

Abortion: Church of England Statements

General Synod 2005

'The Church of England combines strong opposition to abortion with a recognition that there can be - strictly limited - conditions under which it may be morally preferable to any available alternative.' (Briefing Paper prepared by the Mission and Public Affairs Council [MPA] for General Synod, February 2005)

'In the rare occasions when abortion is carried out beyond 24 weeks, 'Serious foetal handicap' should be interpreted strictly as applying to those conditions where survival is possible only for a very short period' (1993 Resolution of General Synod, quoted in 2005 briefing paper)

Press Statement 30/8/11 (drafted by MPA)

- *The Church of England combines strong opposition to abortion with a recognition that there can be strictly limited conditions under which it may be morally preferable to any available alternative. This is based on our view that the foetus is a human life with the potential to develop relationships, think, pray, choose and love.*
- *We would like to see a drastic reduction in the number of abortions carried out and stricter interpretation of abortion law.*
- *The case for further reductions of the time limit for abortions should be sympathetically considered on the basis of advances in neo-natal care.*
- *Every possible support, especially by church members, needs to be given to those who are pregnant in difficult circumstances.*

Women facing an unwanted pregnancy realise the gravity of the decision they face and do not take it lightly: all abortions are tragedies, since they entail judging one person's welfare against that of another (even if one is, as yet, unborn). We would like to see more support for them including access to information, advice and counselling from a wide range of providers that would enable them to make a fully informed decision.

*This Government has found it difficult to successfully tackle the problem of teenage pregnancy. Some may think that increased abortion rates for teenagers show that teenagers have been able to get access to advice and help when facing unplanned pregnancy. However we can not view this as a success. Money and energies have to be spent in tackling the root causes. The cross-Government strategy is to cut under 18 **conception** and we would support that intention. Long term methods must involve strategies to avoid conception, such as good sex education accompanied by good relationship education for both boys and girls, increasing hope and choices for girls in areas of deprivation, decreasing poverty and a climate where people talk about responsible relationships, rather than viewing abortion as a readily accessible solution to personal or social problems.*

Press Statement 10/1/13 (drafted by MPA)

The Church of England combines strong opposition to abortion with a recognition that there can be strictly limited conditions under which it may be morally preferable to any available alternative. This is based on our view that the foetus is a human life with the potential to develop relationships, think, pray, choose and love. Most women facing an unwanted pregnancy realise the gravity of the decision they face and do not take it lightly: all abortions are tragedies, since they entail judging one individual's welfare against that of another (even if one is, as yet, unborn). We would like to see more support for women including access to information, advice and counselling, from a wide range of providers that would enable them to make a fully informed decision.

Parliamentary Inquiry on Abortion and Disability March 2013

'Ground E is discriminatory on two counts. In the first instance, it permits abortions to be carried out solely on the basis of disability; secondly, it removes the twenty-four week time limit for abortions in cases of disability. We do not believe that such discrimination, founded on the risk of disability, is justifiable. While not extending to foetuses, the concerns addressed and the spirit behind equality legislation are contrary to the provisions of Ground E which also militates against advances made in recent decades to value individuals with disability.'
(MPA Response to Parliamentary Inquiry into Abortion on the Grounds of Disability, March 2013)

There is something profoundly disturbing in our current contradictory stance which says that people living with disability are valued, respected and cherished, but that disability in and of itself represents a valid ground for abortion. In the end, there is a world of difference

between an abortion taking place because a diagnosis of foetal disability adversely affects the mental health of a pregnant woman and stating that foetal disability is in and of itself a ground for abortion. (Speech by +Bristol in House of Lords (drafted by MPA) on Abortion (disability Equality) Bill, October 2016)

Press Statement on Abortion and Sex-Selection 7/10/13 (drafted by MPA)

The Church of England is opposed to abortion on the grounds of gender. While we recognise the legal complexities involved in the cases recently considered by the DPP we are concerned that his decision might be interpreted as legitimising this practice. It is important that the law is clarified on this point, ensuring that the sex of a child is never considered to constitute grounds for discrimination.

Press Statement on Abortion and Sex Selection 4/11/13 (drafted by MPA)

The Church of England is opposed to abortion on the grounds of gender. It is important that the law is clarified on this point, ensuring that the sex of a child is never considered to constitute grounds for discrimination.

Press Statement Abortion and Freedom of Conscience 18/12/14 (drafted by MPA)

The Supreme Court (2014 judgement in Greater Glasgow Health Board v Doogan and Wood UKSC 68) has struck a balance that enables those with conscientious objection to refrain from ‘supporting’ abortion while enabling them to give care to women who, for whatever reason, choose to have their pregnancies terminated. This balance is in keeping with the Church of England’s position of opposition to abortion combined with offering care, support and compassion to women.

It is essential that freedom of conscience as detailed by the Supreme Court is recognised and upheld within the NHS and by other health providers. In particular, it is important that exercising the right to conscientious objection should not be penalised in any fashion either by particular Trusts or within health professions. Exercising the right to freedom of conscience must not be a bar, formally or informally, to employment or promotion, nor ought it to result in any unfavourable treatment or harassment within the workplace.

General Synod July 2017: Answer to question with regard to marking 50th anniversary of 1967 Abortion Act

The Church of England combines principled opposition to abortion with a recognition that there can be strictly limited conditions under which it may be morally preferable to any available alternative. This is based on our view that the foetus is a human life with the potential to develop relationships, think, pray, choose and love.

Women facing unwanted pregnancies realise the gravity of the decision they face: all abortions are tragedies, since they entail judging one individual's welfare against that of another (even if one is, as yet, unborn).

Every possible support, especially by church members, needs to be given to those who are pregnant in difficult circumstances and care, support and compassion must be shown to all, whether or not they continue with their pregnancy.

Brendan McCarthy 3rd November 2017