



The **Methodist** Church

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Mr Chris Mason
United for Life
22 Moreton Close
Bishops Cleeve
Cheltenham GL52 8AW

Dear Chris Mason

I am writing in response to your letter regarding United for Life's 'Make Abortion History' campaign.

The Methodist Church would not sign up to this campaign, although individual Methodists may choose to do so. As members of the Make Poverty History Coalition it would be inappropriate for us to be associated with a campaign heading that takes this brand to raise a single issue, and I would hope that United for Life would reconsider its use of the 'Make Abortion History' slogan.

I enclose for your information a memorial and response, plus a minute of the discussion that took place at this year's Methodist Conference regarding abortion.

Yours sincerely

Anthea Cox
Co-ordinating Secretary

Enc

(Signed in Anthea Cox's absence.)

The following Memorial was referred to the Methodist Council by the 2005 Conference:

M25 Abortion

The St Ives & Hayle (12/11) Circuit Meeting (Present: 22. Vote: 19 in favour, 0 against) would encourage the Methodist Conference to support the lowering of the number of weeks when an abortion can be carried out.

Reply

The Methodist Conference recognises the concerns of the Circuit Meeting.

Under the Abortion Act 1967 there are criteria under which abortion is permissible, including risk to the life, physical or mental health of the pregnant woman; serious foetal abnormalities; or the “social” grounds where the continuance of the pregnancy would involve risks greater than termination to the physical or mental health of the pregnant woman or her existing children, taking into account the social and economic circumstances. These “social” conditions are subject to a statutory limit of 24 weeks; the other grounds are without time limit.

There were a total of 181,600 abortions in 2003, and approximately 2% of these took place at twenty weeks or over. The majority of these late abortions, as with abortions overall, are carried out on the grounds that the continuance of the pregnancy risks the physical or mental health of the woman, but there are also a number of terminations on the ground of serious foetal abnormalities.

Late abortions are by their nature likely to be traumatic, and women terminate pregnancies at this stage for a range of reasons: certain abnormalities may only be picked up by the twenty-week ultrasound scan; some women, particularly younger ones, may deny they are pregnant or have difficulty in accessing pregnancy advice; some women may be unable to cope with their pregnancy or find that their circumstances change profoundly.

A Methodist Statement on Abortion (1976) and the Conference Report of 1990 on *The Status of the Unborn Human* both affirmed that there is never any moment from conception onwards when the foetus totally lacks human significance. However the degree of this significance manifestly increases through the pregnancy. The belief that humans are made in God’s image makes abortion “on demand” unpalatable; however the obligations of love require that the needs of the pregnant women are also recognised. It was as a result of this that the Methodist Conference supported the legalisation of abortion in certain circumstances.

However the time limit on abortion has remained a concern. The Methodist Statement on Abortion states no pregnancy should be terminated after an

aborted foetus would be viable, and that it would be best to restrict all abortions to the first twenty weeks of pregnancy, except where there is direct physical threat to the life of the mother or when new information about serious abnormality in the foetus becomes available after the twentieth week. Since the Methodist Statement was made, the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990 reduced the time limit from 28 to 24 weeks for the so-called "social" grounds, bringing the law closer to the stated Methodist view.

Whilst the Methodist Conference would wish to see an end to late abortions, a reduction in the time limit could only be carried out once there was sufficient guaranteed provision for pregnancy advice and terminations where appropriate, and could only be supported for abortions carried out on the grounds of social circumstances.