

Friends Seeking Clearness on Abortion

The increasing human population is putting pressures on Earth, which is a concern for Friends. To provide a healthy life for all people and other species, the growth of human population must stop or even decline. To achieve this, lower fertility is more desirable than higher mortality.

Around the world, many couples want to have fewer children than they do. Greater access to and use of effective contraception would help significantly reduce unplanned pregnancies and thus lower fertility. Even so, no contraception is one-hundred percent effective. Thus, for some, having an abortion becomes a real, personal, emotional, and practical issue. In all countries, abortions take place, legally or illegally, safely or unsafely. Whether we like it or not, abortion is a reality on which we must tenderly seek clearness.

Historically Friends have not had unity on the matter of abortion. Friends would like to prevent unwanted pregnancies, reduce the number of abortions, and minimize the occasion of abortion. This pamphlet is an attempt to bring Friends together to seek clearness on abortion.

Facts about Abortion in the World ...

About 44 million abortions are performed each year.¹ The population growth rate would be considerably higher if these abortions were not performed; for every 1000 births, there were 320 abortions.²

- Highly restrictive abortion laws are not necessarily associated with lower rates of abortion.¹
- About half of abortions are unsafe, performed by a person without the necessary skills.¹
- Approximately 47,000 women die each year due to complications of unsafe abortions, which account for 13 percent of maternal deaths.¹

In the United States ...

About one million abortions take place each year. This represents 17 abortions per 1,000 women age 15-44 each year, the lowest rate since 1975. At these rates, about one in three women will have an abortion in their lifetimes.³

- For every 1000 births, there are about 270 abortions.³
- Women who have never married and are not cohabiting account for 45 percent of all abortions.³
- Approximately 50 percent of women seeking abortion had used (or their partners used) contraception at the time of conception, most commonly condoms (27 percent) or a hormonal method (17 percent).³

Gallup polls over the last 40 years indicate that attitudes toward abortion have not changed, but varied within the margin of sampling error. Around 17 percent say that abortion should be illegal under any circumstances; 26 percent favor legal abortion under any circumstance, and 53 percent favor abortion under certain circumstances, which include abortion during the first three months of pregnancy, when pregnancy results from rape or incest, when pregnancy endangers the life of the mother, or when the child would be mentally or physically impaired.⁴

We All Need Compassion

We all need compassion—to give it and to receive it—in order to bridge our divisiveness, heal our wounds, and come together to work on this difficult issue. Compassion is needed for:

- Those who believe there is never an occasion for abortion.
- Those who oppose any modern contraceptive methods.
- Those who advise us to rely on abstinence alone to prevent pregnancy.

- Those who think they can eradicate abortion through fear.
- Those who choose not to use contraception and then find it necessary to have an abortion.
- Those who abort under pressure from others.
- Those who spurn single women with children.
- Those who have unwanted pregnancies and put their children up for adoption.
- Those who make adoption difficult.

How Can We Show our Compassion?

- Talk with those with whom we disagree, listen to them, and share reasons for one another's views.
- Welcome children. Help single mothers to live easily in our communities.
- Support contraception at home and abroad.
- Recognize that under current conditions, unwanted pregnancy is a fact of life.
- Support women who choose to have an abortion.
- Pray and search together for Divine guidance for all the personal choices on reproduction we have to make.

Potential Ways to Minimize the Occasion of Abortion

- Promote an understanding of sexuality as an expression of spiritual commitment.
- Encourage greater self-esteem and responsibility by helping everyone make clear and informed choices about sexual behavior.

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Potential Ways to Minimize the Occasion of Abortion

(cont'd from reverse)

- Share insights on how to deal with sexual passions and emotions.
- Encourage men to take their share of responsibility for pregnancy prevention.
- Improve communication within couples.
- Educate ourselves, our youth, and others how to prevent pregnancy by explaining the facts of reproduction.
- Educate youth on the serious consequences and responsibilities of bearing and raising a child.
- Encourage delay in the beginning of sexual activity.
- Affirm the options of abstinence and celibacy for those who feel so led.
- Explain how to use contraception and how and where it can be obtained, including long-acting reversible contraception and emergency contraception.
- Encourage research into new contraceptive methods.

Questions

- The sexual activity rates among teens in western Europe are at the same level as the rates in the U.S., but their pregnancy rates are about half those of the U.S. Why?
- Do we provide both political and financial support to those trying to improve access to contraception?
- Does a judgmental attitude about sexuality outside of marriage lead to regulations that prevent meaningful access to contraception for unmarried persons who need it?
- How can we ensure that safe and legal abortion will be available when a woman chooses to abort an unwanted pregnancy?

Queries

- What guidance does your Meeting give to young Friends entering puberty?
- What position does your spiritual community take about sexual relationships from which pregnancy may result?
- What steps are we ready to take to help minimize the occasion for abortion?
- How can individuals with different beliefs about the morality of abortion work together to minimize the occasion of abortion?

Endnotes

- 1) Guttmacher Institute, 2012. Facts on Induced Abortion Worldwide. 2008 data. <guttmacher.org/pubs/fb_IAW.pdf>.
- 2) Guttmacher Institute, 2012. Abortion Ratios Worldwide in 2008. <guttmacher.org/media/resources/abortion-ratios.pdf>
- 3) Guttmacher Institute, 2014. Facts on Induced Abortion in the United States. 2011-12 data. <guttmacher.org/pubs/fb_induced_abortion.pdf>
- 4) Gallup, 2015. Abortion: Gallup Historical Trends <gallup.com/poll/1576/abortion.aspx>.

Other Resources

- National Centers of Health Statistics, 2013. Pregnancy Rates for U.S. Women Continue to Drop. (No. 136) <cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db136.htm>.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2013. Abortion Surveillance -- United States, 2010 <cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/ss6208a1.htm>.

QEW Population Pamphlets

- *A Friends' Witness on Population*
- *Seeking Clearness on Childbearing in a Crowded World*
- *Adoption: An Earth-Friendly Alternative*
- *Immigration in a Crowded World*
- *A Witness on Sexuality for Friends*
- *Empowering Women: The Link to Population*

Quaker Earthcare Witness works "to integrate into the beliefs and practices of the Religious Society of Friends the Truth that God's creation is to be respected, protected, and held in reverence in its own right, and the Truth that human aspirations for peace and justice depend upon restoring Earth's ecological integrity."

Quaker Earthcare Witness

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Contributions to QEW are welcome.

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How do we listen to Truth which may be revealed by others?

—North Pacific Yearly Meeting,
Faith and Practice, 1993.

This Quaker Earthcare Witness pamphlet is intended as an aid to worship-sharing on this sensitive topic.

Contact QEW for our other publications on population and other concerns <quakerearthcare.org>.

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