The Maine Interfaith Council

*for* Reproductive Choices

**Reproductive Choices:**

*An Episcopal Perspective*

The Reverend Anne C. Fowler

**Prayerfully Pro-choice**

The Episcopal Church honors an individual’s right to make an informed decision about abortion. The church is a pro-choice denomination and belongs to the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice.

**The Episcopal Three-Legged Stool**

The theology of the Episcopal Church rests on what our founding Anglican theologian, Richard Hooker, calls “the three legged stool”: Scripture, tradition, and reason. Biblical witness, the Church’s historical teachings and practice, and human knowledge and experience, form the bases for our ethical and moral decisions.

Our theology talks also about the “via media” or *middle way*. Originally *the middle way* referred to the founding of our Church as the joining of the best of the Roman Catholic and Protestant traditions. But we use the term today to describe the Episcopal Church’s intention to be inclusive of a variety of theological and ethical positions.

We are a sacramental and incarnational faith. We believe we are children of God, made in God’s image, and therefore we place great value on sanctity of human life. We believe also in the moral agency of every individual, that is, the right and responsibility of all of us to act as conscience dictates.

**The Bible and “Reason”**

Most Episcopalians are not biblical literalists. We believe the Bible to be the story of our salvation through God’s grace, not the literal word of God. The biblical view is that a human being's life begins at birth. But modern science and medical technology give us a more nuanced conviction; that the moral status of the fetus changes over the course of the pregnancy. Thus advances in science and medicine, representing human reason, must be weighed against Biblical pronouncements, for a balanced position.

**Tradition and the Church’s Teachings**

Official statements of The Episcopal Church are made in the form of legislation passed by both the House of Deputies and the House of Bishops during the Triennial General Convention.

**Revelation Continues, Change Happens**

The Episcopal Church was historically anti-abortion. However, in 1994, the Church resolved fully to support legal, expressing its "unequivocal opposition to any... action... that [would] abridge the right of a woman to reach an informed decision about the termination of her pregnancy, or that would limit the access of a woman to a safe means of acting upon her decision."

The church acknowledges there will be loss whenever a decision for an abortion is made while also acknowledging that there will be circumstances where this loss may be the greater good.

Taking seriously the statement "All human life is sacred from its inception until death" (General Convention, 1997) allows room for abortions and may even necessitate the decision for an abortion in some cases.

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