

## **Appendix 2**

### **The Methodist Church in Ireland – Council on Social Responsibility**

*January 2018*

*In 1983 Article 40.3.3 became part of the Constitution of Ireland, following a referendum. It is now commonly known as the 8<sup>th</sup> amendment. Since then, in 2013, the Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act was brought into law. A referendum is likely to be held in May 2018, asking Irish citizens if this amendment should be maintained or removed.*

Abortion is a grave matter and should be taken as seriously as it deserves. Sadly, many pregnant women, throughout history and across the world, have found themselves considering this a possibility.

For this reason, the Methodist Church in Ireland does not think that discussion should be reduced to simple slogans. We recognise that it is a complex, as well as emotive, issue. We take seriously our calling to engage thoroughly with our society and acknowledge that we live in a society where different beliefs are held.

We have consistently been against abortion on demand. This remains the case. A holistic concern for the emotional, physical and social health of mothers, as well as our belief that the unborn should have a right to life, underpins our call that the present discussion would encourage the development of a society that does not just adopt what has come to be seen as a default response, but provides its citizens with frameworks for all to thrive.

We are adamant that support services should be put in place for women who proceed with a challenging pregnancy. These require vital financial support; expert services from Tusla and, if necessary, fostering and adoptive services; full support for children born with disabilities and their parents; or hospice care for babies tragically born with little chance of survival. As advocates of socially responsible citizenship we acknowledge that this would be expensive and would therefore recognise the need for extra resources to be sourced. It is crucial that this is an active budgetary priority for government.

The Oireachtas Committee has voted proposing to remove the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment from the Constitution and legislating for unrestricted abortion up to 12 weeks. Our opposition to abortion on demand includes this first trimester so we advise that expert counselling services are immediately and freely available, for all where abortion may be considered.

We would urge that abortion is seen as a last resort. Any provision of an abortion service does not mean that it has to be availed of and there should be no pressure to do so.

There is a spectrum of opinion amongst Methodist people about whether or when abortion should be available, but the Methodist Conference has previously stated that abortion is a permissible choice in the case of medical or psychiatric emergency where the mother's life is endangered, or in other strictly delineated circumstances. (Where there is risk of grave injury to the physical or mental health of the mother; in cases of rape or incest; in cases of fatal foetal abnormality or where incapable of survival.)

We recognise that some women may make a considered decision to proceed with an abortion even with full care facilities in place. In order to minimise the risk to women, we suggest that specialist units within existing hospitals, staffed only by those willing to perform an abortion, should be available.

We continue to seek a society that benefits from healthy relationships and responsible behaviour. Among other things, we urge good sex education and where possible the prevention of unwanted pregnancy by the responsible use of contraception by both men and women.

We will continue to pray for the Taoiseach and government as they endeavour to lead the country at such a critical time in our history. And we encourage all to prayerful and loving action in support of pregnant women and families who find themselves in need and seeking help. We remain committed to a society where all are valued and where we are willing to use our time and resources to ensure justice for all