

The ELCA's Abortion Policy: What Other Lutherans Have Said

"Silence in the face of evil is itself evil. God will not hold us guiltless. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act." —Dietrich Bonhoeffer

The ELCA's Abortion Policy

THE ELCA, through its employee health benefits plan, is willing to pay, no questions asked, for all abortion procedures performed during the first five months of pregnancy. After the fifth month, restrictions do apply, but this is a very limited limit because in the United States only 1.5 percent of abortions occur after the fifth month.

Question: "Does the ELCA Health Benefits Plan in fact pay for "induced abortions" during the first 20 weeks of pregnancy?" *Answer:* "Yes, the ELCA Health Benefits Plan may pay for abortion procedures during the first 20 weeks of pregnancy...."

Question: "Are there any conditions under which abortions during the first twenty weeks are not covered by the ELCA health benefits plan?" *Answer:* "No, the ELCA Health Plan does not question abortions performed within the first 20 weeks of pregnancy...."

—Cathy Hendrickson, Health Care Advocacy Supervisor, ELCA Board of Pensions, in e-mail correspondence with John Vincent, December 11, 2009

What Other Lutheran's Have Said

PASTOR LEONARD R. KLEIN: "The ELCA will continue, consciously and openly, to pay for a most grotesque mortal sin—using offerings gathered at its most sacred assemblies to do so. Its readiness to pay for this act far exceeds that of most states and of the federal government.... The ELCA's supposed compromise social statement on abortion is thus shown to be a smokescreen for the most extreme pro-choice position.... Its three restrictive examples of justifiable abortion are treated...not as a limitation but as a sample of all kinds of abortions that might be desired and all of which will be paid for.... *Real churches don't kill babies.*" —LUTHERAN FORUM, 1996

"A church which condones abortion cannot be part of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church." —LUTHERAN FORUM

FORMER ELCA PASTOR JENNIFER FERRARA: "'Real churches don't kill babies.'... In the spring of 1996...I read this line by former Lutheran Pastor Leonard Klein. This was his critique of the decision of the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in American...to reject its own health care provider's carefully worked out restrictions on payment for abortions.... As I read Klein's editorial on the topic, I began to hyperventilate; I knew my life as a Lutheran pastor was never going to be the same....

"To take a firm stand on abortion was extremely difficult in a church that offers no authoritative stance on a single matter having to do with sexual ethics or the sanctity of human life.... The ELCA is an accomplice to the murder of unborn children.... My friend Patricia [Sodano Ireland] agreed with me. When I asked her if she thought the abortion issue was reason enough to leave the ELCA, her unwavering response was, 'Of course it is.' In the fall of 1996 she did just that." —WOMEN IN SEARCH OF TRUTH

FORMER ELCA PASTOR PATRICIA SODANO IRELAND: "[The ELCA became] less confessionally and morally sound.... *Lutheran* magazine...dubbed certain instances of abortion as a tragic *choice*. Worst of all was the ELCA's insurance plan, which provided coverage for abortion." —WOMEN IN SEARCH OF TRUTH

CANDI FRANKEL: “My husband and I learned early in our marriage that we would most likely never have children of our own. In confronting our infertility, desperate as we were to conceive, it was obvious that there were certain medical avenues that we could not in good conscience pursue. The knowledge that the ELCA condoned abortion was, therefore, particularly devastating. If my husband and I could take what we knew about right and wrong and apply it to a difficult problem and come up with the right answer, why couldn’t the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America? This was no rhetorical question. The answer mattered.” —WOMEN IN SEARCH OF TRUTH

PASTOR TIM WHITE, TRINITY EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH, COLUMBUS, NEBRASKA: “It bothers me when our church sends in premium payments for health benefits for church employees, knowing that part of that is going to pay for somebody's elective abortion. To me that's reason enough to leave right there.”

ELCA PASTOR RUSSELL E. SALTZMAN, RUSKIN HEIGHTS LUTHERAN CHURCH IN KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI: “I am the result of sexual predation, of step-sibling incest.... I was not abandoned to adoption. I was rescued by it.... Today, not even my own church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, is able to say flatly that unborn babies like me should live. No woman has an absolute right to abortion, so my church declares in its social statement on abortion. But it goes on, conversely, to say that no fetus has an absolute right to birth. The woman decides—after of course appropriate moral reflection with sympathetic listeners, but she decides. Pregnancies created in circumstances such as those of [my birth mother] in 1947 are [today] fair targets for ‘morally responsible’ abortions, according to my church. Even stranger, were either [of my parents] or their parents beneficiaries under the ELCA health plan (which means pastors and salaried church workers and their dependents), . . . [my mothers's] abortion would be a reimbursable medical expense. The ELCA health plan will not pay for an elective breast implant but . . . will pay to abort someone like me. When it comes to my birth, the church that values my baptism is ambivalent at best about my right to life in the womb.” —“FEAR OF ABANDONMENT”

“The Presbyterians have adopted a position similar to that of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and like the ELCA, PCUSA’s medical benefits plan for clergy and church workers regards an elective abortion as a reimbursable medical expense. There is no reimbursement for an elective nose job, even if your nose is big enough to qualify as a county in Rhode Island, but that’s just policy, nothing personal. (I am a pastor in the ELCA, but I dropped out of the health plan years ago over its support for abortion.)” —“EVERYTHING PERSONAL”

RETIRED ELCA BISHOP MICHAEL C. D. MCDANIEL: “As long as the ELCA health insurance program covers abortions, a percentage of each Sunday's offering presented before the altar of the Lord is going to finance murder.” —“ELCA Journeys: Personal Reflections on the Last Forty Year,” CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY, April 2001

JILL STANEK, R.N.: “I had been working for a year at Christ Hospital in Oak Lawn, Illinois, as a registered nurse in the Labor and Delivery Department, when I heard in report that we were aborting a second-trimester baby with Down’s syndrome. I was completely shocked. In fact, I had specifically chosen to work at Christ Hospital because it was a Christian hospital and not involved, so I thought, in abortion. It hurt so much that the very place these abortions were being committed was at a hospital named after my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I was further grieved to learn that the hospital’s religious affiliates, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America and the United Church of Christ, were pro-abortion. I had no idea that any Christian denomination could be pro-abortion!” —“DEATH IN THE DELIVERY ROOM”

DR. A. L. BARRY, PRESIDENT, THE LUTHERAN CHURCH–MISSOURI SYNOD: “The ELCA has not been able to speak out clearly against abortion, and, sadly, even pays for willful abortion procedures for members in its health insurance plan.” —http://www.lcms.org/graphics/assets/media/LCMS/wa_elca-lcms.pdf

ELCA PASTOR JONATHAN L. JENKINS, HOLY TRINITY LUTHERAN CHURCH, LEBANON, PA: “Even if no one chooses to exercise the right to have the church pay for abortion, the fact that the church is prepared to pay for death, with no questions asked, remains a blot on the church’s conscience.”

PASTOR TOM BROCK, HOPE LUTHERAN CHURCH, MINNEAPOLIS, MN: “Why are we killing babies with offering dollars in the ELCA? The ELCA does not care about unborn human life. I want to hear Bishop Mark Hanson say just one word about protecting unborn children. —PASTOR’S STUDY RADIO PROGRAM, May 29, 2010

LUTHERANS FOR LIFE: “A member of the ELCA inquired of the Board of Pensions as to whether they would pay for an abortion for the purpose of sex selection. That board stated that they would pay for an abortion for that purpose. The secretary of the ELCA confirmed this conclusion.” —“AN ANALYSIS OF THE ELCA SOCIAL STATEMENT ON ABORTION,” p. 7

DAN SKOGEN, ELCA MEMBER: “The ELCA has a dirty little secret that they hope their membership never finds out about. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America provides for abortions in the medical health coverage for people they employ and their families. They have been doing it from the start, since the ELCA was formed over 20 years ago. Our tithes and offerings have gone and are going to pay for the killing of unborn children.... They allow and pay for abortions for any reason.... Our paying for abortions makes it easier for people to have them. Is that God’s will? Do you believe God thinks the ELCA is doing a loving thing by funding abortions? This is a denomination gone wild!” —“THE ABORTION CHURCH,” <http://www.exposingtheelca.com/1/post/2010/01/the-abortion-church.html>, January 25, 2010

“WHEREAS, The ELCA Health Benefits Plan is funded primarily by offering dollars and therefore church members’ offering dollars may have been used and may be used to pay for abortions; and WHEREAS, Polls have shown that a majority of Americans are opposed to their tax dollars being used to pay for abortions; and WHEREAS, It follows logically that a majority of Americans, including ELCA Lutherans, are also opposed to their church offering dollars being used to pay for abortions (or would be if they knew); now, therefore, be it RESOLVED, That the Nebraska Synod will declare it unjust for the ELCA to pay for abortions except when an abortion has been an unavoidable by-product of medical procedures necessary to prevent the death of the mother.” — PROPOSED RESOLUTION FOR A MEMORIAL ON EXCLUDING ABORTION COVERAGE FROM THE ELCA HEALTH BENEFITS PLAN, submitted to the Nebraska Synod Assembly, 2010; ruled out of order by the Resolutions, Reference & Counsel Committee

UWE SIEMON-NETTO, DIRECTOR, CENTER FOR LUTHERAN THEOLOGY & PUBLIC LIFE: “Down in Wichita, Kansas, there is a physician by the name of George Tiller. On his website he boasts that he has already performed 60,000 abortions, mostly late-term, and week after week he is killing 100 more unborn babies. Dr. Tiller . . . knows they are human because he baptizes some of them before he incinerates them in his own crematorium. You don’t baptize non-humans. Dr. Tiller knows that. He is a practicing Lutheran. His former congregation, Holy Cross of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, excommunicated him as an unrepentant sinner. But the Lutheran Church of the Reformation, which belongs to the ELCA, communes him. . . . Perhaps this little tale will give even non-believers pause if they have not discarded their conscience, known to Christians as the law God has written upon every man’s heart. One day, of this I am certain, this will indeed result in collective shame – and God knows what other horrible consequences.” —“REMEMBERING COLLECTIVE SHAME,” October 2008

After considering these facts and responses, how then should we answer the question, “Is the abortion issue reason enough to leave the ELCA?” Our own unwavering reply should be, “Of course it is!”