

# 2005 Consistently Protecting and Promoting Life

*Presented by the Commission on Christian Action, adopted by the delegates the 120th Covenant Annual Meeting.*

## **Biblical Basis for Our Call**

God is alive, “eternal” and “immortal,” the “living God.” God is life, fully revealed and given in Jesus Christ (John 1:4). God shares life, through creation and redemption, with us and all that lives. Scripture reveals God as the source, goal, and Lord of all life.

God is the source of all life. In the beginning, God creates life in marvelous diversity, beauty, and goodness (Genesis 1-2). God breathes life into dust to create humankind (Genesis 2:7) and all living creatures (Psalm 104:30; Ecclesiastes 3:19). God’s Spirit is the giver of life (John 6:63; 2 Corinthians 3:6). In God “we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). We receive life with thanksgiving as a gift from God.

God is the goal of all life. The Sabbath rest (Genesis 2:1-3) declares that God intends from the beginning a fellowship with all life (Exodus 20:9). We long for that coming kingdom where the whole earth knows the Lord, who will then dwell in our midst (Isaiah 11:9; Revelation 21) so that “the wolf shall live with the lamb...and a little child shall lead them” (Isaiah 11:6). We live life in hope as a journey toward God, who is life’s goal (1 Corinthians 15:24-28; Romans 8).

God is the Lord of all life. God directed us to “be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 1:22, 28), provided food (Genesis 1:29-30; 9:2-4; cf. Matthew 6:25), and calls us to exercise stewardship over life on earth (Genesis 1:26, Psalm 8:6-8). In Passover and exodus, God called Israel from serving dead idols to living life abundantly in a land flowing with milk and honey (Exodus 3:8). In Jesus’s resurrection, the church was “born anew to a living hope” (1 Peter 1:3) as we are “made alive in Christ” (1 Corinthians

15:22). Our deliverance from death to life means that we must faithfully serve life, for we serve life's risen Lord (Colossians 3:17).

Jesus Christ came that all "may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). Jesus's feedings and healings show us that abundant life includes both basic needs and the body's health. Yet his suffering and death declare that neither biological existence nor bodily health is an ultimate good (see 1 Corinthians 15:53). Abundant life includes reconciled community; Jesus breaks down every "dividing wall of hostility" (Ephesians 2:14) so that we might "pursue peace with everyone" (Matthew 5:9; Hebrews 12:14). Abundant life serves others as Jesus did, fulfilling both the law and the prophets by embodying love for all (Exodus 22; Isaiah 58; Matthew 25). God ultimately intends abundant life for the community of all—humanity and every creature and the cosmos itself—reconciled to God in Christ (Ephesians 1:10).

## The Call

We are called in Christ to be "a fragrance from life to life" (2 Corinthians 2:16). Receiving new life in Christ calls us to seek abundant life for all in grateful response, hopeful anticipation, and joyous service to Christ. We are for life because God is for life (Matthew 22:32). We are called to be consistently for life because God values all life (Jonah 4:11; Matthew 6:26).

We live out this call in a world opposed to it. Therefore, being consistently for life will often look more like crucifixion than resurrection. A "culture of death" dominates our fallen world. Life is destroyed in systematic infanticide, ritual executions, organized genocides, environmental degradation, acts of terror, and perpetual wars. Abundant life can be extinguished by both grinding poverty and empty excess, by both tyranny and individualism, by chronic hunger, relentless addiction, or lack of meaningful work. This "culture of death" even masquerades as abundant life, offering false forms of freedom, satisfaction, and safety. It has too often captured the Christian imagination, keeping us from receiving, living, and serving abundant life in Christ.

We repent of our complicity with the culture of death. We will resist death and the culture of death in our actions and our attitudes, through our practices and our policies.

Scripture teaches that humans have a special dignity—they are created in the “image of God” (Genesis 1), “crowned with glory and honor” (Psalm 8), the center of God’s incarnation (Hebrews 2). As bearers of God’s image, we have a special calling to be stewards of all life (Genesis 1:28; 2:15), but especially of human life (Genesis 9:6). We are our brother’s keeper (Genesis 4:9), our neighbor’s servant (Luke 17), our enemy’s intercessor (Matthew 5:44). Therefore, we repent of our failures to be consistently for life as God is for life, to consistently serve life as God does.

## The Response

The Covenant Annual Meeting in recent years has approved several resolutions that express a consistency in protecting and promoting life. In the Resolution on Abortion in 1994, we affirm our responsibility “to God, to ourselves, to each other, and to the new lives we are capable of bringing into existence.” Fetal human life is regularly mistreated and destroyed in practices of abortion, assisted reproduction, and now embryonic stem cell research and cloning, the latter as noted in the 2004 Resolution on Beginning-of-Life Issues in Emerging Biotechnologies. We affirm life by seeking to protect and preserve it, even at its earliest stages.

In a 1997 Resolution on Assisted Suicide, we affirm life even when confronted by choices that affect those struggling with the continuation of painful or reduced life. Suffering is not good in itself, but it is also not a condition to be avoided at all costs. By God’s grace, suffering is made into part of the plan of redemption. We acknowledge that it is sometimes difficult to choose between the lesser of evils when one’s suffering is uncontrollable and decisions are ambiguous. We commit ourselves to providing a caring community for the individuals and families who are sick and suffering.

Among many of our formal statements, in the 2003 Resolution on Our Relationship with the Poor we choose life over death when confronted by

the diminishment of life caused by poverty. We affirm that life is sacred, and an abundance of life requires sufficient food, safe neighborhoods and schools, reasonable housing, health care, and adequate clothing. "God's intentions have never been for some of God's people to accumulate wealth while others are in abject poverty." It is with repentant hearts we acknowledge that too often we have neither personally nor corporately participated in the struggle on behalf of those in poverty.

Therefore, continuing in this context, and aware of our biblical call to protect and promote life:

1) Be it resolved that Covenanters see with new eyes the wonders of God's creation and the significance of life, and to look on God's gift of life with appreciation and gratitude. We are to be ministers of the gospel, the good news of redemption and life.

2) Be it resolved that Covenanters in local congregations exercise sensitivity and support to those whose lives face formidable challenges. Among the many ways we can participate in ministry are to come alongside individuals and their family members, such as those in prison, those experiencing mental illness, notably in severe forms such as Alzheimer's disease and dementia; those who face crisis pregnancies; and those experiencing grinding poverty.

3) Be it resolved that we Covenanters educate ourselves about the way the world experiences the culture of death; the ways we can respond as promoters of life by praying and giving (such as to Covenant World Relief and the Paul Carlson Partnership); and serving (opportunities abound, from short-term mission to work through such organizations as the Peace Corps).

This is our calling—to care for all life as stewards of new life in Christ, to care consistently for life as recipients of God's steadfast, life-giving love. We will seek to embody this calling through our life together as Christ's Church and our actions as his faithful disciples.