHEREAS, the aforementioned sentence from Paragraph 161J has allowed official agencies of The United Methodist Church to promote the legality of abortion not just in certain tragic circumstances, but in all circumstances; and

WHEREAS, Paragraph 161J expresses moral disapproval of most abortions that are performed, while the aforementioned sentence from Paragraph 161J has been, and is, used by official agencies of The United Methodist Church to approve all judicial decisions, and legislative actions, that promote abortion rights;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the 2007 session of the _____ Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church hereby charges its Conference Secretary, using the entire rationale stated above, to petition, in a timely and appropriate manner, the 2008 General Conference to amend Paragraph 161J of The Book of Discipline to read: "*Abortion*—The beginning of life and the ending of life are the God-given boundaries of human existence. While individuals have always had some degree of control over when they would die, they now have the awesome power to determine when and even whether new individuals will be born. Our belief in the sanctity of unborn human life makes us reluctant to approve abortion. But we are equally bound to respect the sacredness of the life and well-

being of the mother, for whom devastating damage may result from an unacceptable pregnancy. In continuity with past Christian teaching, we recognize tragic conflicts of the physical life of the unborn with the physical life of the mother that may justify abortion, and in such cases we support the legal option of abortion under proper medical procedures. We cannot affirm abortion as an acceptable means of birth control, and we unconditionally reject it as a means of gender selection. We oppose the use of late-term abortion known as dilation and extraction (partial-birth abortion) and call for the end of this practice except when the physical life of the mother is in danger and no other medical procedure is available, or in the case of severe fetal anomalies incompatible with life. We call all Christians to a searching and prayerful inquiry into the sorts of conditions that may warrant abortion. We commit our Church to continue to provide nurturing ministries to those who terminate a pregnancy, to those in the midst of a crisis pregnancy, and to those who give birth. We particularly encourage the Church, the government, and social service agencies to support and facilitate the option of adoption. (See Paragraph 161L.) Governmental laws and regulations do not provide all the guidance required by the informed Christian conscience. Therefore, a decision concerning abortion should be made only after thoughtful and prayerful consideration by the parties involved, with medical, pastoral, and other appropriate counsel."

[add language]

RESOLUTION: WITHDRAW THE UNITED
METHODIST CHURCH FROM
THE RELIGIOUS COALITION FOR
REPRODUCTIVE CHOICE

WHEREAS, the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC) is dedicated to defending and expanding abortion rights—that is, legal rights to all abortions, whatever the circumstances, without exception—in American law;

WHEREAS, "RCRC was founded in 1973 to safeguard the newly won constitutional right to abortion," according to The Reverend Carlton W. Veazey, RCRC president and CEO (www.rcrc.org/about/index.cfm, 12/10/06);

WHEREAS, RCRC's founding mission remains intact: "The primary struggle for reproductive choice has shifted to the state level, with new legislation limiting access to reproductive health care traveling from state to state until enough momentum develops to bring it to the national arena. In such a climate, we need healthy state [RCRC] organizations so that we can stop each new threat as it arises" (www.rcrc.org).

[org/getinvolved/affiliate.cfm](http://www.rcrc.org/getinvolved/affiliate.cfm), 12/10/06);

WHEREAS, RCRC works for abortion rights in any and all circumstances, while The United Methodist Church teaches that moral discernment, on matters related to abortion, is essential; for the church “[believes] in the sanctity of unborn human life,” “cannot affirm abortion as an acceptable means of birth control,” and “unconditionally reject[s] [abortion] as a means of gender selection” (The Book of Discipline [2004], Paragraph 161J);

WHEREAS, RCRC consistently lobbies government for the preservation of partial-birth abortion rights, while The United Methodist Church “oppose[s] the use of late-term abortion known as dilation and extraction (partial-birth abortion) and call[s] for the end of this practice” with rare exceptions (Paragraph 161J);

WHEREAS, United Methodists hold various political positions on abortion, and therefore agencies of The United Methodist Church should not be permitted to join a particular political lobby on abortion, such as RCRC; and

WHEREAS, Bishop Timothy W. Whitaker, of the Florida Area, has declared: “At the 2004 General Conference, the church endorsed our [United Methodist] agencies’ continued participation in the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice without much of a debate about how participation in this coalition compromises our public witness against abortion” (“Do No Harm!,” a sermon);

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the 2007 session of the _____ Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church hereby charges its Conference Secretary, using the entire rationale stated above, to petition, in a timely and appropriate manner, the 2008 General Conference to withdraw immediately the General Board of Church and Society and the General Board of Global Ministries/ Women’s Division from the membership of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice.

RESOLUTION: DELETE “114. SUPPORT FOR THE RELIGIOUS COALITION FOR REPRODUCTIVE CHOICE” FROM THE BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS (2004)

WHEREAS, the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC) is dedicated to defending and expanding abortion rights—that is, legal rights to all abortions, whatever the circumstances, without exception—in American law;

WHEREAS, “RCRC was founded in 1973 to safeguard the newly won constitutional right to abortion,” according to The Reverend Carlton W.

Veazey, RCRC president and CEO (www.rcrc.org/about/index.cfm, 12/10/06);

WHEREAS, RCRC’s founding mission remains intact: “The primary struggle for reproductive choice has shifted to the state level, with new legislation limiting access to reproductive health care traveling from state to state until enough momentum develops to bring it to the national arena. In such a climate, we need healthy state [RCRC] organizations so that we can stop each new threat as it arises” (www.rcrc.org/getinvolved/affiliate.cfm, 12/10/06);

WHEREAS, RCRC works for abortion rights in any and all circumstances, while The United Methodist Church teaches that moral discernment, on matters related to abortion, is essential; for the church “[believes] in the sanctity of unborn human life,” “cannot affirm abortion as an acceptable means of birth control,” and “unconditionally reject[s] [abortion] as a means of gender selection” (The Book of Discipline [2004], Paragraph 161J);

WHEREAS, RCRC consistently lobbies government for the preservation of partial-birth abortion rights, while The United Methodist Church “oppose[s] the use of late-term abortion known as dilation and extraction (partial-birth abortion) and call[s] for the end of this practice” with rare exceptions (Paragraph 161J);

WHEREAS, United Methodists hold various political positions on abortion, and therefore agencies of The United Methodist Church should not be permitted to join a particular political lobby on abortion, such as RCRC; and

WHEREAS, Bishop Timothy W. Whitaker, of the Florida Area, has declared: “At the 2004 General Conference, the church endorsed our [United Methodist] agencies’ continued participation in the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice without much of a debate about how participation in this coalition compromises our public witness against abortion” (“Do No Harm!,” a sermon);

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the 2007 session of the _____ Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church hereby charges its Conference Secretary, using the entire rationale stated above, to petition, in a timely and appropriate manner, the 2008 General Conference to delete “114. Support for the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice” from The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church (2004).

PLEASE VISIT WWW.LIFEWATCH.ORG FOR A PDF OF THESE RESOLUTIONS TO EMAIL TO YOUR ANNUAL CONFERENCE DELEGATE.

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- Please remember that your individual contributions are especially important to the continuing ministry of Lifewatch. Indeed your faithful support, for the advancement of the Gospel of Life, is cause for our heartfelt gratitude. Your checks can be sent to Lifewatch/P.O. Box 306/Cottleville, MO 63338. Also, you can gift Lifewatch through PayPal at www.lifewatch.org.
- The National Pro-Life Religious Council (NPRC) has published an ecumenical, devotional booklet. Entitled 30 Days for Life: A Prayer Devotional, the booklet is composed of thirty devotions—each of which includes a Biblical passage, a brief commentary, and a prayer. Leaders of various pro-life organizations, within the various churches, wrote the devotions. For your copy, send a request and \$2.00 to Lifewatch/P.O. Box 306/Cottleville, MO 63338.
- Roe Reality Check is a simple, well documented booklet on abortion in America. It comes from The Second Look Project—a second look at abortion and *Roe v. Wade*, that is— at the Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities, which is located within the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. For the most part, Roe Reality Check consists of fifteen “myths” about abortion, which are then answered by documented “facts.” Before being compiled in a booklet, these fifteen “reality checks” were published as postcards that were sent to members of the U.S. House of Representatives, the U.S. Senate, and the national media, and to interested others. They have also

appeared as posters and billboards in urban, public places and spaces.

For your information, here are most of the myths about abortion. (1) “High Court Rules Abortions Legal the First 3 Months.” (2) “Most abortions are done because of maternal or fetal health problems, or in cases of rape or incest.” (3) “Most Americans favor U.S. abortion law.” (4) “*Roe* said the Constitution includes a right to abortion.” (5) “Supreme Court justices have [not] criticized *Roe v. Wade*.” (6) “The U.S. abortion rate is relatively low.” (7) “Most American women support *Roe v. Wade*.” (8) “Most abortions are done before fetal organs are functioning.” (9) “U.S. abortion law has not encouraged the use of abortion as a method of birth control.” (10) Abortion is legal only when the fetus is in the womb.” (11) “If *Roe v. Wade* is overturned, abortion will automatically be illegal in the U.S.” (12) “*Roe v. Wade* is only about a woman’s right to abortion, not about a right to take life in general.” (13) “Abortion is standard medical practice; only religious hospitals and some physicians refuse to provide it.” (14) “*Roe v. Wade* empowers women to choose freely whether abortion is their best option.”

For your copy of Roe Reality Check, simply go to www.secondlookproject.org/postcards/RoeBooklet-10-21-05.pdf and print the document (on both sides of the printed pages). This will produce pages that can be folded into a booklet. Roe Reality Check is a project that deserves wide distribution within and beyond your congregation.

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I wish to order: ___ copies of The Right Choice (\$12.00/copy); ___ copies of The Church and Abortion (\$5.00/copy); ___ copies of Thinking Theologically about Abortion (\$7.00/copy); ___ copies of Holy Abortion? (\$8.00/copy); ___ copies of The Jericho Plan (\$8.00/copy); and ___ copies of 30 Days for Life (\$2.00/copy) Price includes shipping.

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● The Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC) believes that, by lobbying against any and all government efforts to limit abortion, it is protecting American society from religion, religious people, and religious communities imposing religious opinion on the society at large. Responding to this line of thinking in March of 1976, Archbishop Joseph Bernardin declared to the House Judiciary Committee: "[Abortion] is not wrong simply because the Catholic Church or any church says it is wrong. Abortion is wrong in and of itself. The obligation to safeguard human life arises not from religious or sectarian doctrine, but from universal moral imperatives concerning human dignity, the right to life, and the responsibility of government to protect basic human rights." This quotation is from "Criss Cross: Democrats, Republicans, and Abortion," a fascinating article by George McKenna, in The Human Life Review (Summer/Fall 2006).

● "In the end, I can only tell my listeners a story—a parable. It's a little jewel of a short story by Ursula K. Le Guin called 'The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas.' In her mythical city of Omelas, 'bright-towered by the sea,' all is perfection. There is accomplishment without effort, love without sacrifice, faith without clergy, victory without courage, art without labor, triumph with never a defeat...

"There is just one small catch: 'In a basement under one of the beautiful public buildings of Omelas, or perhaps in the cellar of one of its spacious private homes, there is a room. It has one locked door, and no window...' And in this closed-off room, there is a neglected, abandoned, feeble-minded, starved child whom all must agree to leave so.

"Those are the terms, and, when you think about it, they are the only terms on which a Utopia can be constructed by man: Absolute perfection—well, almost absolute—in exchange for paying no heed to the evil at its center. That's the price of any utopia, whether it's a Third Reich, worker's paradise, or Plato's Republic, in which all the decisions are made by a select group of guardians who will forever keep everything the absolutely perfect same.

"Strangely enough, there are those who walk away from Ursula Le Guin's perfect city. To quote the author: 'They keep walking, and walk straight out of the city of Omelas, through the beautiful gates...they walk ahead into the darkness, and they do not come back. The place they go towards is a place even less imaginable to most of us than the city of happiness. I cannot describe it at all. It is possible that it does not exist. But they seem to know where they are going, the ones who walk away from Omelas.

"Call them pilgrims, sojourners, striking out with nothing more than faith. But with nothing less. And this year [at the 2006 National Right to Life Convention] they came together for a few days in Nashville, Tenn." —From "Among Pro-lifers" by Paul Greenberg, Arkansas Democrat-Gazette editorial, June 28, 2006; and in The Human Life Review (Summer/Fall 2006).♥