

## DISCIPLINE REVISION:

# Human Reproduction Proposals

Discipline Revision Proposals (originating with the US UB “Human Reproduction Task Force”)

*These proposals from the US HRTF were all unanimously adopted, unchanged, by the US United Brethren National Conference on July 12, 2023. Items in blue italics are newly proposed additions.*

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## Proposal 1: The Beginning of Life

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Insert the following as a new paragraph in the chapter “Family Standards” after section 140 on “Remarriage”

### ¶140+1 The Beginning of Life

1. In human procreation, God invites us to participate in his good work of creation in a unique and significant way. Human life is God’s gift, and it is sacred at every stage from its end to its earliest beginning.
2. The Church bears living testimony to the sacredness of life by:
  - a. Promoting the flourishing of every person’s life through works of justice, mercy, and evangelism.
  - b. Standing with and for those whose lives are vulnerable. Never is a human life more vulnerable than during its beginning *and near its end*.
3. God values each human being in their full humanity at every stage of their life. Therefore, we are committed to promote human flourishing at every life stage and to protect the lives of all human persons through their entire life span beginning at the moment of conception. Scripture portrays this in at least four ways.
  - a. Every human is made a bodied person in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26-27).
  - b. God provides for each person throughout the course of their life, regardless of accomplishments or faith, sustaining life by sending rain on the righteous and the unrighteous (Matthew 5:45).
  - c. God loves each and every human person, shown most clearly in God’s saving mission through the Incarnation of God the Son: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son” (John 3:16).
  - d. God’s salvation entails the restoration and renewal of the whole person, shown through the full, authentic humanity of Jesus the Messiah (Hebrews 2:5- 18).
4. God’s people bear testimony to the sacredness of life by caring for pregnant women as well as the unborn. No other human relation shares the characteristics of a pregnant woman and the human life she carries: one life biologically dependent upon another human life, and neither life more intrinsically valuable than the other.
  - a. *Scripture states the embryo's separate and intrinsic value as a unique creation of God. Psalm 139:13 – “You...knit me together in my mother’s womb... I am fearfully and wonderfully made.” Jeremiah 1:5 – “Before I*

*formed you in the womb, I knew you; before you were born, I set you apart.” Moreover, science affirms that the embryo, having its own uniquely identifiable characteristics, including DNA, is a developing human separate from its mother.*

5. The physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of a pregnant woman are significant in the best of circumstances. These needs are even more acute in circumstances when pregnancy is the result of rape or incest, or when continuing a pregnancy places a woman’s life at risk. During such unimaginably difficult times, the Church envisions and strives to embody the love and tenderness of God for the weak and the vulnerable just as it does when promoting and protecting the lives of the unborn.

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# Proposal 2: Family Planning

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Replace the current statement 141 on Family Planning with the following, and place it after the statement on “The Beginning of Life.”

## ¶141 Family Planning

1. Children are a gift from the Lord. We recognize the family as an environment of unique nurture and support in which all members together pursue their calling in Christ Jesus.
2. Children may be received into the family in a variety of ways, including natural conception, assisted reproduction, adoption, and foster care. These aspects of reproduction and growing families are some of the deepest and most meaningful aspects of our lives. In this light, they can also be the most painful, complex, and difficult.
3. Believers may for valid reasons determine not to have children, or to place a child for adoption. For those who choose to have children, if there is a desire to time pregnancies or to space children a certain number of years apart, that is a decision parents are free to make, and through prayer and discernment they may wisely plan for the addition of any children God blesses them with. (Proverbs 16:3; James 1:5)

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# Proposal 3: Adoption and Foster Care

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Insert the following as a new paragraph in the chapter “Family Standards.”

## ¶141+1 Adoption and Foster Care

1. As believers we have the privilege of being adopted into the family of God.
2. In scripture we see the heart of God for the fatherless and are told to fight and care for the orphan (Psalm 146:9). The church is encouraged to do this, in parenting or support roles. Valuable avenues to family growth may include embryo, private, international and domestic adoption, and foster care.
3. Often there is some aspect of loss and tragedy included in situations of adoption and foster care, and the responsibility to provide care can be challenging and difficult. The church is encouraged to be equipped, and offer emotional and financial support as they are able, in providing for the needs of these children and parents (Isaiah 1:17). In doing so, Jesus’ value of children is lived out, and is considered the same as caring for Jesus himself (Matthew 18:1-6).

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# Proposal 4: Infertility

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Insert the following as a new paragraph in the chapter “Family Standards.”

## ¶141+2 Infertility

1. We recognize the pain and grief that accompanies infertility and empathize with couples affected by it.
2. Couples affected by infertility may request the elders gather together to lay hands on them to pray for healing (James 5:14).
3. Infertile couples are advised to seek the wisdom of the Holy Spirit (James 1:5) and supportive church community in moving forward with faith in considering methods to welcome children into their family, including assisted reproductive technology, adoption, and foster care.

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# Proposal 5: Assisted Reproduction

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Insert the following as a new paragraph in the “Family Standards” chapter.

## ¶141+3 Assisted Reproduction

1. Assisted reproduction includes the use of medical procedures or technology to aid human procreation.

The use of assisted reproductive technology may take a variety of forms, which will necessarily change as new procedures develop. Therefore, rather than addressing the nature of specific procedures, the church advises its members to prayerfully consider the following guidelines when deciding whether to make use of assisted reproductive technology:

- a. Its use should be motivated by love.
- b. Its use should bring glory to God.
- c. Its use should protect and preserve life from the moment of conception.
- d. Its use should promote justice toward and prevent the exploitation of each person involved in the process.
- e. Its use should protect the integrity of the family.

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# Proposal 6: Abortion

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Replace the current statement on Abortion with the following.

## ¶142 Abortion

1. We believe that human life is sacred from the moment of conception until natural death. Consequently, abortion cannot be recognized morally and scripturally as a means of birth control.
2. We are aware that any consideration of abortion occurs in a place of crisis and significant consequence, and that forgiveness is available in Christ.
3. The church recognizes that abortion may be medically necessary in rare and tragic circumstances, taking into account the life of the mother and baby.
4. The church needs to demonstrate sensitivity and care toward those who have had abortions in the past in order to facilitate an atmosphere of grace and healing.

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# Proposal 7: Responsibility of the Church

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Insert the following as a new paragraph in the Family Standards chapter.

## ¶142+1 Human Reproduction and the Responsibility of the Church

1. Scripture is clear that God's church is responsible to bring Jesus' love, light, hope, and healing to people who are hurting, struggling, and in need while also maintaining deeply biblical convictions about human life and reproduction. These two convictions are not in conflict. They are to be simultaneously embraced and held in creative tension in order for the Church to be a faithful witness to the world.
2. We understand that a deep range of emotions pertain to reproductive issues. The Church's commitment is to:
  - a. Be a generous support in bearing the burdens of those in trial or crisis (Gal. 6:2; Rom 12:15).
  - b. Show extravagant welcome (Romans 12:13; 15:7), companionship (Romans 12:10), and sacrifice (Hebrews 13:16) to those in need.
3. While maintaining our compassion and support for people during difficult and often confusing reproductive crises, we must always maintain our commitment to the authority of Scripture (Isaiah 40:8, 2 Timothy 3:16). At times this may necessitate embracing convictions that contrast with prevailing cultural and social norms and rejecting certain reproductive technologies or procedures.

It is our high view of God’s gift of life (Psalm 139:13-16), the sacredness of the human body (Genesis 1:26-27), and the beauty of God’s design of human reproduction (Genesis 1:28, 2:23-24) that compels us to maintain and celebrate our biblical convictions about human reproduction as we care for and value the least of these.

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## DISCIPLINE REVISION:

# Additional Proposals

Discipline Revision Proposals Not from the HRTF Task Force

## Proposal 8: Cohabitation

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Insert the following as a new paragraph in the chapter “Family Standards.”

### ¶133+1 Cohabitation

1. We believe that simulating the marriage relationship by living together without the covenantal commitments associated with marriage circumvents God’s plan for family life (Genesis 2:18).
2. Even when the couple’s intention is to remain sexually pure, cohabitation increases the temptation for sexual sin and fails to avoid the appearance of evil (1 Corinthians 6:18, 1 Thessalonians 5:22).
3. Members must avoid cohabitation prior to marriage.