

The Business Committee of the Thirty-Fourth General Synod has recommended this proposed resolution be sent to a Committee of the General Synod.

Denouncing the *Dobbs* Decision and Proclaiming Abortion as Healthcare

A Resolution of Witness

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1 **Summary:**

2 Content warning: abortion, sexual violence, miscarriage

3

4 In June 2022, the Supreme Court, in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*,
5 overturned the fifty-year precedent of *Roe v. Wade*, which established the right to abortion. This
6 resolution denounces the *Dobbs* decision, affirms abortion as healthcare, and calls upon the
7 various settings of the United Church of Christ to nonviolently resist abortion bans, protect legal
8 abortions where they exist, and accompany people seeking abortion care.

9

10 **Biblical, Theological, and Historical Grounding**

11 In June 2022, the United States Supreme Court, in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health*
12 *Organization*, overturned the fifty-year precedent of *Roe v. Wade*, which established the
13 Constitutional right to abortion. With abortion access now limited or entirely restricted in some
14 states, access to abortion care is deeply unequal, privileging those living in abortion-access states
15 or with the financial means to travel to an access state.

16

17 This decision is unjust and is causing suffering among many. We must speak out against this
18 injustice and resist it nonviolently. Content warning: abortion (throughout, specifically lines 41-
19 67; 129-130), sexual violence, (lines 58-67; 165) miscarriage (lines 132-133)

20

21 Justice oriented theology calls for us to place the human narrative of those who suffer oppression
22 as central to our theological claims.

23

24 Shocking stories in the news grab our attention such as children forced to bear children, as in the
25 case of the 16-year-old Florida girl blocked from terminating her pregnancy by a judge's
26 determination that she is "not sufficiently mature" – even though she has the consent of her legal
27 guardian for the procedure to go ahead.¹

28
29 Other stories may not make the headlines but are common. People who can get pregnant are
30 faced with falling deeper into poverty by bearing a child, such as the Texas mother who
31 "panicked" when "she learned she was pregnant in September of last year just as a Texas law
32 banning all abortions after roughly six weeks of pregnancy took effect."

33
34 "I was so broken. I couldn't fathom that it was happening," said the 30-year-old hairstylist. "I
35 can't afford this child. I am struggling with a child I already have."²

36
37 Such stories reveal the complex social, psychological and economic consequences of the denial
38 of reproductive care that are the context for social justice oriented theological and biblical
39 reflection.

40
41 A groundbreaking study conducted by UC San Francisco reveals the long-term adverse effects of
42 unwanted pregnancy on people's lives. The study found, "These parents were also more likely to
43 raise the child alone, without the support of family members or partners, and were more likely to
44 stay in contact with an abusive partner. In addition, individuals who were not able to access
45 abortion were three times more likely to be unemployed than those who were able to access one.
46 They had four times greater odds of living below the federal poverty line, were more likely to
47 report not being able to afford basic living needs, and were more likely to be enrolled in food
48 assistance or other public safety-net programs such as Temporary Assistance for Needy
49 Families." Poverty, food insecurity, ongoing deprivation, and high risk of abuse are the real life
50 consequences of the lack of reproductive healthcare.³

51
52 Proverbs 31:9 teaches us not to be silent in the face of such outrages, but to speak up, speak out
53 and act.

54
55 "Open your mouth, judge righteously,
56 And defend the rights of the afflicted and needy."

57
58 And we know this is the job of those who seek justice and that the refusal to understand the
59 rights of the poor is "wicked" as in Proverbs 29:7:

60
61 "The righteous is concerned for the rights of the poor,
62 The wicked do not understand such concern."

63
64 Taking care of those unjustly and violently treated was central to the teaching of Jesus of
65 Nazareth. The parable of the "Good Samaritan" (Luke 10:30-37) teaches this in no uncertain
66 terms. We who follow the teachings of Jesus know we must not "pass by on the other side" when
67 those who can get pregnant are so unjustly treated by the denial of needed reproductive care.

68

69 The United Church of Christ has been a consistent voice supporting people who need health care,
70 specifically those who can get pregnant.

71
72 General Synod 27 affirmed support for “universal health care which meets the following criteria:
73 1) it covers all persons; 2) it presents no financial barriers; 3) it provides comprehensive benefits;
74 4) it offers a choice of physicians and other health providers; and 5) it eliminates racial, ethnic
75 and all other disparities for health care.”⁴

76
77 General Synod 29 “affirmed the value and dignity of women in the church and society and called
78 for an end to sexism and the consequences of patriarchy” and called upon the various settings of
79 the church to “[assure] women equal pay, a full range of health care choices and services,
80 including Title X and Planned Parenthood, and [recognize] a woman’s right to make decisions
81 about her own reproductive health.”⁵

82
83 General Synod 30 “reaffirmed its commitment to the full legal protection of the civil rights of all
84 persons regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity and expression.”⁶ While “women” are
85 the group of people typically understood as needing abortion care, cisgender women, nonbinary,
86 genderqueer, & genderfluid people, and transgender men can all be people who might become
87 pregnant.

88
89 General Synod 15 declared the United Church of Christ a Just Peace Church, and General Synod
90 30 reaffirmed that identity. Nonviolent resistance to injustice is one of the ten practices of Just
91 Peace. While Christians often quote Romans 13 to argue that laws should be obeyed, Paul, the
92 author of Romans, defied Roman civil authorities and was arrested for preaching the good news.
93 He witnessed to the guards while he was in jail (Acts 16:16–40). Helping people who can get
94 pregnant access reproductive health care in places where governing authorities have made it
95 illegal is biblically and theologically sound. Resources are available on the UCC Just Peace
96 Website.⁷

97
98 “Indeed, the body does not consist of one member, but of many... The eye cannot say to the
99 hand, ‘I have no need of you,’ nor the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’ ... If one member
100 suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.” (1
101 Corinthians 12:14, 21, 26, NRSVUE). Although not all members of the collective body of the
102 United Church of Christ and the nation are able to be pregnant, when the reproductive freedom
103 and health care access for some parts of the body are limited, the whole body suffers with it, and
104 the whole body is called to respond.

105
106 **Text of the Motion**

107
108 **Whereas** the *Dobbs* decision overturned *Roe v. Wade* and ruled that there is no constitutional
109 right to abortion;

110
111 **Whereas** a majority of Americans support legal abortion in all or most cases;⁸

112
113 **Whereas** anti-abortion laws do not decrease abortion rates but make abortions more dangerous
114 by eliminating access to safe, affordable, and medically-necessary abortions;⁹

115
116 **Whereas** abortion care following miscarriage is severely restricted by abortion bans, threatening
117 the lives of pregnant people in their time of grief;¹⁰
118

119 **Whereas** people of lower socioeconomic status and people of color are more likely to receive
120 abortion care, due to systemic factors including poverty, lack of access to contraception, and
121 distrust of the medical system,¹¹ and whereas anti-abortion laws deepen unequal access to
122 comprehensive reproductive care, with insufficient access mostly affecting rural communities
123 and Black and Brown communities and negative reproductive health outcomes
124 disproportionately affecting people of color;¹²
125

126 **Whereas** General Synod 8 “[called] for the repeal of all legal prohibitions of physician-
127 performed abortions”;¹³ General Synod 12 “[reaffirmed] full freedom of choice for the persons
128 involved in making decisions regarding pregnancy”;¹⁴ General Synod 17 “[deplored] the
129 decision handed down today by the United States Supreme Court severely limiting major
130 provisions of *Roe v. Wade* as undermining the spirit of the constitutional freedom of choice of
131 women of this nation and making freedom of choice essentially a luxury for those who are not
132 economically disadvantaged;”¹⁵
133

134 **Whereas** previous General Synods (12, 13, 16, 18) have paired support for safe and legal
135 abortions with a desire for information and resources about contraception and family planning,
136 and teen abortion rates decline with free access to contraception;¹⁶ and the United Church of
137 Christ has heeded this call through holistic, faithful sexuality education, *Our Whole Lives*, which
138 helps participants make informed and responsible decisions about their sexual health and
139 behavior;
140

141 **Whereas** Justice Thomas’ concurring opinion in *Dobbs* threatens Constitutional protection for
142 access to contraception, as well as protection for same-sex sexual relations and marriage;¹⁷
143

144 **Whereas** the UCC Medical Benefits Plan covers abortion “per Plan policies and per individual
145 state regulations,”¹⁸ and is now an unequal benefit across states where the UCC Medical Plan has
146 beneficiaries;
147

148 **Therefore be it resolved** that the Thirty-Fourth General Synod of the United Church of Christ
149 affirms the right of all people to access reproductive healthcare including contraception and
150 abortion and takes the following actions:
151

152 Proclaims that Mary’s informed, joyful choice to bear a child is the first act of Christian
153 discipleship, and that forced birth is an act of sexual violence antithetical to the incarnation and
154 the choice to have and care for children is a sacred decision which should not be forced upon
155 anyone;
156

157 Proclaims that every person seeking an abortion is a beloved child of God, our neighbor, a
158 person we love;
159

160 Denounces the overturn of legal precedent in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization*
161 and condemns all laws banning abortion or restricting access to reproductive health services;
162
163 Affirms the morality of resisting by peaceful means, including civil disobedience, any laws
164 banning abortions, and calls upon every setting of the United Church of Christ to use Just Peace
165 practices¹⁹ to confront abortion bans and restrictions on reproductive healthcare;
166
167 Calls upon the National Setting of the United Church of Christ and the Conferences to explore
168 and pursue all avenues for legal challenges to abortion bans;
169
170 Calls upon the United Church of Christ Board to explore creation of a Bail Fund for UCC
171 members arrested for participation in civil disobedience or other acts of Christian witness that
172 promote social, racial, economic, environmental, gender, and reproductive justice;
173
174 Calls upon the Pension Boards to cover travel costs and other out-of-pocket expenses for out-of-
175 network abortions and other reproductive healthcare required by UCC Medical Benefits
176 recipients living in states where abortion is limited or outlawed, and requests a report on this
177 expansion of coverage to General Synod 35;
178
179 Calls upon Local Churches and their members to engage with the Our Whole Lives: Sexuality
180 and Our Faith curriculum to promote holistic sexuality education, including information about
181 contraception, and to support and offer access to contraceptives;
182
183 Calls upon Local Churches, Associations, and Conferences to physically, financially, and
184 spiritually accompany people seeking abortions and other reproductive healthcare, in partnership
185 with local health care agencies and abortion funds.
186
187 **Funding:** The funding for the implementation of the resolution will be made in accordance with
188 the overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.
189
190 **Implementation:** The Officers of the Church, in consultation with appropriate ministries or
191 other entities within the United Church of Christ, will determine the implementing body.

¹ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2022/08/17/florida-teen-abortion-denied-mature/>

² <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/poor-women-pregnancy-abortion-ban>

³ <https://www.ucsf.edu/news/2022/06/423161/ucsf-turnaway-study-shows-impact-abortion-access>

⁴ An Urgent Call for Advocacy in Support of Health Care for All, as in H.R. 676, General Synod 27, <https://new.uccfiles.com/synod/resolutions/health-equity.pdf>

⁵ RESISTING ACTIONS SEEKING TO UNDERMINE THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN SOCIETY, General Synod 29: <https://new.uccfiles.com/pdf/gs29-11.pdf>

⁶ REAFFIRMING OUR COMMITMENT TO FULL EQUALITY FOR PERSONS OF ANY SEXUAL ORIENTATION, GENDER IDENTITY, OR GENDER EXPRESSION, General Synod 30: <https://new.uccfiles.com/pdf/gs30-11.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.ucc.org/just-peace/>

⁸ <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2022/05/06/americas-abortion-quandary/>

⁹ “Women living under the most restrictive abortion laws (i.e., where abortion is prohibited altogether or allowed only to save a woman’s life) have abortions at about the same rate as those living where the procedure is available without restriction as to reason” (p. 8)

“The more restrictive the legal setting, the higher the proportion of abortions that are least safe – ranging from less than 1% in the least-restrictive countries to 31% in the most-restrictive countries... even where abortion is broadly legal, inadequate provision of affordable services can limit access to safe services. In addition, persistent stigma can affect the willingness of providers to offer abortions, and can lead women to prioritize secrecy over safety.” (p. 5)

https://www.guttmacher.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/abortion-worldwide-2017.pdf

¹⁰ <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2022/05/10/1097734167/in-texas-abortion-laws-inhibit-care-for-miscarriages>

“One Texas law passed last year lists several medications as abortion-inducing drugs and largely bars their use for abortion after the seventh week of pregnancy. But two of those drugs, misoprostol and mifepristone, are the only drugs recommended in the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists guidelines for treating a patient after an early pregnancy loss.

The other miscarriage treatment is a procedure described as surgical uterine evacuation to remove the pregnancy tissue — the same approach as for an abortion.”

“For some [patients, waiting until the bleeding starts and the pregnancy tissue is naturally released] is too difficult, given the emotions surrounding the pregnancy loss... Instead, the patient may choose medication or a surgical evacuation procedure, which Briggs said may prove necessary to avoid a patient becoming septic if some of the tissue remains in the uterus.”

¹¹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3780732/>

¹² <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7813444/>

¹³ http://rescarta.ucc.org/jsp/RcWebImageViewer.jsp?doc_id=8abee2f6-352d-48f9-958b-49a311bc4489/ucoc0000/UD000001/00000009&pg_seq=60&search_doc=

¹⁴ http://rescarta.ucc.org/jsp/RcWebImageViewer.jsp?doc_id=8abee2f6-352d-48f9-958b-49a311bc4489/ucoc0000/UD000001/00000013&pg_seq=91&search_doc=

¹⁵ http://rescarta.ucc.org/jsp/RcWebImageViewer.jsp?doc_id=8abee2f6-352d-48f9-958b-49a311bc4489/ucoc0000/UD000001/00000018&pg_seq=54&search_doc=

¹⁶ Colorado’s teen birth rate fell 54 percent and the teen abortion rate declined 64 percent in the last eight years due to free access to contraception, especially IUD’s.

¹⁷ “in future cases, we should reconsider all of this Court’s substantive due process precedents, including Griswold, Lawrence, and Obergefell.” https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/21pdf/19-1392_6j37.pdf

¹⁸ https://pbucc.org/images/pbucc/publications/Health/Non-Med_Highlights_2023_102022.pdf

¹⁹ Just Peace Practices:

1. Support non-violent direct action.
2. Take independent initiatives to reduce threat.
3. Use cooperative conflict resolution.
4. Acknowledge responsibility for conflict and injustice and seek repentance and forgiveness.
5. Advance democracy, human rights, and religious liberty.
6. Foster just and sustainable economic development.
7. Work with emerging cooperative forces in the international system.
8. Strengthen the United Nations and international efforts for cooperation and human rights.
9. Reduce offensive weapons and weapons trade.
10. Encourage grassroots peacemaking groups and voluntary associations.