

RESPONSIBLE MORAL AGENTS IN MATTERS OF SEXUALITY AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH CARE

OPTIONS

Delegates to the 2008 General Conference will be voting on a number of issues dealing with the responsibility to act as moral agents in matters related to sexuality and reproductive health care. Delegates will also again be asked whether they will continue to support membership of the Women's Division and General Board of Church and Society in the *Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice*.

ISSUE

Will the Church assume the leadership role called for in the Social Principles in bringing together medical, theological, and social science disciplines to address the complex issue of sexuality in all of its manifestations or will it adopt more regressive policies? Will it continue to support comprehensive health care choices and services relating to sexuality and reproduction? Will it continue to affirm the role of women and their partners in deciding when and how often to bear children? Will it continue to support the need for full, positive, age-appropriate and factual sex education opportunities for children, young people, and adults?

ANALYSIS

The Social Principles have provided United Methodists with positions on sexuality, reproductive choices and related health care based upon the recognition that "sexuality is God's good gift to all persons" and that "persons may be fully human only when that gift is acknowledged and affirmed by themselves, the church, and society." The Church has also declared that "the decision whether or not to give birth to children must include acceptance of the responsibility to provide for their mental, physical, and spiritual growth, as well as consideration of the possible effect on quality of life for family and society." It also supports the right of all children to have access to quality education "including full sex education appropriate to their stage of development that utilizes the best educational techniques and insights." All of these positions have been, and continue to be, very similar to those of other faith groups that have been working with the United Methodist Church for over thirty-five years through their memberships in the *Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice*.

In recent years, the participation of the United Methodist Church in the struggle to support a woman and her partner's ability to determine whether, how often, and when to bear children has come under increased attack by certain individuals and groups within the denomination. Legislation will once again be coming before the 2008 General Conference that would — if adopted — have the Church take a position of advocating further restrictions on the ability to make responsible reproductive health care choices. As an example, one of these recommended changes to ¶161J would eliminate the Church's support of abortion even in cases where a physician has determined there is a danger to the well-being of the mother or there are severe fetal anomalies incompatible with life. Highly charged issues including opposition to seldom used procedures — as well as support for seemingly minor changes to the *Discipline* or *Book of Resolutions* — are being used by some to try to move the Church to a position of being opposed to its historic stand in support of comprehensive reproductive health care.

Despite the fact that the United Methodist Church was a founding member of the *Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice* and continues to work closely with its other members and staff on matters of mutual concern, some within the church seek to convey the erroneous idea that RCRC's moral and theological stance contradicts the United Methodist Church's teaching on sexuality and reproductive health issues. In reality,

through its work in Washington DC, in more than 20 state affiliates, with congregations and faith communities throughout the country and in South Africa, the *Religious Coalition* is recognized as a respected voice of moderation and tolerance by faith communities and policymakers. The United Methodist Judicial Council has also recently ruled that the Minnesota Annual Conference's membership in the RCRC Minnesota affiliate does not violate the *Book of Discipline*.

The fundamental question is this: "Will United Methodists as people of faith seek a society that values human life and human dignity and honors individual conscience; believes the ability to make moral decisions - including about reproductive issues - is the very basis of an individual's dignity; seeks to correct the conditions that underlie the high rate of unintended pregnancy and abortion, through comprehensive sex education, affordable family planning services, and high-quality accessible medical care; strives to make reproductive justice a reality by furthering the medical, economic, and educational resources necessary for healthy children, families and communities; and believes that government must never mandate the tenets of one religious viewpoint?" (*Question adapted from a statement in the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice 2006 Annual Report, page 1.*)

RECOMMENDED ACTION

MFSA recommends that the 2008 General Conference support access to age-appropriate comprehensive sexual and reproductive education and health care and the ability of persons to act as responsible moral agents in matters of sexuality and reproductive health.

VOTE FOR:

Petition #80794-C1-¶159	page 184	Respect for Differences of Opinion
Petition #80603-C1-R276	page 252	Right to Privacy
Petition #81000-C2-¶161	page 318	Sexual Abuse
Petition #80642-C2-¶162.T	page 347	Right to Health Care
Petition #80054-C2-NonDis	page 348	Stem Cell Research
Petition #80712-C2-R25	page 356	Retain 2004 Resolution on Responsible Parenthood
Petition #80560-C2-R42	page 359	Pornography
Petition #80566-C2-R102	page 372	New Development in Genetic Science
Petition #80568-C2-R108	page 379	Health Care for All in the United States
Petition #80569-C2-R109	page 386	Health and Wholeness
Petition #80616-C2-R112	page 393	Readopt 2000 Resolution on Hospital Mergers
Petition #80570-C2-R113	page 393	Deletion
Petition #80616-C2-R366	page 407	Ethics of Embryonic Stem Cell Research
Petition #80843-C2-R9999	page 416	Stem Cell Research
Petition #80969-C2-R9999	page 417	Health Care for All
Petition #80857-CO-¶605	page 476	Clergy Session Policy
Petition #80858-DI-¶630.2	page 598	Board of Lay Ministry
Petition #80860-DI-¶1117	page 601	Role of GBOD
Petition #81530-DI-NonDis	page 621	Sexual Education Programs
Petition #80863-IC-¶2103	page 1264	Role of COSROW
Petition #80864-IC-¶2302.2e	page 1264	Role of UMM
Petition #80854-LC-¶221	page 1336	Implementation
Petition #80223-LC-¶228.2b	page 1338	Policy for Congregations
Petition #80856-MH-¶341	page 1449	Written Report
Petition #80859-MH-¶634.2	page 1484	Policy for BOM
Petition #80861-MH-¶1421	page 1491	Policy from GBHEM
Petition #80852-MH-NonDis	page 1493	Sexual Abuse/Harassment

VOTE AGAINST:

Petition #80449-C2-¶161.G	page 324	Human Sexuality
Petition #80538-C2-R103	page 378	Retain Resolution #103
Petition #80685-C2-R42	page 362	Readopt Resolution #42 (see #80560-C2-R42 page 359)
Petition #80692-C2-R109	page 393	Health & Wholeness (see #80569-C2-R109 page 386)
Petition #81031-C2-¶161.G	page 328	Human Sexuality
Petition #81357-C2-¶161.G	page 333	Sex Education
Petition #81358-C2-¶161.G	page 333	Sex Education
Petition #81381-C2-¶161.G	page 333	Human Sexuality
Petition #80178-C2-¶161.J	page 335	Abortion
Petition #81063-C2-¶161.J	page 335	Abortion
Petition #81079-C2-¶161.J	page 336	Support Parental Notification
Petition #81097-C2-¶161.J	page 336	Abortion
Petition #81124-C2-¶161.J	page 337	Abortion
Petition #81153-C2-¶161.J	page 338	Late Term Abortion
Petition #81181-C2-¶161.J	page 338	Abortion
Petition #81327-C2-¶161.J	page 338	Support Crisis Pregnancy Centers
Petition #81328-C2-¶161.J	page 339	Fetal Pain
Petition #81329-C2-¶161.J	page 339	Choice of Health Care Professionals
Petition #81330-C2-¶161.J	page 339	Eugenic Purposes
Petition #81331-C2-¶161.J	page 339	Mourn High Abortion Rates
Petition #81343-C2-¶161.J	page 340	Adoption and Abortion
Petition #81359-C2-¶161.J	page 340	Abortion
Petition #81360-C2-¶161.J	page 340	Abortion
Petition #81480-C2-¶161.J	page 340	Abortion
Petition #81001-C2-¶162.C	page 343	Rights of Children
Petition #81326-C2-¶162.I	page 345	Population
Petition #81080-C2-R25	page 356	Responsible Parenthood
Petition #81135-C2-R25	page 356	Responsible Parenthood
Petition #81179-C2-R25	page 357	Deletion Responsible Parenthood Resolution
Petition #81334-C2-¶162.M	page 346	Embryos
Petition #81336-C2-R25	page 357	Responsible Parenthood
Petition #81337-C2-R25	page 357	Responsible Parenthood
Petition #81338-C2-R25	page 357	Responsible Parenthood
Petition #81139-C2-R25	page 358	Responsible Parenthood
Petition #81099-C2-R9999	page 418	Reassess HIV/AIDS Policy
Petition #81172-C2-R9999	page 419	Gender-Selection Abortions
Petition #81251-C2-R9999	page 425	Vulnerable Human Life
Petition #81256-C2-R9999	page 426	The Importance of Families
Petition #81454-C2-R9999	page 434	Abortion
Petition #81551-C2-R9999	page 435	Rev. Don Wildmon

MFSA recommends that the 2008 General Conference reject efforts to prohibit any United Methodist agency, board, commission, or entity from belonging to or supporting organizations such as the *Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice*.

VOTE AGAINST:

Petition #80033-C2-NonDis	page 348	Withdrawal from RCRC
Petition #80179-C2-R114	page 393	Deletion of Support of RCRC Resolution
Petition #81453-C2-R9999	page 433	United Methodism & the RCRC

VOTE FOR

Petition #80727-C2-R114	page 393	Retain 2004 Resolution in Support of RCRC
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