

“The Lord Is with You”
A Word of Counsel to the Church
The Sanctity of Nascent Life

The Joint Commission on Theology and Doctrine
North American Lutheran Church
Lutheran CORE

In the name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The beginning of human existence, i.e., nascent life, carries in it the fullness of the genetic code, the complete chromosomal material of an individual. The strengths and characteristics given to us by God have not yet blossomed for all the world to see, yet they are fully present in the beauty of His love. “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.” (Jeremiah 1:5) Luther's Small Catechism proclaims, “I believe that God has created me and all that exists,” so in faith we continue to proclaim that our life, and every life, comes from God and belongs to God. In our earthly dependency upon the womb of our mothers for protection, nourishment, and love from the first moments of our lives, we see in the creation of each life the shape of faith. We will always be fully dependent upon God for life, for shelter, and for mercy—the God who uses men and women to bring forth every generation of His creation.

How we in the North American Lutheran Church and Lutheran CORE speak about the dignity of nascent life is indicative of so much more. As the fullness of God’s mercy calls us into newness in each day, we come to know that no day in our lives is beyond His care. God himself has given us a pattern by which we know His love: the conception, gestation, and birth of our Lord Jesus. As we reflect upon when life begins and what life means, we look to what God has done in sending His Son to live among us from conception, to death, to resurrected life.

In the Annunciation of the Good News given to Mary, the Mother of our Lord, we come to know the gift of every life in a new way, and we come to know the holiness of her womb as a sanctuary of mercy for all humankind. She who is our Mother in the faith shelters the One who is the Savior of the world with her very body, a model of love beyond all fear, of obedience beyond all personal security, of faith in the One who is yet unseen.

In the self-emptying (kenotic) movement of God in the incarnation, He was never more vulnerable, more helpless than when He was *in utero*, swaddled in amniotic fluid. He was also never more intimately protected, swaddled in the myriad layers of a mother’s love. It is the

vision of this love that is ever so needed in this day—a death defying love, an eternal love, a fierce love, a sacrificing love. It is this vision that we are called to bear for the sake of generations to come. For in the disordered loving of a fallen world that removes sexual intercourse from the fidelity, trust, and delight of the marriage bed, there will continue to be the littlest among us, made in the image and likeness of God, who without a holy love, will be unprotected from the lies that say they are neither human nor of any value. In a time in human history when the laws of many nations sanction the destruction of new lives simply because they are an inconvenience, the North American Lutheran Church and Lutheran CORE, and all who belong to the Body of Christ, are called to teach and preach the message that the Lord who created the heavens and the earth, the Lord, who in the power of the Holy Spirit grew in His mother’s womb, the Lord, who in obedience gave His life for all, The Lord is with you.

“The Lord is with you.” This is what we are called to speak to every woman with a child in her womb. The Lord is with you, regardless of the circumstances of your pregnancy. We urge the NALC to commit itself as a church, as the Body of our Lord on earth, along with those joined with it in mission in Lutheran CORE, to be with you as well. We seek to attend to your needs, to help you, to guard you, and to guide you that you may bear your child in a community of love. Whether a husband and wife, or a mother alone raises that child or puts that child into the arms of another family, we will provide spiritual counsel so that parents and child will have the abundant life that Christ Jesus has promised them. We do not want a woman who is overwhelmed by the news of an unintended pregnancy to abort an innocent child, a child whose cries for life cannot yet be heard, a child who is of great value to God, regardless of the circumstances of the child’s birth. Whatever the circumstances of the pregnancy, the termination of the life of their child will not make a mother’s or father’s life better.

Apart from victims of sexual violence, the NALC and Lutheran CORE should call to repentance all men and women who have engaged in sexual behaviors outside of marriage. Men and women who are not married to each another and who have used their procreative abilities irresponsibly and then have chosen to abort a child, as well as husbands and wives who have aborted children whom they do not want, are called to confession, contrition, and amendment of life. God wants us to know His joy, and until we acknowledge our sin and throw ourselves upon His mercy, we can never live rightly. The wanton destruction of a human life for matters of one’s own convenience is sin. The casual use of abortion as a final solution for a conception born of recreational sex is sin. The intimidation and emotional blackmail to undergo an abortion that women have received from the men who have impregnated them is sin.

The church also has great concern for those among us, who under the advice, counsel, or persuasion of family and/or medical personnel, have aborted a life *in utero* as a result of rape, incest, severe abnormalities of fetus, or endangerment to the life of the mother. In these cases, we as a church seek to be a vessel of compassion and consolation. Even in the most difficult situation, the termination of the pregnancy will not necessarily bring an end to the intensity of the current pain. The end of any of new life, even when it comes to be the only apparent solution that one believes can be endured, will still carry layers of sorrow. Again, we urge the NALC to

commit itself as a church body, along with its partners in Lutheran CORE, to provide pastoral care to all parties who are involved, for there are no decisions in such times that will be without familial grief. We seek not to condemn but to console. As anger, abandonment, regret, and the depths of despair each come in their turn, so the mercy of our ever-present God will need to be spoken. The Lord is with you. The Lord is still with you.

The rationales, however, for legalizing abortions in North America are far from these limited cases of “therapeutic” abortion. The arguments have changed throughout the 20th and 21st centuries from easing the burdens of the poor on the society, to the right of a woman to have autonomy over her own body (*Roe v. Wade*), to sex-selection of children from cultures that value male progeny over female, to simply one of economic gain, (i.e., not wanting to support another child). In too many cases, legalized abortion has simply become a form of retroactive birth control. Abortion dehumanizes and diminishes all who are involved. It affects the father, who has lost what it means to be a guardian to his family and who has lost the learning that comes from a relationship in which spirituality and sexuality are not divorced. It affects the mother, whose denial may break down if she later conceives and bears a child, or is later unable to conceive a child, or whose guilt may spiral into the bondage of shame as she seeks to keep her abortion a secret. At last, it affects the child, the blessed child, a living human presence who is denied the fullness of body that was intended for him in this life and in the age to come.

Legalization of abortion puts the state at odds with the historic witness of the church, and so we are called to listen again to the Word of God as proclaimed in the Holy Scriptures, the wisdom of the Church Fathers, and the insight of the Reformers as we seek to follow Christ faithfully in our day. The *Didache* clearly speaks the law as stated in the fifth commandment to the issues of abortion and infanticide in the ancient world, “Thou shalt not murder a child by abortion, nor again shall thou kill it when it is born.”¹ *The Epistle of Barnabas* speaks of those who seek to end the life of one *in utero* as “killers of the child, who abort the mold of God.”² The Nicene Creed professes that Jesus is fully human and fully divine from the moment of His conception and in doing so declares that human life begins at conception.³ Again and again the Psalter sings that fearfully and wonderfully made, we are the work of God's hands (Ps 139:14). John Calvin, in concert with the early Fathers, regards an unborn child as “already a human being.”⁴ Martin Luther regards procreation as “the work of God” and speaks of those who kill the growing fetus as an example of the wickedness of human nature.⁵ The witness of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church is clear: There is no life that is beyond God's care, beginning at the moment of conception. The child *in utero* is not simply the possession of the father or the mother, for each nascent life is the handiwork of God. “For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb.” (Ps 139:15).

The North American Lutheran Church and Lutheran CORE strive to witness to the all-encompassing love of God in early 21st century North America, when nearly 50 million abortions have been legally performed since 1973 in the United States and 1988 in Canada. We urge the NALC and Lutheran CORE to commit not only to protecting the next generation of children during those first exquisite nine months of life, but to helping those for whom abortion mars their

procreative histories. As parents come to healing through the counsel and ministries of the church, their witness will be invaluable. In the renewal of their faith, the lies that were told against the littlest among us will come to an end. As their voices then sound within the assembly of all who believe that He who is the Savior of the world is fully human and fully divine from the moment of His conception, so we come yet again to understand the giftedness of the creation of our own bodies. May each of us seek to live out the dignity with which we were created, so that our lives as the enfleshment of God's love will bear witness to His love for all the world.

1 *Didache* 2:2

2 *The Epistle of Barnabas* 19:5

3 The Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.) is explicit, “We confess the Holy Virgin to be the Mother of God because God the Word was made flesh, and became man from the moment of conception.” See also the Formula of Concord, Epitome, Article VII.10, “Therefore we believe teach, and confess that the Son of man according to his human nature is really (that is, in deed and in truth) exalted to the right hand of the omnipotent majesty and power of God, because He was assumed into God when He was conceived by the Holy Spirit in his mother's womb and his human nature was personally united with the Son of the Most high.” *Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. and ed. by Theodore Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 488.

4 John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Last Four Books of Moses*, trans. Charles Bingham (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), 3:41,42.

5 Martin Luther, *Luther's Works* vol. 4. ed. by Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut Lehmann (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing, 1964), 304.

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