FEARFULLY AND WONDERFULLY MADE:

A POLICY ON
HUMAN BIOTECHNOLOGIES

National Council of Churches USA

NOTES AND QUESTIONS

NCC POLICY STATEMENT:
HUMAN BIOTECHNOLOGIES POLICY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
"FEARFULLY AND WONDERFULLY MADE"*

Background and Overview

*In 2000, the National Council of Churches, celebrating its 50 years of service and witness, set in motion a review of its own foundational policy statements. Some policy statements (e.g. "*The Recognition of Mainland China*") were retired due to world events and the passage of time. Others have been updated to make current their insights and teachings. In reviewing the 1986 Policy "*Genetic Science for Human Benefit*" it was recognized that this very limited policy statement was inadequate to guide the work and witness of the Council and its Member Communions in the burgeoning field of biotechnologies. The 2000 General Assembly therefore established a Feasibility Committee to review and recommend an appropriate approach to policy development in the area of biotechnology. That Committee, reporting in 2002, recommended that a Human Biotechnology Policy Development Committee be established to develop a new Policy Statement addressing the human applications of biotechnologies. This policy statement builds upon the values and insights of the 1986 Policy Statement but by mandate does not address the agricultural applications of biotechnologies, therefore this Policy Statement is offered in addition to the 1986* "Genetic Science for Human Benefit" *statement.*

When we consider the moral and ethical dimensions of the human applications of current biotechnologies, we need to have an accurate understanding of the science on which they are based. Moral and ethical considerations also require an understanding of the social and regulatory contexts in which such biotechnologies and their human applications are emerging and developing. In order to provide the NCC General Assembly with the necessary background to assess, amend and adopt this proposed policy statement a companion study document entitled, "Equipping the Saints in an Age of Human Biotechnologies" *has been prepared. There we have provided an outline of current technologies, meant as a starting place for serious study by individuals and church groups who want to contribute meaningfully to biotechnology discussions. Following its theological, ethical, and biological statements, the study document reviews the insufficient, and inept levels of regulation and non-regulation in many countries of the world, and at various governmental levels within the United States. Consideration of the study document will provide important information that supports the conclusions and directions of this policy statement.*

* Biblical excepts are from the New Revised Standard Version, published by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA.

This document, the proposed policy statement proper, begins with a theological discussion of our anthropology or self-understanding particularly in regard to biotechnologies which now hold potential for altering ourselves and those for generations to come. A second major section discusses the nature of the Church's calling especially in relation to faith and science, biotechnology and ethics, and pastoral care. A third section describes what we take to be the key challenges for Church engagement. These challenges we describe in relation to: human embryonic stem cell research, perception of disabilities, conduct of the biotechnology industry, and the fabric of the commonweal. The fourth and final section offers recommendations for consideration and implementation by the General Assembly.

In submitting this document for consideration and a first reading, it is our prayerful hope that this draft provides a useful basis for ecumenical encounter and discernment. For the moment our time of speaking is at a conclusion and we shall, for now, listen to the insights of others as churches and individuals respond. What we hear will, of course provide the basis of changes we will make in anticipation of a final reading and adoption in 2006.

We are grateful for the opportunity to have served the ecumenical community in this way and offer for your reflection our proposed policy statement, "Fearfully and Wonderfully Made."

In Faith,

The Policy Development Committee on Human Biotechnologies

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I. Our Theological Self-Understanding

The Communions joined in this policy statement on human biotechnologies take its title from Psalm 139/138*, verse 14, to reflect our awe and gratitude to the Holy One whose hidden purposes are partly revealed in our incarnate selves. The Psalmist speaks personally: "I praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made," and turns both outward to the whole world of wonders and inward to unformed parts "knit together in my mother's womb." It is our Creator God who does the knitting through human procreation; our genes and genesis are written in a book of infinite wisdom; the darkness of ignorance and despair is illuminated by the Divine Presence who knows and loves us no matter who we are.

The member communions of the National Council of Churches join their voices together precisely to help put ethical, as well as theological concerns to the fore. Our churches are united in opposing cloning for human reproduction, and in wanting safeguards for "regenerative" medicine. This policy statement is meant as a guide for our members and as a witness to our values in a complex and fast-moving debate.

Our approach must be one of reverence, humility, and deliberation, aware that scientific and social revolutions go hand in hand and that our ecumenical witness must point to cultural as well as to natural wonders in the balance. We resist scientific reductionism and religious fundamentalism, each absolutist in its own way.

Our humility must extend as well to our own limited knowledge of God's infinite design. Human frailties have allowed us too often to be glib about what constitutes "normal" or "whole" or "able-bodied" life. In so doing we relegate many of our sisters and brothers to the status of "other", seeing only their differences, which we call "disabilities," rather than seeing them as those who manifest, like us, reflections of the *imago dei*.

We recognize that no single policy statement can express the fullness of the perceptions of our member communions, each with their own emphases and commitments to the Lord of Life. It is in the spirit of ecumenical reflection, however, to seek to include as many insights as possible, and thus we welcome discussion and response from within the churches and outside them. At the same time, advances in biotechnologies are coming by the day, often in hands of

* This Psalm is number 138 according to the *Septuagint*.

enormously powerful commercial interests. It is not our duty ever to obstruct genuine progress in science, but it is our duty to recommend what measures we see that would help that progress be genuine.
Scientific progress must, in our view, also be situated in a context of democratic governance, where distorting inequities—notable in the US healthcare system—can be addressed. The National Council of Churches is committed to the pursuit of justice in church and society, including the elimination of poverty, racial justice, justice for women, environmental justice, and responses to the urban crisis. Without an awareness of current injustices in our culture and others, any advance in therapeutic (much less reproductive) biotechnologies threatens to enlarge current social divisions and create new ones.

The potential impact of biotechnology on people with disabilities raises profound philosophical and theological questions. Many people living with disabilities have meaningful, productive lives, and would state that the major suffering in their lives comes from the environment and social context: the physical, attitudinal, and social barriers that limit them much more than their disability. Disability is increasingly understood as contextual and as simply one part, not the whole, of a person's identity. As such, disability then raises questions about what it means to be human, what kind of people should there be, whether disability is seen as defect, disease, or simply a difference in the diversity of humankind, and what it means to be a community that welcomes and supports everyone. Because "disability" can so easily and frequently be a place where we encounter the human capacity to make "one of us" into "the other," it calls for deep commitment to include the voices and perspectives of people with disabilities and their families in the dialogue and decisions about the use of biotechnology in personal, clinical, social, and political contexts.

Human history is a long testimony to our ability to draw distinctions between race, tribe, clan, language, and culture that obscure our unity given in our common heritage as the children of God. The advent of powerful new biotechnologies holds both potential for overcoming such divisions, and a like potential to deepen the rifts in human community. The Church must now join with all persons of goodwill to seek the human application of those technologies that strengthen both individuals and societies to better live the lives for which they were created.

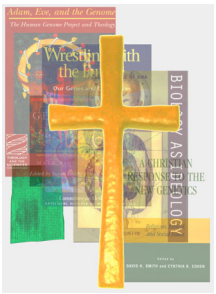
Beyond affirming our irreplaceable value, God’s purposes are reflected in our callings; each of us is qualified to serve God and our fellow human beings in a unique way. All our God-given abilities were built into us to equip us for a particular share of the world’s work. This ense of vocation includes our using these abilities for the welfare of the whole—our individual value is related to a common good. Each of us has a call to serve that is as unique as our fingerprints and DNA.

Thus, in our biblical understanding, our highest dignity as human beings is not individuality in an individualistic sense. It is rather something we all share, being created in the image of God: "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27). The belief that every person, no matter what race, nationality, gender, disability, or "genetic makeup" embodies the image of God is a profound declaration of the goodness God intends for all creation.

Psalm 8 presents the scope of these divine blessings in words that echo Genesis:

> **When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,**
> **the moon and the stars that you have established;**
> **what are human beings that you are mindful of them,**
> **mortals that you care for them?**
> **Yet you have made them a little lower than God,**
> **and crowned them with glory and honor.**
> **You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;**
> **you have put all things under their feet,**
> **all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field,**
> **the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,**
> **whatever passes along the paths of the seas.** (NRSV 8:3-8)

This work of applied ethics depends upon a high vision of the Church's calling. We join together as communions and individual believers to advocate for the fullest potential life for those now living and generations to come because we seek to be the extension of the Incarnation, the Body of Christ, the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. In communion with that body, beyond all divisions, we see the restoration of all human beings to the glorious state and destiny for which our loving God continues to create us.



II. The Church's Calling

Faith and Science

Science is "a branch of knowledge or study dealing with a body of facts or truths systematically arranged and showing the operation of general laws." Given this definition, theology is a science, the science of divine things or religious truth. Theology systematizes and interprets elements from scripture, tradition, worship life and reason itself. What we call science today, however, has come to be limited to the natural.

Everyone is called to be a theologian because everyone is called to a life of prayer. Through that prayer, grace, and subsequent spiritual advancement, the theologian may come to know God as infinite and yet personal. Even then, the theologian must stand in awe of the mystery of God and recognize that the Holy One is unknowable, except through revelation and encounter. Those who have a vocation in science will also struggle to know as much as possible about their chosen field of study. They, too, must realize that they also stand before a mystery and that no one will ever know everything about God's creation.

From our Christian point of view, science is understood to be the exploration of the created world, the measure and analysis of the material world in as wide a framework as possible. Inasmuch as we are responsible for tending God's creation, scientific endeavor is proper for a Christian because one should know as much as one can about what one is responsible for. Problems arise when the results of scientific investigations are misinterpreted or used unscientifically. For example, the Human Genome Project that mapped the human genome gave us our first accurate blueprint of human genetic structure. This is useful science, however, in its experimental application phases it holds the capacity for both benefit and harm.

At the same time, we must recognize that theology looks to science to best explain the created world. St. Basil of Caesarea used the science of his day to explain God's creative work in his *Hexaemeron* (six days of creation). It would be a grave mistake, however, if twenty-first century theologians used the same Aristotelian science that Basil used in the fourth century. The theological truths may be the same, but the understanding of the world has certainly changed. The Church historically responded to challenges by using new language and new ideas to more fully explain the truth. We must rise to contemporary challenges using the best tools and insights available, including those of modern science.

When we recognize that science is a proper vocation, the question becomes: "Within what limits are these particular science vocations to be exercised?" Our answers must grow out of our belief in the sovereignty of God and a recognition that exploitation of science to divide the human community is, by its very nature, sinful. Biotechnologies, like all human endeavors, stand under the judgment of God. From our faith perspective we seek then to raise questions on behalf of human well being as we approach biotechnologies with the potential they bring for human advancement.

Biotechnology and Ethics

As people of faith and stewards of God's creation, we affirm the faithfulness of God present in human life as help and salvation, healing and wholeness. We approach the ethical questions raised by the application of new and emerging biotechnologies with the affirmation that theology informs every part of our life. All areas of life belong to God. Theological ethics undergirds all that we say and do. This policy statement of the National Council of Churches is intended to help its member communions and others seek to understand God's purpose in these new and emerging biotechnologies, make God's will manifest in our common life, and find a common voice to herald God's Good News in a faithful, responsible and just way.

We are faithful. Just how Christians and churches make ethical assessments reflects who we are as a people and what the Church is called to be, believe, think, and do in the world. Our understanding of God shapes our moral life. What we believe about God, the cosmos, and ourselves raises profound moral questions about life and death and directs us from belief to values to concrete imperatives for action. Our ethical responses emerge from our shared life rooted in the Biblical vision of shalom – that is, the Peaceable Kingdom which God wills for creation. God's justice is revealed in the prophets and fulfilled in Christ's call to compassionate ministry. In short, how we deal with genetic issues impacts our life together and our life for others—our very faithfulness as a church is at stake in this strange new world.

We are responsible. As member churches, we bear witness to what God intended the church and the world to be. We share a sense of urgency that all will share the fruits of the new and emerging biotechnologies. In our stewardship of the creation, we lift high the concept of the common good—that we live in a covenant community with responsibility for one another. We face the sad fact today that receiving the material benefits of progress in biotechnology may well depend on family or societal income and may not be equally accessible to all in our global context. The persistence of poverty in the midst of great scientific advances is an issue of basic justice and should deeply challenge both church and society to ensure the safety of individuals and the sharing of the quality of life for all.

We seek justice. Concern for the common good is both made manifest in the life of each community and advocated for all people. Members and churches witness to God who is present in human life as help and salvation, healing and wholeness, by taking on the task of safeguarding and furthering justice and peace. Having

knowledge of both the perils and possibilities of the new and emerging biotechnologies, wonder and diversity must be held in an appreciative balance—with a clear moral mandate and obligation toward, and for, the vulnerable.

Pastoral Care

As people of faith wrestle with the theological implications of genetics and biotechnologies, we become even more aware of the issues raised about God's presence in creation, God's will for creation, and our human responsibility as faithful stewards of the gift of life and creation. People of faith have traditionally turned to their communities of faith in matters of life and death.

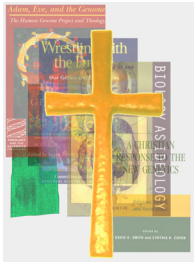
The pastoral role as an expression of God's presence and interpreter of belief and communal understanding becomes even more important as the possibilities raised by biotechnologies increase the number of decisions and turning points in life. It is at those points where, with the Spirit's help, matters of faith, hope, life and death are encountered and interpreted. The challenge for pastors and lay counselors is to be equipped with sufficient understanding and insight to help individuals, couples and families address the profound issues that arise at the intersection of faith and science. Such issues of genetic risk are often avoided by both clergy and health care professionals because of the complexity and power inherent in these matters.

As individuals and families are faced with ever-increasing possibilities to shape life through use of genetics and biotechnologies, pastors are called to adapt traditional roles and skills to a growing variety of places and times where people might struggle with the questions of faith that may arise, or with how to apply their own faith and belief to the decisions they face. Those roles include, but are not limited to:

- Pastoral presence at times of decision and crisis, including marriage when issues of genetics arise, decisions about pregnancy and the implications of testing, guilt or blame in relation to those decisions, response to a birth of a child with a genetic condition, support at the times of onset of a genetic disease, and end of life issues related to terminal care.
- Pastoral assistance in determining new forms of family and selfhood in relation to new forms of conception and medical treatment as individuals and families struggle to understand the personal, spiritual, and theological questions that are raised.
- Pastoral advocacy in the role of assisting individuals and families to acquire needed services or supports, or serving as an interpreter and bridge between the worlds of families, faith, and healthcare. That bridging role can be two ways, helping families to understand the language and perspective of health care professionals and, vice versa, helping health care professionals to understand the questions and feelings of families, particularly in relation to their issues of faith.

- Pastoral supports through a community of faith that can be called and empowered to support individuals and families at times of decision, loss, and need. The pastoral role of equipping and empowering a community of faith can be both proactive, through roles of preaching and education, and reactive, in response to particular individuals and families. Chaplains, genetic counselors, and even hospital ethics committees can become part of the larger equipment of the community of faith.

The pastoral role and challenge is thus both large and complex. It is also paradoxical, for it calls upon clergy to know enough about the world of genetics and biotechnology to be alert and proactive, but also humble enough to know what they don't know. The same is true for health care professionals, who are called to know enough about the spiritual and religious implications of their work to be helpful, but also to recognize the complexity and diversity of religious practices and understandings. With humility and mutual respect we look forward to more appreciative collaboration and more effective support between clergy and health professionals.



III. Key Challenges for Church Engagement

The terminology associated with human biotechnology is large and complex, and the issues arising are many and serious. But with respect to these issues, the crux of the matter lies deep within us all. Human beings see other human beings not as beloved creatures of God whom God delights in just as we are, but as instruments on which to work our will. The crux of the matter changes grace to law, creatures to would-be creators, fallen humans who decline to seek God's will, considering their own will a worthy substitute.

Of the many matters we could have chosen, we selected four areas that have been the subject of much current debate. We hold up these four key challenges in light of our understanding of the crux of the matter: stem cell research, disabilities, the conduct of the biotechnology industry, concern for the fabric of the commonweal.

Stem Cell Research

Perhaps no area related to human applications of biotechnologies is more divisive within the Christian community at present than the matter of stem cell research. The divisiveness of this issue mirrors the strong opposing ethical views that characterize the abortion debate in the United States, and within and among our churches. The National Council of Churches, more than two decades ago, determined that the hope of achieving consensus on the issue of abortion was not possible and hence the member communions resolved to forego an ecumenical statement on the issue. While consensus was elusive for us, we believed we could make an important contribution to the broader debate as each tradition and perspective offered its insights and the theological and ethical thinking that undergirds their respective conclusions.

While there are other morally problematic genetic technologies, notably reproductive cloning and germ line therapy, these are not yet so controversial. Proponents of reproductive cloning have yet to suggest any significant need for, or benefit from, pursuing such technology, while the dangers are almost incalculable. For example, the experimentation necessary to produce healthy live cloned animals involved disposing of hundreds to thousands of initial "errors," a process that would be blatantly immoral in humans. Effective germ line therapy could offer tremendous potential for eliminating genetic disease, but it would raise difficult distinctions about "normal" human conditions that could support discrimination against the disabled. But the human community has some time to

reflect on this conundrum. Since targeting inaccuracies in somatic gene therapy have resulted in activating dangerous nearby genes, leading to the U.S. suspending all human gene therapy using viral vectors, the case for germ line therapy, which would affect not only those presently treated but all their descendants as well, has become even more remote.

Embryonic Stem Cell Research

As with the abortion debate, much of the stem cell debate turns on the differing views we hold on the moral status of human embryos. Some have argued that from the moment of conception (however this is understood), it is a human entity and therefore irreducibly valuable, and the destruction of a human embryo at any stage of development is morally repugnant. On the other side of this question, others have argued that an embryo does not obtain full moral status until it reaches a more advanced stage of development.

In the United States, federally funded research is limited to embryonic stem cell lines that were already in use prior to August 9, 2001. This federal ban does not limit private or state funding for research to create or use new human embryonic stem cell lines, nor does it affect research in other countries. The current federal restrictions have created a vacuum which has prompted some state governments to provide funding which is not available federally in order to compete with other states for highly skilled researchers and to encourage high tech industry. The net result is a race to provide the most conducive environment for this emerging industry, and the tendency, in the absence of federal regulation is for state governments to compete to be the least restrictive to business conduct. The best interests of the commonweal may not be well served in such a climate of competition.

The value of embryonic stem cell research to medical science has yet to be proven, and experimentation may yet prove disappointing to those who are hopeful that embryonic stem cells can uniquely unlock dramatic advances such as possible cures and/or treatments for diabetes, Parkinson's disease, as well as organ failure. Researchers maintain that treatments to alleviate suffering and perhaps even cures can be learned by studying human embryonic stem cells. We are not able to judge whether these claims are well founded or overstated.

The churches of the National Council of Churches support the pursuit of medical research that may result in alleviating human suffering, and even possible cures, but hold differing strong opinions about the morality of human embryonic stem cell research. As a result of a lack of clear consensus, the National Council of Churches neither endorses nor condemns experimentation on human embryos, and takes no position on the use of human embryonic stem cells for research purposes. Research using human embryonic stem cells is now under way despite moral, religious, ethical, and cultural objections of various groups.
We are, however, in agreement in our recognition of the irreducible sanctity of human life, as well as the intrinsic moral and ethical good inherent in efforts to

reduce human suffering through medical science. We support medical research utilizing alternative means of scientific research toward these ends. Our support for alternative sources of stem cells does not prejudice the question of whether the above-mentioned means are acceptable or not.

We also note suggestions within the scientific community, and specifically from the President's Council on Bioethics, that alternatives may exist that may obviate the sacrifice of human embryos, including but not necessarily limited to:

- Human stem cell research made possible using spontaneously aborted fetuses.
- Stem cells taken from adult subjects.
- Stem cells taken from umbilical cord blood.
- Embryonic stem cells from other species.
- Adult cells manipulated chemically or by other means and reverted to stem cells.

Though of profound consequence, the theological and ethical divisions on this matter that emerge from our various traditions are deep and insurmountable. On these matters we will speak, each as required by conscience. We are however able to identify several points of commonality on which we speak together, especially in the context of a highly unregulated social context. Together, we:

- strongly support legislation that would prohibit the sale or purchase of human embryos;
- oppose the creation of chimeras, or any experimentation that might lead to an intermediary human/animal species. Should future scientific investigation into minimal gene transfers between species result in clear evidence of realizable medical benefits, we strongly favor a thorough public debate, including input from religious leaders, which leads to formulation of an informed consensus and governmental regulation;
- call on all private and public institutions that carry out experiments with stem cells to establish publicly available guidelines, and to provide rigorously independent public oversight in the absence of governmental oversight;
- while acknowledging that some of our members object strongly to experimentation with human embryonic stem cells, we nevertheless recognize the persistence of the practice; and, therefore call for a clear, comprehensive system of national and international regulatory oversight and accountability, including provisions that take into account moral, ethical, cultural and religious sensitivities, including clear limits on the stage to which experimental organisms are allowed to develop;
- support regulatory schema that represent the values of a broad community of stakeholders, including persons who may benefit from the medical progress made possible by the research in question, young persons who will live with the consequences of this research, as well as members of marginalized communities who have traditionally been under-represented in decision-

making processes, and persons representing the broad range of religious backgrounds in our society.

Perception of Disability

The promise and danger of biotechnology is perhaps nowhere more obvious than the ways it affects people with disabilities and their families. There is no one "disability" perspective on the use of biotechnology, for people with disabilities and their families are first of all people, with different values, theologies, and understandings about the purpose of life and God's call to care for one another. The use of tools and processes declared to be neutral and value free, and designed to relieve suffering, holds great promise when they can support the lives of people with disabilities or alleviate unnecessary pain or suffering. But biotechnology becomes profoundly disquieting to many with disabilities when disabling conditions or predictions are equated with life long suffering, imperfection, or disease. When those personal and social values are combined with the power of technology to prevent the birth of a child with a disability or defect, the possibility of a new eugenics fueled by social values, market forces, and personal choice, rather than official policy, becomes quite real.

Our reflection causes us to challenge the assumptions that everything needs to be "fixed" or "improved" and that we know how best to do this; and that just because something can be done does not mean it ought to be done. Science cannot save us from finitude. The pre-supposition for life and appreciation of the whole human person as an entity argue for society to offer no disincentives to reproduction by and of persons with disabilities, in the absence of deliberate cruelty and undue hardship.

Among the principles that have been identified by those with disabilities which ought to guide application of biotechnologies, and which we affirm are:

a) The use of new human genetic discoveries, techniques and practices are strictly regulated to avoid discrimination and protect fully, and in all circumstances, the human rights of disabled people,
b) Genetic counseling that is non-directive, rights based, widely and freely available and reflects the real experience of disability,
c) Parents are not formally or informally pressured by medical, insurance or governmental policy to take prenatal tests or undergo "therapeutic" terminations,
d) Organizations of disabled people must be represented on all advisory and regulatory bodies dealing with human genetics,
e) The human rights of disabled people who are unable to consent are not violated through medical interventions.

Conduct of the Biotechnology Industry

Recent decades have seen the unprecedented growth and development of biotechnology companies. Large amounts of venture capital are daily invested in biotechnology pharmaceutical start-ups and other forms of merchandizing

scientific advance. Without the business dimensions of the industry few breakthroughs in science would ever find expression in therapeutic settings. Yet, the rapid advance in science coupled with a vigorous and well-financed corporate infrastructure has outstripped governmental capacity for adequate regulation.

Our North American context provides challenges, both cultural and socio-economic, that threaten our identity as Christians and believers. Potent forces are at play that competes to shape Christian identity and faithfulness. On the cultural side, the danger of materialism is a denial of the social mandate of our faith rooted in God's gracious and generous love for all of God's children. Our materialistic culture leads to consumerism, which fosters a primary understanding of ourselves as that of "buyers", and distorts our vision so that we consume to fill our emptiness, and obscure our powerlessness and despair. In addition, unhealthy exaggerated concepts of self-reliance, independence and personal privacy labeled as individualism stand in opposition to biblical concepts of covenant community, responsibility for one another, and care for the neighbor/stranger. Finally, hedonism and its pursuit of pleasure as the sole purpose of life follows individualism's focus on personal fulfillment and jeopardizes the stewardship of resources for the good of all of God's children.

Socio-economic forces are at play as well. The United States and the Church exist in a global context that demands a global analysis with a commitment for equitable allocation of medical resources and funding for research. In a world of poverty, wars, and hunger, a wise balancing and use of limited resources for basic necessities of life must temper our advancement of research and consumption of newly available biotechnologies. Our identity as a people and our faithfulness as a church must be conserved and lived with integrity.

With a commitment to view with thanksgiving the true advances made possible through emerging technologies we, nonetheless, seek a more stable, accountable regulatory environment in the interest of humanity and human community. Any such regulatory infrastructure will address the policy issues related to:

A. **Access**--Public policies must be constructed in ways that maximize access to beneficial technologies. Instituting such provisions may have implications for public health policies, insurance regulation, and/or allocation of research grants. Specifically of concern are the poor, those lacking health care coverage, and those who suffer from rare diseases.
B. **Privacy**--Genetic information is a deeply personal possession. Individuals and groups have the right to keep private such information. Public policies must be fashioned to prevent pressures from governmental agencies, insurers or employers from compelling the release of such information.
C. **Informed Consent**--The inherent complexity of genetics and of biotechnologies provides special challenges in assuring informed consent. Protocols and practices regarding informed consent must be developed to

address the needs of those who must make decisions about genetic testing or treatments, whatever their education or background.

D. **Adequate Regulation**--Mechanisms must be developed to assess the capacity of the biotechnology industry to self-regulate. Inconsistencies in state regulations must be evaluated as to the risk to the consumer. An international forum must be developed for assessing the inequities and risks arising from the lack of global regulation. In particular, steps to limit the practice of "eugenic tourism" must be pursued.

E. **Patenting**--In light of the realities of biotechnological advances, some re-assessment on the part of all stake holders of the patenting laws is recommended. Agreed upon means of assessing the consequences of present intellectual property and patent laws for those suffering with disease as well as from the perspective of those seeking scientific advance, must be developed. Patenting of life forms and genetic materials gained from populations not fully informed of their potential use, provide two examples of areas of advocacy needed in the legal field.

All these questions and more require adequate national (and perhaps international) debate. Such a discussion must include stakeholders as well as stockholders. All of us, and future generations to come are stakeholders in the codes of conduct and regulatory environments that serve as the context for the biotechnology industry. We salute those within the industry who have sought to broaden the scope of those who participate in these discussions. But so important a part of our societal life cannot be left to chance and goodwill. Governmental leadership will be required to foster and sustain such a conversation and churches have a substantive role to play in these formulations.

The Fabric of the Commonweal and the Future

With gratitude, we affirm that creation holds the resources necessary for abundant life and God intends the fullness of life for all. The present recommendations concerning such matters as stem cell research, equal access to gene therapies, patenting, and regulation have been developed recognizing that the economic and social results of the new and emerging biotechnologies must be judged to serve the common good. As these issues all have theological or pastoral implications, a rich opportunity challenges us as the National Council of Churches. Both at the same time and on the same issue we:

- Call on the churches to bring together the two strains of the ecumenical vine we have not always joined together: the practice of the church and advocacy within our society.
- Challenge the notion that scientific and technological experts control the discussion simply by virtue of their expertise. It will take all of our virtue and expertise. To be a responsible church, members must be fully informed, equipped, and empowered to serve the common good.
- Lift a vision of partnership with regard to the development and control of these powerful new tools and believe that work for the common good extends partnership.

- To center ourselves anew in Jesus Christ is the great challenge emerging biotechnologies present as they offer to redefine the human. To map the values of our faith is to recognize again that the human and incarnate Jesus is the one who calls us to work for justice, to be a community, and to serve each other as the body of Christ. In the presence of new technological advance we seek the venerable values of equity, justice and fair play as the hallmarks of the commonweal.

The emerging era of biotechnological discovery that now seems poised to usher a revolution in human medical innovation, will no doubt also inspire the Church to articulate new understandings of what it means to be human, God's own, and stewards of God's creation. We have detailed here some of the most significant social justice, regulatory and economic concerns that now, or soon will, confront the Church as it struggles to engage the implications of human biotechnologies for human life, morality and ethics, and social benefit. Some issues we have raised do not lend themselves, at the present time, to specific recommendations. Time may call on us to respond as the unknown future unfolds and the Church is moved to respond to new challenges. In seeking to remain faithful to our charge as Christians, the Recommendations that follow reflect a response to the issues detailed above, as well as recommendations that represent positions that reflect a broader elaboration of our commonly held Christian values. Collectively these recommendations reflect what we believe it means to be prophetic and stand for social and economic equity, the common good, and mindfulness of the needs of the least among us in light of emerging biotechnological innovations.

We conclude then as we began; in awe and gratitude to the Holy One we join our voices to that of the Psalmist acknowledging that humanity is "fearfully and wonderfully made." To honor the created nature of our being we offer then recommendations to be embraced by the National Council of Churches that together we might serve in faithfulness in embracing both the promise and challenge of human biotechnologies.

III. Recommendations

The following recommendations are broadly drawn so that this policy statement may serve the Council as a foundational document for several years even within the context of a highly dynamic biotechnology industry. The emphasis of these recommendations is on enabling the communions and ecumenical bodies to prepare and participate in shaping much needed material for debate about human applications of biotechnologies.

THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST IN THE USA GENERAL ASSEMBLY Resolves to:

1. Provide an ongoing venue for member communions to discern together their faithful response to the challenges presented by current advances in biotechnologies. Together we will,
    a. Call upon the Justice and Advocacy Commission of the National Council of Churches to oversee and give leadership to the Council's on-going efforts in the area of biotechnologies
    b. Call upon the Washington Office of the National Council of Churches to work in conjunction with the Washington Interfaith Staff Committee (WISC) to monitor legislative developments regarding biotechnology and, as appropriate, communicate the perspective of this policy statement to policymakers, and as needed alert the member communions to occasions requiring advocacy efforts.
    c. Be in close communication with ecumenical and interfaith agencies in the states to learn of developments in biotechnology on the state, local and regional levels and to support their advocacy efforts.
2. Provide an on-going ecumenical voice informing church members and the wider society of benefits and risks to the common good in the face of emerging technologies.
3. Serve, along with other advocates, including those of faith groups outside of NCC membership, as an ongoing voice for the establishment of a federal commission comprised of representative stakeholders from diverse segments of the society, to foster a national inquiry and debate productive ultimately of action to create:

   a. A means for coherent federal regulatory authority and oversight responsibility adequate to meet the challenges of advances in human biotechnologies, and,
   b. A process within the public domain for ongoing discourse regarding the ethical, legal and social implications of biotechnologies and formulation of legislative recommendations adequate to safeguard the individual and the society while enabling research to proceed.

4. Work in conjunction with other agencies on an international basis such as the World Council of Churches, regional ecumenical organizations, and the world Christian communions (Lutheran World Federation, World Alliance of Reformed Churches, etc.) to support mutually agreed-upon points of advocacy such as seeking a global ban on reproductive human cloning, and germline modification (inheritable genetic modification), and,
   a. Develop an ongoing mechanism to periodically review, monitor, and identify mutually held concerns in the field of biotechnology.
   b. Give particular attention to the economic implications and to areas of inadequate regulation, as they may develop in the future.

5. Work with other agencies to explore the potential for United Nations actions and international treaty agreement provisions which may enhance and extend the benefits of medical biotechnology for all persons and minimize the potential risks to humanity.

6. Work within the NCC, seminaries, and pastoral care and counseling networks to develop an Internet-based network of resources for ministry that relates to pastoral concerns surrounding biotechnological issues, including genetic screening and testing. This could include referral resources for clergy who are working with individuals and families, educational resources, training opportunities, etc.

The National Council of Churches Calls Upon its Member Communions to:

1. Commend this policy statement for study and implementation to their respective judicatories, pastors, congregations, and members.
2. Study biotechnology issues each in light of its own theology engaging its own membership in this inquiry.
3. Identify scientists within our member communions as valuable interpreters of the scientific enterprise, guides to the wonders and beauty of God's creation, and aids in our understanding of genetics and its associated technologies.
4. Identify clergy and lay members of our communions who are health care professionals, geneticists and molecular biologists, genetic counselors, and members of families with experience in health care matters, and recruit them as resources for clergy and congregations who are facing

biotechnology issues, particularly as the Church begins to encounter these issues on a frequent and ongoing basis.

5. Develop worship materials that address the emerging needs created by the new biotechnologies and the issues they present, including:
    a. Prayers and liturgical materials that provide solace and comfort to those who struggle with loss and distress related to genes, inherited conditions, parenting and the issues raised by genetic screening and testing, and other related pastoral concerns.
    b. Prayers and liturgical materials that are appropriate for an evolving self-understanding of our biological lives, life cycle, and occasions of transition and/or decision.
    c. Prayers of petition related to aspirations pertaining to genetic testing and screening, and medical treatments with genetic/intergenerational implications.
    d. Prayers for scientists, both petitions for their blessing, and for their personal use in devotions.
6. Work to use existing mechanisms to keep clergy current with the impact of these technologies on the life of parishioners and church.

The National Council of Churches calls upon congregations of our Member Communions to:

1. Provide study opportunities for congregation members to become acquainted with issues related to biotechnologies, making use of the gifts of scientists, genetic counselors, physicians, members of the disabled community and others that can help Christians understand, and respond to, these issues.
2. Support in prayer the efforts of the ecumenical community to seek the well being of both individuals and the commonweal through advocacy for reform of the regulatory environment and broad national debate of biotechnological issues.
3. Make available this policy statement and related documents from their own traditions and denominations which offer insight and counsel on these matters.
4. Offer support and nurture to congregational members struggling with ethical decision-making, recognizing and being sensitive to privacy concerns as well as the sense of confusion, hope and despair which may be commingled in such decisions.

Parish Priests, pastors, and others serving congregations are encouraged to:

Recognize that genetics and bioengineering raise a number of pastoral and theological questions with which they, as clergy, are frequently and traditionally involved. Those include:

1. An understanding of the value and worth of every person and the pastoral roles in developing an appreciative stance toward the gift of life, in all its diversity, and in shaping our identity as both individuals and as a people of faith.
2. An understanding of free will, and the call to use our knowledge and ability in faithful ways as stewards of life and creation;
3. Understandings of suffering and loss, and the grieving processes, rituals, and traditions that have long sustained individuals, families, and communities.
4. The pastoral role as representative of God, in life and death situations where people often feel anger, abandonment, and/or hope about God's role as either cause and/or solution.

The National Council of Churches calls upon the theological seminaries of member communions and others engaged in theological education to:

1. Provide instruction to those preparing for church vocations regarding ethical considerations raised by current biotechnologies, including their implications for both individuals and society, and providing ongoing engagement of emerging questions prompted by current and future research.
2. Expand opportunities for continuing education for clergy and health care professionals who are interested in developing expertise in addressing the spiritual, theological, pastoral, and ethical dimensions of bioengineering capabilities.
3. Provide instruction about the impact of biotechnological advances on society and the church and their ethical implications for pastors in engaging individuals and society.
4. Identify scientists within our member communions as a valuable interpretive and analytic resource to the Church.
5. Work toward creation of a national center on theology and genetics based within an appropriate research and training center that would coordinate its development, bring resources together, work as a collaborative pastoral voice in the wider social dialogue about genetic and biotechnological issues, and sponsor both research and training that will empower clergy, congregations, scientists, and families as they seek to respond as people of faith to these new frontiers of human identity, scientific research, human technology, and theological understanding.

The National Council of Churches calls on medical practitioners, health care professionals, and researchers to:

1. Remain in ongoing dialog with persons of broad religious backgrounds about the impact of emerging biotechnologies and their impact on religious sensibilities.
2. Recognize that the powerful technologies under their charge can be used for evil as well as good, and that decisions made in laboratories about how to use human genes can affect all humanity, both for good and for ill.
3. Update and revise guidelines pertaining to informed consent as appropriate to advances in research, clinical trials, and clinical practice, and in accordance with the highest standards.
4. Formulate plain-language standards for these technologies, so that as broad a public as possible is included as a partner in this science.

National Council of Churches USA