

September 10, 2019

To: Senator Danny Verdin, Chair  
South Carolina Senate Medical Affairs Subcommittee

From: Dr. Janelle L. Rivers

Subject: Testimony on H.3020

I have lived most of my life in South Carolina--in six different counties during my more than seventy years. Currently I live in the district that is represented by Sen. Dick Harpootlian.

I am writing to explain my personal and religious objections to H.3020.

You may be familiar with the quote, “The Universe doesn't like secrets. It conspires to reveal the truth, to lead you to it.”

(LISA UNGER, *Beautiful Lies*)

Some personal truths remain secret for decades. I want to tell you about the secrets of three women I have known. They faced similar situations—one before the Roe v. Wade decision in 1973 and two afterwards. All three were mothers who were actively caring for at least two healthy, thriving children. All three had scarring and damage from their previous pregnancies. All three were told by their doctors that they would probably not survive another pregnancy.

- One of these women, from Darlington County, waited until her children were grown to seek solace from her Bible study group about the deep pain she still carried over having decided to end a subsequent pregnancy in order to live and mother the children she already had.
- One from Lexington County kept her secret until her grandchildren were nearly grown. She eventually told a small group of trusted friends that she was troubled by the teachings of her church, which conflicted with her decision to proceed with a hysterectomy after a positive pregnancy test.
- One from Orangeburg County who had this same secret before 1973 went forward with the pregnancy and died from its complications, leaving her young children without a mother. So, the truth of her situation was revealed by her death in less than a year.

Two of these South Carolina women kept their stories private for decades, not wanting to risk being shamed by people who claimed to have the moral authority to make life-and-death decisions for others based on a simple rule crafted to support religious traditions.

One of my favorite sayings is, “Tradition preserves two things equally well: truth and error.” Sometimes religious institutions are slow to recognize truths that are obvious to outsiders. Churches may change slowly but they do change. The United Methodist Church publishes its Social Principles every four years. The current version states:

The beginning of life and the ending of life are the God-given boundaries of human existence. While individuals have always had some degree of control over when they would die, they now have the awesome power to determine when and even whether new individuals will be born. Our belief in the sanctity of unborn human life makes us reluctant to approve abortion.

But we are equally bound to respect the sacredness of the life and well-being of the mother and the unborn child.

We recognize tragic conflicts of life with life that may justify abortion, and in such cases we support the legal option of abortion under proper medical procedures by certified medical providers. We support parental, guardian, or other responsible adult notification and consent before abortions can be performed on girls who have not yet reached the age of legal adulthood. We cannot affirm abortion as an acceptable means of birth control, and we unconditionally reject it as a means of gender selection or eugenics (see Resolution 3184)....

Young adult women disproportionately face situations in which they feel that they have no choice due to financial, educational, relational, or other circumstances beyond their control. ....

Governmental laws and regulations do not provide all the guidance required by the informed Christian conscience. Therefore, a decision concerning abortion should be made only after thoughtful and prayerful consideration by the parties involved, with medical, family, pastoral, and other appropriate counsel.

(Retrieved 9/4/19 from Social Principles of the United Methodist Church 2017-2020 at <http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/the-nurturing-community>).

More often than not families keep the decisions they have made about moral dilemmas in close confidence. Women who were of voting age in 1973 can remember a time when safe legal abortion was not available in the United States. Those women have now reached retirement age, and they may well know secrets that will help to lead us to universal truths. I encourage each member of the General Assembly to speak to the elderly women in their own families—those over 67 years of age—and ask what truth resides in the secrets that they know.