

Synod Committee on Bioethics Statement on Late-term Terminations, November 2004

In the light of current public debate about abortion the Synod Committee on Bioethics has a specific concern about late-term termination of pregnancy and makes the following statement to the church:

- (a) That late-term termination of pregnancy, beyond 20 weeks gestation, should only be performed if at least one of the following indications is present:
 - (i) there is serious risk to the mother's life;
 - (ii) there are foetal abnormalities that are incompatible with life;
 - (iii) the foetus has severe malformations. In these situations there are no hard and fast rules as to whether the foetus should or should not be aborted. Judgments based on the best available scientific information, and ethical and theological considerations, is required.
- (b) That late-term termination should not be carried out for the purposes of sex selection.
- (c) That late-term terminations:
 - (i) should be performed in such a manner as to avoid pain and suffering by the foetus;
 - (ii) should follow the clinical guidelines of the Medical Practitioners' Board of Victoria;
 - (iii) should only be performed in a major teaching hospital where peer review and assessment by an ethics committee are available;
 - (iv) should only be performed where those directing the procedure respect the rights of health professionals who have moral objections to late-term terminations.

In making this statement the Synod Committee on Bioethics recognises that there are a variety of views about abortion among the members of the Uniting Church. However, because the Christian tradition recognises that human beings are made in the image of God, that tradition has always opposed infanticide, the taking of viable life. In the Christian view natural life is bodily life as indicated by Christ taking human form. Therefore bodily life is God's will for humanity and to deliberately destroy viable life is to deny God's intention. (For a fuller explanation of this point interested people should consult the chapter 'Considering the Body as Christians' in the Committee's recent publication *And Then There Were Two: A Study on Cloning*. The book is available from *UniChurch Books*).