

# RELIGIOUS AMERICANS SPEAK OUT

Pro-Choice

## Believe It! Religious Americans Are Pro-Choice

*For years, opponents of access to legal abortion have claimed that all religions and people of faith oppose abortion. They've said it so often that many people assume it to be true. In fact, this assertion is false. Religious Americans actively support a woman's right to choose abortion. They trust women and their families to decide whether and when to have children. They recognize that in a pluralistic society such as ours, the decision regarding abortion must remain with the individual, to be made on the basis of conscience and religious principles. They do not want government to impose laws about childbearing based on any one belief about when life begins.*

### **Protestants have longstanding pro-choice positions**

Most Protestant denominations in the United States have longstanding pro-choice positions. The United Church of Christ has maintained a consistently strong pro-choice stance since 1970. In 1994, the General Convention of the Episcopal Church adopted a resolution expressing "unequivocal opposition to any [legislation] that abridges the right of a woman to reach an informed decision about the termination of pregnancy or that would limit the access of a woman to safe means of acting

on her decision." In 1992, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) reaffirmed support for a woman's right to choose; in 1993, the General Assembly voted to affirm the Freedom of Access to Clinics Act (FACE). At the 1992 General Conference of The United Methodist Church, the principles of *Roe v. Wade* were reaffirmed by an 84 percent majority vote.

### **Jewish tradition upholds reproductive choice**

Jewish tradition has long affirmed and protected the life, well-being, and health of pregnant women and has upheld the basic right to abortion. The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, representing Conservative congregations, in 1993 reaffirmed its resolution opposing any legislative attempts to weaken *Roe v. Wade* through constitutional amendments. Recent resolutions of the Union for Reform Judaism, representing Reform congregations, uphold an "unwavering commitment to the protection and preservation of the reproductive rights of women" and urge constituents to work toward securing or retaining these rights.

### **Most Roman Catholics are pro-choice**

On family planning and abortion, the attitudes and behavior of Roman Catholic laity

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often clash with Roman Catholic Church teaching. According to Catholics for Choice, the overwhelming majority of U.S. Catholics support access to legal abortion, contraception and comprehensive sexuality education. The 2008 General Social Survey of the University of Chicago found that 86 percent of Catholics approve of abortion when a woman's health is seriously endangered. Catholic women have abortions at the same rate as women in the population as a whole.

The 2008 federal government's National Survey of Family Growth reported that 98 percent of sexually active Catholic women older than 18 are as likely (98 percent) to have used some form of contraception banned by the Vatican as women in the general population (99 percent).

### **Unitarian Universalists support abortion rights**

The Unitarian Universalist Association affirmed a woman's right to choose in 1963 and has consistently reaffirmed this right at all General Assemblies since then. In 1993, Unitarian Universalists overwhelmingly adopted a resolution urging members to support federal legislation that would guarantee the basic right to abortion, provide federal funds for abortion to low-income women and military personnel, and protect doctors and clinics providing abortion services from acts of violence and harassment.

### **Clergy believe in women's right to choose**

Clergy had an important role in abolishing anti-abortion laws that hurt women. Today, many religious leaders believe abortion must remain a private, moral decision and trust women and their families to make their own decisions in the light of their faith traditions

and moral values. A 1998 national survey of Protestant and Jewish clergy showed widespread support for reproductive choice, including abortion. Ninety-two percent of respondents said that every woman should be able to decide when to have children according to her own conscience and religious beliefs. Eighty percent supported a woman's right to a safe and legal abortion.

### **A personal, moral, medical decision**

Those who seek to impose their religious views on others threaten not just women's reproductive freedom but also the religious freedom that is one of America's fundamental values. Most religious Americans believe that the decision to have or not have an abortion should be a personal, moral, and medical decision, not a political one. Most religious Americans are prayerfully, faithfully pro-choice.

Resources: We Affirm, published by Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice; clergy survey conducted by Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice; Catholics for Choice

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*The Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, founded in 1973, is the national organization of pro-choice people of faith. The Religious Coalition—comprising Protestant, Jewish, and other denominations and faith groups, the Clergy for Choice Network, and state affiliates throughout the country—works to ensure reproductive choice through the moral power of religious communities. All programs seek to give clear voice to the reproductive health issues of people of color, those living in poverty, and other underserved populations.*

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