

## MATERNAL HEALTH

### What does the Bible say?

- Motherhood is sacred. Therefore, making motherhood safe is a moral imperative. Women who are called to be mothers undertake a sacred responsibility to carry life and bring that new life into the world. We acknowledge the pain and suffering of women forced to be mothers through rape, child marriage, or lack of access to unwanted pregnancy services and products, and of those who have suffered
- miscarriages. As a family of God, we support women and families in all situations. Mothers are important figures in our biblical tradition. Women like Eve, Hagar, Sarah, Elizabeth, and Mary the mother of Jesus are remembered for their role as bearers of new life. But within the sacred texts, there are also stories of maternal tragedy and loss. Both Rachel (Genesis 35:16-20) and the wife of Phinehas (1 Samuel 4:19-20) died after prolonged and difficult labors. Tragically, this is still happening today.
- In the Gospel of John, Jesus tells his disciples that he came to bring abundant life to his followers (John 10:10). God's desire is that every mother, every child, and every family not only survive, but thrive. Tragically, survival is often a daily struggle for those who lack access to basic services and care. God calls us to respond to the suffering in the world, to love our neighbors throughout the world. (Leviticus 19:18)

### What does The United Methodist Church say?

- Health is a condition of physical, mental, social, and spiritual well-being, and we view it as a responsibility—public and private. Health care is a basic human right. (Social Principles ¶162.V)
- We affirm the right of men and women to have access to comprehensive reproductive health/family planning information and services which will serve as a means to prevent unplanned pregnancies, reduce abortions and prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS. (Social Principles ¶162.V)
- For many women, especially those living in poverty and in developing countries, giving birth is dangerous and life-threatening. Worldwide maternal mortality is a leading cause of death for women of childbearing age ... God desires that every mother, child, and every family not only survive, but thrive. (2016 Book of Resolutions, #3203 "Maternal Health: The Church's Role")

### What do the facts say?

- Every day, 830 women die and 2.9 million newborns die annually from complications during pregnancy or childbirth. Millions sustain serious life-long injuries.
- Ninety-nine percent of the more than 356,000 annual maternal deaths occur in the developing world where women lack access to adequate medical services. These deaths are preventable.
- Currently, 225 million women would like to delay or prevent a pregnancy but lack access to family planning services that would facilitate them to do so.
- If all the unmet need for family planning was met, maternal deaths would drop by third, and 600,000 fewer children would lose their mothers each year.
- Access to comprehensive family planning services reduces unplanned pregnancies, miscarriages and the rates of abortions."
- Access to comprehensive family planning services means healthy mothers and healthy children.

### Take ACTION for justice...

- Support United Methodist projects around the world working on maternal health and family planning.
- Advocate for greater investments in sexual and reproductive health including better policies and funding for family planning and reproductive health work in your communities.
- Partner with local health initiatives that expand access to information and services for women's health. Ask how you can join with these organizations to ensure women and men in your community have access to the services they need to lead healthy lives.

## Maternal Health

Health care for women and children is at the heart of United Methodist Women today, and has been since the organization was founded in the 1800's. In 1869, Dr. Clara Swain was sent to Bareilly, India, to provide quality medical care to women. She has been called the "pioneer woman physician in India," as well as the "first fully accredited woman physician ever sent out by any missionary society into any part of the non-Christian world." Our foremothers made the choice to act to save women's lives. They chose to build hospitals and clinics, to train women and girls to serve as doctors and nurses, and to send missionaries to initiate the work.

Today, United Methodist Women continues to support the health and family needs of women and children around the globe. Women are still dying in childbirth, children continue to die from preventable diseases, and many communities have no access to healthcare. From Latin America to Africa to Asia, United Methodist Women works with women worldwide to address:

- Access to healthcare
- Educational opportunities in medical fields
- Child protection
- Crisis ministries for women who are victims of violence at home or during periods of war and conflicts
- Reproductive health – family planning, cancer screening, healthy childbirth
- Advocacy for equity in law and services for women and children
- Informal educational workshops on healthy living for teens at risk, lactating mothers who are HIV-positive, mothers who need new ideas on nutrition, and basic health, hygiene and disease prevention
- Trauma and mental health counseling

In the U.S., a number of community centers in our network of national mission institutions provide maternal health services to improve access to care for underserved populations. Services include:

- Pre-natal and postpartum care
- Baby supplies
- Parenting support
- Shelter and legal services
- Health care

### **MATERNAL HEALTH:**

"For many women, especially those living in poverty and developing countries, giving birth is dangerous and life-threatening. Worldwide maternal mortality is the leading cause of death for women of childbearing age. Every 90 seconds a woman dies somewhere in the world from complications during pregnancy or childbirth; for every woman who dies, another 20 suffer disability.

"The main causes of maternal mortality include infection, hemorrhaging, high blood pressure, and obstructed labor. They are mostly preventable...Globally, more than 200 million women would like to avoid or delay pregnancy, but lack access to modern contraceptive services." ([Book of Resolutions, 3203](#))

The UMC supports access to family planning because they provide women and men with the ability to plan how, when and how many children to have. It enables women to plan their pregnancies, have healthy babies, and avoid unwanted pregnancies and to stay healthy and alive. Access to family planning services leads to the wellbeing of families, educated communities, and improves economic conditions of families and nations.

Learn more about the [maternal health initiative](#) to advocate for funding programs that support family planning efforts.