

## *‘My Sisters’ Keeper’*

People of Faith for Greater U.S. Support  
Of International Family Planning

An Advocacy Toolkit  
To Save Women’s Lives and Reduce Infant Deaths



*A Project of  
The Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice,  
with Funding Support from the United Nations  
Foundation*

*“And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love  
mercy and to walk humbly with your God?”- Micah 6:8 (KJV)*

# *‘My Sisters’ Keeper’*

## People of Faith for Greater U.S. Support Of International Family Planning

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- Every year, more than half-a-million women die from pregnancy-related causes, 99% of them in developing countries.
- Millions of women suffer serious health complications from pregnancy or childbirth.
- 4 million newborns die in the first month of life, 99% of them in developing countries.

The tragic toll of pregnancy and childbirth on women and infants in developing countries tests our sense of justice. As individuals and as a nation, how can our hearts not be broken and our consciences stirred? But what can we – here in the United States – do? As people of faith, we *can* make a difference, here at home. We can help save the lives of women and infants in the poorest nations of the world. That is the premise of *My Sisters’ Keeper*—RCRC’s initiative to increase U.S. support for international family planning—and the reason we are inviting you to join us in this new endeavor.

People of faith are well prepared to seek justice for women and families because of our faith commitments, our traditions of caring for the poor, and our moral and ethical principles. We can all play a unique role in an RCRC project sponsored by the United Nations Foundation. Our project is being conducted in connection with the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the historic United Nations International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD).

In this project, we are advocating for increased U.S. support for family planning and reproductive health services for the neediest women and families in the world. We are seeking funding to save the lives of women and infants, improve women’s health, and empower women, men and families to have a better life.

Our vision is that voices will be raised in congregations of every denomination and from every tradition – and that those voices will be heard by decision-makers, who will understand the urgency of saving women’s lives and restore the United States to its position of leadership in family planning.

As people of faith, it may be that our concern is grounded in scripture or moral reasoning or our pursuit of justice. We know that huge global trends - population growth, extreme poverty, environmental degradation, and inequitable consumption - must be addressed to achieve sustainable development. We seek to advocate for some of the individuals most harmed by these trends – the women of the world who lack resources and political power and whose lives are too often an after-thought in the development of their nations.

This toolkit includes resources for faith-informed advocacy on behalf of women and families in the poorest nations of the world:

- Facts About The Need for International Family Planning and Reproductive Health Services
- A one-page fact sheet for displays, posting in your congregation, etc.
- Sermon seeds
- Brief, action-oriented items for internet communications (websites, monthly and weekly bulletins, blogs, etc)
- Denominational and individual statements

Thank you for your interest in this project. I hope you and your congregation will undertake one or more activities and let us know about them at [info@rcrc.org](mailto:info@rcrc.org):

- Write to your members of Congress, either as individuals or as a congregation, calling on Congress to increase funding for international family planning and reproductive health. Sign up at <http://capwiz.com/rcrc/mlm/signup/> for action alerts that tell you when to contact Congress.
- Examine this issue in more depth using our toolkit at [www.rcrc.org/issues/MySistersKeeper.cfm](http://www.rcrc.org/issues/MySistersKeeper.cfm) as part of an adult ed or social justice meeting.
- Designate a particular worship service to focus attention on this issue.
- Participate in our Global Mother's Day program (information to come in April).

Whatever you decide to do, it can make a positive difference to women and families in need worldwide.

Peace and blessings,



Reverend Dr. Carlton W. Veazey  
President and CEO  
Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice

# Facts about The Need for Services

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There has been steady and solid support among Christian and Jewish denominations for United States' funding of family planning and reproductive health services for women in poor countries. Many people of faith consider helping people in need to be in the best tradition of religion. For many years, the United States was a leader in supporting family planning but funding fell sharply over the past 10 years. While funding levels are increasing again, a great deal more is required to meet current needs. Our challenge is to bring our faith-informed convictions about the importance of family planning to U.S. government decision-makers. We can start by informing our own congregations and colleagues of the facts.

## The Facts

**Pregnancy and childbirth are a major source of ill health for women in developing countries.**

Unintended pregnancy and maternal and infant death and ill health remain unacceptably high in the developing world. Family planning is a proven method of reducing maternal and infant deaths, yet an estimated 200 million women in developing countries who want to plan and space their children or do not want more children do not have access to effective contraception. Most lack information and services or the support of their husbands and communities.

**Every year, more than half-a-million women die from pregnancy-related causes, 99% of them in developing countries.**

**Millions of women suffer serious health complications from pregnancy or childbirth.**

For every woman who dies, an estimated 20–30 women suffer short- or long-term illness or disabilities, such as severe anemia, damage to the reproductive organs, severe postpartum disability (such as obstetric fistula), chronic pain or infertility.

**4 million newborns die in the first month of life, 99% of them in developing countries.** Two-thirds of these newborn deaths occur in Africa, South Asia and Southeast Asia.

**Only about half of the 123 million women who give birth each year in developing countries receive antenatal, delivery and newborn services.** More than three in four women who needed care for obstetric complications in 2008 did not receive it.

**The disparity between developed and developing countries is stark.** One in 22 women in Sub-Saharan Africa dies during pregnancy or childbirth, compared with one in 110 in Asia, one in 280 in Latin America and the Caribbean, and one in 5,900 in more developed regions.

**Lack of family planning contributes to the high rate of abortion.** More than 50 million of the 190 million women who become pregnant each year have abortions. Many of these are clandestine and performed under unsafe conditions. Every year, an estimated 74,000 women die as the result of unsafe abortions.

**The need for family planning is growing fast,** and it is estimated that the “unmet need” – a term used by health experts - will grow by 40 percent in the next 15 years. But family planning has been losing ground as an international development priority. Funding is decreasing, and the gap between the need and the available resources is growing.

## **Moving Forward**

The number of unintended pregnancies is lowest in countries with the greatest access to effective contraception and where women play a major role in family decision-making. But one evaluation found that family planning services are routinely available to women at a reasonable cost in only 14 of 88 developing countries.

**We can begin to move toward the ideal of “reproductive rights” by supporting family planning services throughout the developing world.** The International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), held in Cairo in 1994, defined reproductive rights as human rights, recognized sexual health as a component of reproductive health, and called for universal access to reproductive health care by 2015. The ICPD vision includes equality between women and men in reproductive decision-making, voluntary choice in determining the number and timing of one’s children, and freedom from sexual violence, coercion and other harmful practices. A 20-year program of action, adopted by 179 countries, placed women’s empowerment and reproductive rights at the center of slowing rapid population growth and achieving sustainable development.

Fifteen years later, in 2009, the international community began assessing progress toward the goals set at ICPD. Governments are also working on the Millennium Development Goals, or MDGs, adopted by world leaders following the United Nations Millennium Summit in 2000. The eight MDGs are consistent with the ICPD’s vision. Three of them depend on the availability of reproductive health care to reduce maternal and infant deaths and combat the AIDS pandemic. In 2007, MDG 5 was expanded to include universal access to reproductive health services.

Although governments worldwide have committed to making reproductive health services available to all, resources have been insufficient to make universal access a reality. Donor assistance for family planning has decreased substantially in absolute dollar amounts in recent years, from \$653 million in 1997 to \$394 million in 2006.

**The benefits for women and families are substantial.**

- In 2008, contraceptive use prevented 188 million unintended pregnancies, 1.2 million newborn deaths, and 230,000 maternal deaths. The greatest benefits from increased availability of family planning would be in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Central Asia.
- Family planning and maternal and newborn health services improve women's health and enhance their status and rights. They also protect the health of infants and young children and improve the well-being of families
- When women can plan and space their children, they can remain in school or attend school, obtain paid employment, and improve household income. When couples have smaller families, population growth and related consumption of natural resources are lowered



## Am I My Sisters' Keeper?

- Every year, more than half-a-million women die from pregnancy-related causes, 99% of them in developing countries.
- Millions of women suffer serious health complications from pregnancy or childbirth.
- 4 million newborns die in the first month of life, 99% of them in developing countries.

We have the power to stop this tragedy. Family planning is the key – it saves women's lives, improves women's health, and reduces infant deaths. It empowers women, men and families to have a better life.

The need for family planning is growing fast, but U.S. funding has not kept pace.  
Act now to make a difference!

- Get together with others to study the issue.
  - Talk, sermonize and pray about this
  - Contact your members of Congress.

Learn more at [www.rcrc.org/issues/MySisters'Keeper.cfm](http://www.rcrc.org/issues/MySisters'Keeper.cfm)

You can make a difference in the lives of millions of women, children, and families.

## Sermon Seeds

### Scriptural and Theological Grounding for Sermons about International Family Planning

#### **My Sisters' Keeper** Genesis 4:9

As people of faith we are called to care not only for our immediate family or those in our community, but for our sisters and brothers throughout the world. Women and newborns throughout the world face dire risks to life and health due to inadequate or non-existent family planning services, risks that would be greatly reduced by increased U.S. funding for these services. During difficult economic times of our own it is easy to forget how blessed we are compared to other parts of the world and the responsibility we have. We truly are our sisters' keeper.

#### **Created Equally** Genesis 1:27

Lack of family planning services disproportionately affects women, their lives, bodies, and well-being. We are taught in Genesis 1:27 that all humans were created (in Hebrew: *B'Tzelem Elohim*) in the image of the divine, equally, both men and women. Any and all systematic discrimination against women denies that fundamental truth, which guides our work in human rights in general as well as in women's rights.

#### **One Human Family- The Tower of Babel** Genesis 11:1-9

Humanity is divided by so many languages, so many borders, it is easy to forget that we are all one human family, the children of God. We have a responsibility to care for each other, to remember all that connects us and ties us together, not that which divides us. That responsibility extends to the responsibility to give aid and help when we can to address dire situations, which the plight of pregnant women around the world most certainly is. The recent earthquakes in Haiti and Chile have reminded us of this need to care for those outside our borders—a need we can continue to address by calling on our government to fund the important work of saving women's and infant's lives.

## **Who hears the cries of Hagar, the cast out woman?**

**Genesis 16:1-11**

**Genesis 21:9-20**

Two different times, while pregnant, and with her newborn son, Hagar is cast out and abandoned. Yet God hears her, God sees her suffering. As funding for needed services is drastically cut, have we not cast out pregnant women around the world, just as Hagar was cast out? God hears their cries for help; do we?

### **The Jewish Tradition (from the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism)**

The guiding principle of sexuality in the Jewish tradition is “*Kedoshim tih’yu*”—“you shall be holy,” which means that sexuality is linked to blessing, commandment, and God. We cannot fulfill that mitzvah, that commandment/worthy deed without seeking to preserve our health and well-being, the integrity of our bodies and minds, and considering our future in all decisions we make.

Maimonides, the great Jewish scholar and teacher, taught that ensuring the health and well-being of the community is of critical importance. When members of a society at large are ill, our responsibility expands to ensure that medical resources are available at an affordable cost. These notions of health care are directly related to family planning and reproductive health care, without which many members of a community cannot thrive and be well.

### **The Call! What Action Can Your Congregation Take**

- Write to your members of Congress, either as individuals or as a congregation, calling on Congress to increase funding for international family planning and reproductive health. Sign up at <http://capwiz.com/rcrc/mlm/signup/> for action alerts that tell you when to contact Congress.
- Examine this issue in more depth using our toolkit at [www.rcrc.org/issues/MySistersKeeper.cfm](http://www.rcrc.org/issues/MySistersKeeper.cfm) as part of an adult ed or social justice meeting.
- Designate a particular worship service as a time to focus attention on this issue.
- Participate in our Global Mother’s Day program (information to come in April).

**Brief, action-oriented items for internet communications (websites, monthly and weekly bulletins, blogs, etc)**

Every year, more than half-a-million women die from pregnancy-related causes, 99% of them in developing countries.

We have the power to stop this tragedy with increased support for family planning services.

Learn more at [www.rcrc.org/issues/MySisters'Keeper.cfm](http://www.rcrc.org/issues/MySisters'Keeper.cfm)

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In developing countries in Asia and Africa, 4 million newborns die in the first month of life. Family planning services enable women to plan and space births – and can reduce this tragic toll.

Learn more at [www.rcrc.org/issues/MySisters'Keeper.cfm](http://www.rcrc.org/issues/MySisters'Keeper.cfm)

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One in 22 women in Sub-Saharan Africa dies during pregnancy or childbirth, compared with one in 5,900 in developed countries. We can save women's lives with better access to family planning services.

Learn more at [www.rcrc.org/issues/MySisters'Keeper.cfm](http://www.rcrc.org/issues/MySisters'Keeper.cfm)

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Family planning saves lives! In 2008, contraceptive use prevented the deaths of 1.2 million newborns and 230,000 new mothers, 99% of whom are in developing countries. But U.S. funding is not keeping pace with need.

Learn more at [www.rcrc.org/issues/MySisters'Keeper.cfm](http://www.rcrc.org/issues/MySisters'Keeper.cfm)

# The Views of People of Faith

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## Catholicism and International Family Planning

Catholics for Choice provided us with the following summary about Catholic views on international family planning. More information is available on their website, [www.catholicsforchoice.org](http://www.catholicsforchoice.org).

Throughout the world, women, men and their families suffer because they lack the resources to plan their families, and the comprehensive information and education to keep them safe and healthy. The Catholic hierarchy's powerful lobby plays a huge role in influencing public policy and affects everyone—Catholic or not—by limiting family planning services worldwide. However, the great majority of Catholics disagree with the Vatican and the bishops on matters related to sexuality, contraception, and parenthood. For more than 35 years, Catholics for Choice has worked in the United States and around the world to make sure that decision makers understand that Catholics do, in fact, support family planning and freedom in reproductive choices.

The morality and the legality of modern family planning is an important personal and political issue worldwide. Catholic support for contraception is grounded in core principles of Catholic theology, which respect the moral agency of all women. It is bolstered by respect for the religious freedom and rights of people of all faiths and no religious faith, by respect for plural and tolerant democratic societies and, most importantly, by adherence to the Catholic principle of standing with the poor and marginalized of the world who are disproportionately women.

Deciding when and whether to have children is one of the most important decisions individuals and couples make. The debate within the church is not about whether to limit family size based on capacity to care for and love children; it is about allowing men and women the freedom to decide which methods of family planning to use. In spite of the Vatican and many bishops' opposition to most methods of family planning, Catholics throughout the world use modern methods of contraception and believe that using such methods is exactly what good Catholics should do.

An overwhelming majority of Catholics worldwide disagree with the hierarchy's ban on the use of contraception. 97% of U.S. Catholic women have used some form of contraception banned by the Vatican during the course of their reproductive lives. In Bolivia, 70% of married Catholic women have used some form of modern

birth control and in Colombia over 90% of Catholics have used a modern family planning method at some point in their lives. Catholics have rejected church-approved family planning methods in favor of reliable, modern methods of contraception, with less than 3% of sexually active U.S. Catholic women using church-approved methods as their primary form of family planning.

Despite the overwhelming Catholic support of modern family planning, the Catholic hierarchy has taken the lead on some of the greatest challenges to sound reproductive health and rights laws around the world, blocking everything from access to therapeutic abortion to the availability of emergency contraception and basic family planning. The Vatican uses every means at its disposal, most often wielding its financial strength and political clout, to block consensus and pressure policymakers to abandon support for family planning both domestically and internationally, as well as at the United Nations. Using false claims that its positions are universally accepted by Catholic constituents, the hierarchy actively lobbies against measures to improve access to reproductive health care.

In 2008, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops lobbied Members of the United States Congress during negotiations on spending for PEPFAR – a U.S. program to combat global HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria through treatment, care and prevention-- and were ultimately successful in having family planning removed from the \$48 billion spent on HIV/AIDS prevention. They were also successful in strengthening so-called conscience clauses which would allow groups like Catholic Relief Services—the third largest recipient of PEPFAR funds—to opt out of distributing or even mentioning condoms. The decoupling of vital family planning services from HIV/AIDS prevention programs meant a loss of critical services that can prevent the transmission of HIV. This is a needless and tragic setback for HIV/AIDS prevention efforts and for the families who want and need access to family planning. More recently, the bishops lobbied against much-needed support for family planning in the economic recovery proposals here at home and for the work of the United Nations Population Fund abroad.

Catholics use contraception, Catholic legislators support family planning and the majority of Catholics believe that you can be a good Catholic without obeying the church hierarchy's prohibition on modern family planning methods.

## Episcopal Church

Dated February 18, 2004

The following is a true copy of a Resolution adopted by the Executive Council at its meeting on February 9 -12, 2004, in Tampa, Florida, at which a quorum was present and voting.

*Resolved*, That the Episcopal Church affirm that the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) held in Cairo, Egypt established an important plan of action to ensure access to education, health care, and family planning for all the world's citizens; and *be it further*

*Resolved*, That the Episcopal Church recognize that the ICPD made a fundamental shift in recognizing the pivotal role that women play in securing health and well-being for themselves, their families, and their communities; *and be it further*

*Resolved*, That the Episcopal Church affirm on this, the tenth anniversary of Cairo, its commitment to the implementation of the Program of Action and the role of the United Nations and UNFPA in doing so, and *be it further*

*Resolved*, That the Episcopal Church recognizes that the Millennium Development Goals are consistent with and supportive of the Cairo Program of Action, *and be it further*

*Resolved*, That the Episcopal Church call upon the President and the Congress of the United States to honor its commitments made in Cairo to improving women's health, access to education and reproductive freedom, and by ensuring every child's health and opportunity.

## **Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)**

### ***Hope for a Global Future: Toward Just and Sustainable Human Development***

**Approved by the 208<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (1996) Presbyterian Church (U.S.A)**

(This is an excerpt. The entire document is at

<http://www.pcusa.org/oga/publications/hope-for-a-global-future.pdf>)

Just and sustainable human development is the comprehensive enhancement of the quality of life for all, present and future; it necessarily involves the integration of economic, social, political, cultural, ecological, and spiritual dimensions of being.

With this definition of "just and sustainable human development," this policy statement addresses international issues in the economic structure. It is based on a biblical theology and Christian assumption of the mutual responsibility and equality of human beings in God's sight, stating that equitable distribution of goods and ecological constraints put moral limits on economic activity for the sake of human well-being, future generations, and nonhuman life. It calls for a renewed emphasis on the Reformed norm of frugality and lifts up the norm of sufficiency so that all may participate in the "good life," calling for abundant living in caring communities in a way that is less materialistic and more frugal....

What, then, are some effective and ethically reasonable means for preventing overpopulation? Contraception certainly must be a central focus of population policy. For more than thirty years, Presbyterian assemblies have endorsed artificial means of birth control as a right and their use as socially responsible. Since overpopulation exacerbates other social and ecological problems, contraception is not only morally acceptable but also essential for the good of men and women and the common good of nations and nature. The right to birth control information, education, services, and means emerges from the demands of both social and ecological justice.

Population policy should focus on reproductive health, the empowerment of women, and the basic human rights and essential needs of all persons. In this way, an enabling environment can be created that gives women and men a new basis for deciding whether and when they want to have children. Safe, effective, affordable, simple, and reversible means of contraception are necessary but not sufficient for effective population control.

Unfortunately, the demand for family planning greatly exceeds its supply. The United Nations' Conference on Population and Development (Cairo, September 1994) estimated that at least 120 million additional married women would adopt contraception if available and culturally acceptable. Others have suggested that perhaps 300 million women in developing countries now want birth control that is not available to them. Probably many more would want it if they understood its personal, social, and ecological relevance. Thus, there is an urgent need for easily

affordable and universally accessible contraceptive education and means for women and men. Men must be included because they bear equal responsibility for procreation, and their attitudes are often controlling factors in the reproductive behavior of women in many countries. Significantly increased efforts in contraceptive research and development are also required. The 1994 Cairo Conference estimated the annual costs of these needs at \$17 billion in 2000 and \$21.7 billion in 2015, with one-third of these amounts coming from donor nations and organizations.

Population stabilization needs to be part of a much broader strategy for socioeconomic justice. Socioeconomic conditions seem to be prime factors affecting fertility rates, with improvements in the quality of life clearly associated with reductions in the rates and numbers of births. Equality for women—in social status, political power, education, employment, health care, and nutrition, among other things—is critically important. The reproductive health of poor women in developing countries is a scandalous crisis in itself. Jodi L. Jacobson of the Worldwatch Institute describes below the situation:

Taken together, illnesses and deaths from complications of pregnancy, childbirth, and unsafe abortion, from diseases of the reproductive tract, and from the improper use of contraceptive methods top the list of health threats to women of reproductive age worldwide. At least one million women will die of reproductive causes this year [1992], and more than 100 million others will suffer disabling illnesses.

Demographer Partha S. Dasgupta adds another startling note below:  
In some parts of sub-Saharan Africa as many as one woman dies for every 50 live births. . . . At a total fertility rate of seven or more, the chance that a woman entering her reproductive years will not live through them is about one in six.

The improved status of women should have a variety of benefits, including a decline in the appallingly high rates of maternal and infant mortality, as well as in fertility rates. Improved economic security for all citizens of poor nations should have similar benefits. According to demographic transition theory, poverty breeds more people in poor countries, since large families provide a means of economic assistance in family production and security in old age. Improved incomes, nutrition, housing, health, education, employment, and social security, then, should decrease the need for more children. Even so, socioeconomic justice is valuable in itself and should be pursued independent of its demographic effects.

Substantial economic and technical assistance from the northern countries will be necessary to help assure these changes and avert the dangers of overpopulation.

### **On Adequately Funding International Comprehensive Family Planning Programs (1997)**

Whereas, the 196th General Assembly (1984) resolution on "The World Population Situation" (*Minutes*, 1984, Part I, pp. 331-33) and the 206th General Assembly (1994) resolution on "Universal and Voluntary Family Planning" (*Minutes*, 1994, Part I, pp. 578) supported comprehensive family planning; and

Whereas, at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo, in 1994, the United States was instrumental in building a broad consensus of 180 nations behind a comprehensive plan to curb population growth and enhance the status of women, and the heart of the ICPD agreement is the recognition that adequate funding for family planning and reproductive health services can ensure a better future for our children by stabilizing world population in the first half of the next century, and since at ICPD it was estimated that more than 120 million couples would like to plan their families but have no access to information and that over 350 million additional couples would like access to more reliable methods of family planning; and

Whereas, the entire 1997 Foreign Operations budget, which includes foreign aid funds, was held up for months by opponents of family planning, and after agreeing that \$385 million would be available for these activities, opponents prohibited disbursement of these funds before July 1, 1997, when nine months of the fiscal year will have passed and also limited disbursement of funds to 8 percent per month—less than one-twelfth of the annual total—effectively prohibiting poor countries receiving such aid from mounting any program that would require a disproportionate share of funds up front; and

Whereas, it is feared that reduced access to family planning services will result in more high-risk births, more unintended pregnancies, more abortions, and more maternal and child deaths in the developing world, and moreover, the administrative restrictions imposed by Congress will redirect much of the reduced funding for family planning assistance to bookkeeping, rather than to meeting the critical needs of women and their families; therefore, be it

*Resolved*, [That the Presbytery of Baltimore overture the 209th General Assembly (1997) to direct the Stated Clerk to

1. establish on a policy of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) that comprehensive family planning programs in the foreign aid budget should be adequately funded on a continuing bipartisan basis and not be subject to ideological political attacks;
2. urge both the president and members of Congress to fully fund all international comprehensive family planning programs in the current budget and significantly increase funding in subsequent budgets as needed to provide for the comprehensive family planning programs in developing nations that are vital to the well being of children, families, national and the peace of the world; and

3. That the 209th General Assembly (1997):

1. Reaffirm the actions of previous General Assemblies calling for U.S. support for comprehensive family planning programs in developing nations;

2. Urge bipartisan support for adequate appropriations, communicate effectively that comprehensive family planning does not encourage abortion, and oppose legislative efforts which reduce foreign aid for comprehensive family planning programs.

3. Urge members of Congress to fully fund all international comprehensive family planning programs in the current budget, and urge the president, with the support of Congress, to increase funding in subsequent budgets as needed to provide for the comprehensive family planning programs in developing nations that are vital to the well-being of children, families, nations, and the peace of the world; and

4. communicate this resolution to the president of the United States, the secretary of state, and to each member of Congress.

## United Methodist Church

### *World's Population and the Church's Response (Resolution #159)*

The creation of the world out of chaos into order is the initial biblical witness. In this witness is the affirmation of the freedom and responsibility of humankind. We affirm God to be the Creator, the one who grants us freedom, and the one to whom we are responsible.

God's ongoing creative and re-creative concern for the universe was expressed through Jesus Christ, who has called us to find the meaning of our lives in dual love of God and neighbor. In this context, we live responsibly before God, writing history by the actions of our lives. The imperative for the individual Christian and the Christian community is to seek patterns of life, shape the structures of society, and foster those values that will dignify human life for all.

We are living in an age of possibility in which we are called under God to serve the future with hope and confidence. Christians have no alternative to involvement in seeking solutions for the great and complex set of problems facing the world today. These issues are closely interrelated: hunger, poverty, disease, lack of potable water, denial of human rights, economic and environmental exploitation, overconsumption, technologies that are inadequate or inappropriate, rapid depletion of resources, and continuing growth of population. None can be addressed in isolation.

Nor can hunger, poverty, disease, injustice, and violence in the world be simplistically blamed on population growth. The rapidly swelling numbers of people, however, makes addressing these issues more challenging. The world's population is estimated to reach 9.2 billion by 2050, with the least developed countries having the highest fertility and population growth. The populations of those nations are expected to triple in the next 50 years, from 600 million to 1.8 billion. With each passing day we are discovering more and more connections between population and with sustainable development. As the population grows, it has an obvious impact on land use, water consumption, and air quality. Communities are called to be responsible stewards of all these resources. How can we protect God's gift of the natural environment and at the same time provide a place of sustainability for humans?

The high rates of malaria and HIV/AIDS diminish life for many of God's children. According to UNAIDS, it is predicted that by 2010 more than 80 million persons will have contracted the AIDS virus. And today malaria is found throughout the tropical and sub-tropical regions of the world and causes more than 300 million acute illnesses and at least one million deaths annually. (World Health Organization, 2001-2010 UN Decade to Roll Back Malaria)

Gender inequality in parts of the world exacerbates these complex issues. We know that in many nations, women are considered property and lack basic human rights such as protection under the law and access to education, housing, and jobs. Women comprise 70 percent of the world's poor and many are captives (knowingly or unknowingly) within patriarchal structures, policies, and practices.

We also recognize the growing numbers of elderly in the world's population. Many of them are among the world's most poor. According to the United Nations Population Fund, there are almost 400 million people over the age of 60 in the developing world, and the majority are women. While just 8 percent of persons in developing countries today are older than 60, the proportion will jump to 20 percent in the next 50 years. As communities engage in sustainable development, it will be important for the needs of the aging to be considered, such as economic sustenance, health care, housing, and nutrition. We must also insure the elimination of violence against older persons and provide support and care for the many elderly who are caring for their children and grandchildren, including those affected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

As people of faith, we are called to educate ourselves about the interconnectedness of life's critical concerns and live as responsible stewards. The church can address these complex population-related issues on several fronts. We call on all United Methodists to:

- access educational opportunities that focus on the issue of population and its inter-relatedness to other critical issues such as poverty, disease, hunger, environment, injustice, and violence, and to promote these opportunities in the local church;
- urge that the United Methodist medical and mission facilities and programs provide a full range of reproductive health and family planning information;
- take the lead in upgrading the status of women in societies and include women in all development planning and processes. One such action would be advocating for the United States to ratify the United Nations Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and to adopt the Equal Rights Amendment;
- implement programs within The United Methodist Church that provide and/or enhance educational opportunities for girls and women, making it possible for them to achieve levels of self-sufficiency and well-being;
- call upon governments to give high priority to addressing the malaria crisis and HIV/AIDS pandemic and urge adequate funding to eradicate and prevent these diseases;
- call on the U.S. Congress and legislative bodies of the developed nations to recognize the crucial nature of population growth and to give maximum feasible funding to programs of population, environment, health, agriculture, and other technological-assistance programs for developing nations. International assistance programs should be based on mutual cooperation,

should recognize the diversities of culture, should encourage self-development and not dependency, and should not require "effective population programs" as a prerequisite for other developmental assistance;

- call on governments and private organizations to place a high priority on research aimed at developing a range of safe, inexpensive contraceptives that can be used in a variety of societies and medical situations. Promote greater understanding of attitudes, motivations, and social and economic factors affecting childbearing; and
- call on governments to implement systems of social insurance and support for older persons to ensure adequate economic sustenance and housing, and quality health care and nutrition.

ADOPTED 2004

See Social Principles, ¶162I.

From The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church — 2004.

***Resolution #25 “Responsible Parenthood”***

Each couple has the right and the duty prayerfully and responsibly to control conception according to their circumstances. They are, in our view, free to use those means of birth control considered medically safe. As developing technologies have moved conception and reproduction more and more out of the category of a chance happening and more closely to the realm of responsible choice, 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.

To support the sacred dimensions of personhood, all possible efforts should be made by parents and the community to ensure that each child enters the world with a healthy body and is born into an environment conducive to the realization of his or her full potential.”

The resolution encourages churches and society to “make information and materials available so all can exercise responsible choice in the area of conception controls. We support the free flow of information about reputable, efficient, and safe nonprescription contraceptive techniques through educational programs and through periodicals, radio, television, and other advertising media. We support adequate public funding and increased participation in family planning services by public and private agencies, including church-related institutions, with the goal of making such services available to all, regardless of economic status or geographic location.

## Reform Judaism

(Excerpted from news release, July 20, 2002, from Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism

[http://rac.org/Articles/index.cfm?id=753&pge\\_prg\\_id=10942&pge\\_id=3140](http://rac.org/Articles/index.cfm?id=753&pge_prg_id=10942&pge_id=3140))

Jewish tradition considers the sanctity of all human life as an overriding principle to the extent that scholars, according to the Talmud, were forbidden to live in a community that did not boast a physician and a surgeon and the concept of *pikuah nefesh* (i.e., danger to one's life) and the prevention of disease were religious values clearly articulated in Jewish sources demanding society's intervention. Therefore, physicians were called upon to minister to all the sick regardless of religion or ethnicity, and men, women and children were given access to daily prayer and medical treatment. Protecting the health of the poor is considered so crucial that communal subsidies matched by reduced rates for poor patients have been the norm. These have been our values and commitments since Sinai and continue to guide us today. Funding UNFPA (the United Nations Population Fund) is essential to the lives of women and children all over the world....

**News release, January 23, 2009, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism**

[http://rac.org/Articles/index.cfm?id=3189&pge\\_prg\\_id=10585&pge\\_id=2541](http://rac.org/Articles/index.cfm?id=3189&pge_prg_id=10585&pge_id=2541)

Mark Pelavin, Associate Director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, today welcomed President Obama's repeal of the "Global Gag Rule." Under the Global Gag Rule, foreign family planning organizations that used their own, non-U.S. funds to provide legal abortion services or to lobby their own governments for changes in abortion laws were banned from receiving any U.S. aid for their non-abortion family planning work. Mr. Pelavin's statement follows:

We are pleased and grateful that President Obama, in one of his first acts as President, issued an Executive Order to abolish the rule that withheld U.S. family planning funding to overseas organizations that support legal abortion. His action is particularly timely, coming just one day after the 36<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the landmark *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court decision. The repeal of the Global Gag Rule represents a major victory for international family planning programs and renews America's position as a leader in the global community.

Jewish tradition teaches that if a person saves one life, it is as if they have saved the world. In a world where poor reproductive health remains the leading cause of death for women, and complications from unsafe abortion result in approximately 67,000 deaths and at least 5 million serious injuries annually, today marks an important step forward.

Repeal of the gag rule renews America's commitment to protecting the health and lives of women and the future of families and communities everywhere. We hope this is the first step toward a new era of U.S. partnership in global cooperation to ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and the advancement of women's sexual and reproductive rights worldwide.

**Excerpts of Remarks by Rabbi Scott Sperling,  
Director, Union for Reform Judaism Mid-Atlantic Council, March 8, 2006**

"Women are commanded to care for the health and well-being of their bodies above all else." That teaching, from the law code called in Hebrew, *Mishneh Torah*, written by Maimonides, a physician, scientist and great Jewish religious scholar of his age, tells us so much of what we need to know on this International Women's Day.

...as a core Jewish value, we believe that "Providing health is not just an obligation for the patient and the doctor, but for the whole of society." I can take great pride in this noble tradition of support for women and their health care needs. For along with Maimonides' 700 year old statement, I can also point to the Union for Reform Judaism's and the Central Conference of American Rabbis' numerous statements and resolutions supporting the fundamental right of women to health care. In 1992, the Central Conference of American Rabbis passed a resolution that read in part, "Women are short-changed in many aspects of health care, from research and prevention to treatment, access and education. Addressing these inequities is fundamental to women's rights."

Around the world, women and girls are confronted with substantial barriers to basic education, to health care and to economic opportunities. They are discriminated against and suffer intolerable abuses exclusively because of their gender. Sadly, too many seem to be willing to shut their eyes to these abuses and the litany of problems they create. Each year over a half a million women die from causes related to pregnancy and childbirth. Can any of us be surprised that 99 percent of these deaths occur in developing countries? Each year, eight million more women suffer serious health complications from pregnancy and childbirth. Each year, approximately 10.8 million children under the age of five die, frequently from low birth-weight or other causes related to complications in their mother's pregnancy. As individuals and as a nation of faith and good will, can we hear this news and not have our hearts broken and our consciences stirred?

In a resolution regarding international women's rights, the Reform Movement's Commission on Social Action stated the matter plainly; "This unequal treatment is more than a matter of denial of abstract rights – it is a matter of life and death." As religious leaders, it is our intention to speak out forcefully against these barriers, against these abuses and the evil consequences they bring. We are here to speak out

for the fundamental rights of women to live lives of health and opportunity. To live lives with a brighter horizon and a more hopeful future.

For over 40 years, the United States has included family planning services as part of the aid we provide in the developing world. We've been able to see the benefits it brings to families and individual women. We can see the improvement in their well-being as we improve maternal health. We know that our support for family planning information and services is critically important in reducing maternal and infant deaths and preventing abortions. We know that access to modern contraception means lives saved and their futures improved. All this we know.

...I want to reiterate the statement made by the Reform movement in 1994, "This unequal treatment is more than a matter of denial of abstract rights – it is a matter of life and death." If we are to make of this International Women's Day a new beginning for women around the world, we must take these words to heart and be moved to action. We must decide to act upon the words of Deuteronomy 30:19, "...I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your seed may live."

# Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations

## *1996 General Resolution*

Because Unitarian Universalists affirm concern for the whole earth, all of earth's inhabitants, and the future we share; and

Whereas the Unitarian Universalist Association is an advocate for women's empowerment, voluntary family planning, sustainable development, and environmental justice;

Whereas the Unitarian Universalist Association supports:

1. the right of every woman to decide whether to bear a child;
2. the right of every individual to safe, effective, and affordable birth control methods;
3. the right of every woman to safe, effective, and affordable abortion services; and
4. government protection for those who provide such services;

Whereas local, national, and international groups concerned with population, women's rights, justice, and the environment see the linkages among these issues and are beginning to collaborate in developing and implementing solutions; and

Whereas the 1994 United Nations International Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo, Egypt, addressed global population issues by bringing together concerns for family planning, human rights, and environmental protection, and agreed that gender equity is a key to achieving sustainable development and population stabilization and that, therefore, socio-economic and educational development programs for women ought to be at the center of planning for change;

Therefore be it resolved that the Unitarian Universalist Association condemns anti-choice violence and calls upon the nations of the world to provide education to men, women and youth regarding reproductive and sexual health, to provide reproductive health services to all who seek them, and to afford protection to those who provide such services;

Be it further resolved that the Unitarian Universalist Association endorses the Cairo Conference's final program of action to support women's economic and educational empowerment and reproductive health care, and implementation of this program entailing commitment by the world's governments of \$17 billion annually by the year 2000; and

Be it finally resolved that congregations and individual Unitarian Universalists be encouraged to establish and support specific projects in their communities to help implement these goals.

## A View from Islamic Scholar Khaleel Mohammed

In the absence of any truly authoritative body that represents what may be deemed Islamic, one finds Muslims all over the world having various opinions on the subject of family planning. Many of the third world Muslim societies are plagued by lack of education and accept certain traditional viewpoints as if they have the stamp of divine approval. In many cases, one of the biggest problems has to do with family planning.

Many Muslims view the matter in a fatalistic manner: they don't practice any form of birth control, assuming that if God does not want them to have children, then they will not have them, and that even if a pregnancy is unwanted, it is a manifestation of the Divine Will. This is indeed a wrong way of viewing things, since God says in the Qur'an that "God does not change the condition of a people until they change it themselves." This means people are the custodians of their affairs, and what they reap is a result of their own actions. We have a duty to children and should not treat them as necessary results of conjugal relations. The Qur'an states that God has created mates, establishing "love and affection" between them. This means, among other things, that a woman should not be seen simply as a baby machine. It stands to reason that responsible parents do not create situations where there is no birth control, where there are too many mouths to feed, where the health of the mother is endangered every time there is a pregnancy.

For those who state that they do not want to be deemed as opposing tradition, there is an Islamic law maxim that states "*dar al mafaasid yuqaddam ala jalb al masalih*"—the removal of evil takes precedence over the observance of that which is good." This functional translation means that if there is no birth control, and many births will affect the family and society, both economically and health wise, then such is "mafsadah"—something that promotes evil—and the removal of such evil must be given precedence to what tradition may deem as good. It is the right of the unborn that we seek as much as possible to bring them into a world where they will be welcomed. As such, it is time for all Muslims to recognize that they should unstintingly support the call for full funding for international family planning services.

If Muslims claim that, as the Qur'an says, men and women are all created from the same matter, to live in love and harmony, then they must see the necessity of family planning without fear of recrimination. The time has come for Muslim societies throughout the world to encourage the development of educational facilities for women in all areas of the world, particularly those regions where there is lack of adequate family planning and health facilities.

In many of the Muslim majority countries, women are now in parliament or, in some cases, even leading such countries. They should use this clout to approach the

United Nations and other bodies, including those from richer Muslim majority countries, to seek help in establishing educational facilities.

## **A View from the United Church of Christ**

The United Church of Christ, informed by decades of its General Synod statements supporting the full rights of women around the world\*, has consistently joined other faith and secular organizations that have called for full funding for international family planning services.

Women must be able to access and utilize family planning services without fear of recrimination or violence. It has been demonstrated that if women receive such services, fewer unintended pregnancies occur, women's reproductive health is improved, rates of female genital mutilation are reduced, and overall family health is enhanced. Women must also be able to determine how such services are best provided in any particular cultural setting.

Additionally, the United Church of Christ supports efforts to eliminate poverty, provide economic support programs for women, and increase opportunities for education for girls and women in recognition of the reality that raising the status of women in society results in better access and use of family planning information and methods and women's health services. Many such programs are made possible through Common Global Ministries, a joint ministry of the UCC and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) conducted with global mission partners and churches around the world.

\*Beijing Platform from the 4<sup>th</sup> World Conference on Women, 1995; Beijing +15; the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights; Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women



