

“No woman can call herself free who does not own and control her body. No woman can call herself free until she can choose consciously whether she will or will not be a mother.”

— Margaret Sanger

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Clergy VOICES

VOLUME 11 • ISSUE 1 • FALL 2008

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE PLANNED PARENTHOOD® FEDERATION OF AMERICA CLERGY ADVISORY BOARD



Faithful Living: The Call to Social Responsibility An Interfaith Convocation

“We should be far less concerned with the purity of our actions and much more concerned with the integrity of our compromises.” —Reinhold Niebuhr

There have been reports in the media that some Christian Evangelicals are moving to the left on some social issues, such as climate change and poverty. In response, some liberal clergy and religious leaders have been tempted to put aside issues of reproductive and sexual justice in hopes of transcending

partisan politics and making progress in these other areas. The Planned Parenthood Federation of America (PPFA) Clergy Advisory Board (CAB) asked the participants of the Interfaith Prayer Breakfast, held as part of the Planned Parenthood National Conference, to address these concerns and to discuss how we may provide space in the public square for religious views without allowing public policy to be dictated by any one religious group.

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Rev. Jennifer Butler, executive director of Faith in Public Life, said that the 2004 presidential election was a watershed moment for progressive religious leaders across the United States. People of faith were determined not to allow the conservative “values voters” to define their faith and politics any longer. Butler acknowledged that there is a real desire for Evangelicals and progressive people of faith to redefine themselves on the most divisive cultural issues and to look for shared values. She emphasized that not all religious leaders working for common-good approaches are seeking split-the-difference compromises. Despite a possible shift in the political landscape, Butler cautioned the audience that it is dangerous and naïve to proclaim the demise of the Christian Right.

Broadening the discussion, Michelle Goldberg, author of *Kingdom Coming: The Rise of Christian Nationalism* and the winner of the 2008 J. Anthony Lukas Work-in-Progress Award for *The Means of Reproduction*, offered that progressive leaders need to get involved in national as well as local culture-war battles. In regard to local initiatives, Goldberg stressed that having a media strategy is the key to educating and/or reeducating the public on issues — both secular and religious — that are important to progressives. Progressives are working hard to redefine themselves, and to stop allowing conservatives to define their values for them by countering the myths about what others say they believe. Unfortunately, a defensive posture — defining ourselves by what we are not — often reinforces myths about progressive values instead of challenging them. A media strategy involves public education and assists progressives in preventing conservatives from defining their faith and politics for them.

In the spirit of collaboration and engaging the wider faith community, new CAB member Aisha Sobh spoke to the crowd about forming alliances with Muslim colleagues. She reminded people that the Qur’an makes it abundantly clear that sex, within the bonds of marriage, is intended to foster emotional intimacy rather than to be just a means of procreation and that there is nothing shameful about being sexual. She said the prevailing view in Islam is that abortion is permissible in the first four months of pregnancy; after four months, abortion is permitted if continuing the pregnancy would harm the woman.



Sobh spoke briefly about how immigration to the United States has affected the way in which Muslims practice their faith and the development of Islamic institutions. For instance, the job description for the imam is beginning to change. Traditionally, the imam is the person who leads prayers in the mosque. Now, the imam is becoming the person who provides pastoral counseling to the community, and some mosques are hiring the equivalent of a youth pastor, while others are beginning to model themselves after America’s churches and synagogues.

The convocation reminded all who were in attendance that there are multiple religious and moral dimensions to the sacred work that we do. People left the event renewed in their commitment to live out their faith in the marketplace and the statehouse and within the halls of religious institutions.

ED. NOTE: For transcripts of Ms. Butler’s remarks at the convocation, please e-mail karen.senecal@ppfa.org.

Clergy Voices welcomes articles on the theological basis for reproductive rights, pro-choice clergy events around the country, prayers and sermons, and more.

Please submit articles to:

Clergy Voices
Office of Special Projects
Planned Parenthood Federation of America
434 West 33rd Street
New York, NY 10001

Rev. Deborah A. McKinley

First Woman to Receive the Davis Distinguished Service Award



(l. r.) PPFA Clergy Advisory Board (CAB) member Rabbi Dennis Ross, Davis Distinguished Service Award winner Rev. Debbie McKinley, PPFA President Cecile Richards, CAB members Rev. Vincent Lachina, Rev. Bill Levering, and Rev. Mark Pawlowski.

Each year at the Planned Parenthood National Conference, the PPFA Clergy Advisory Board pays tribute to a member of the clergy who has made significant contributions to a Planned Parenthood affiliate and to advancing the Planned Parenthood mission. This year, the recipient of the 2008 Davis Distinguished Service Award, presented at the Interfaith Prayer Breakfast, was Rev. Deborah McKinley, the first woman to receive the honor. Board Chair of Planned Parenthood Southeastern Pennsylvania, McKinley is a tremendous advocate

for the affiliate and a passionate ambassador for reproductive rights in the religious community. Over the years, she has enlisted the support of Philadelphia's pro-choice religious community to participate in educational forums, escort patients, provide pastoral counseling, lobby elected officials, and represent Planned Parenthood in the media.

During her acceptance speech, McKinley expanded on the theme of the convocation — Faithful Living: The Call to Social Responsibility — by encouraging the audience to continue to live their faith publicly, “in the realm of the marketplace and the state-house, not simply within the halls of our religious institutions.” When we do this work, McKinley offered, we allow people “to see the stark contrast between the world God desires and the world as it is.” McKinley thanked the PPFA community for the myriad ways they work within this contrast. She said, “You and I struggle with the hardest of life's situations — situations in which there is no good answer. And in those most difficult of life's situations, you and I offer a word of hope — reminding those without power that someone speaks on their behalf, someone stands with them, someone listens to their story, someone holds their hand, reminding them they are not alone.”

Planned Parenthood of Connecticut Partners with Yale Divinity School Seminarians

For the past three years, Planned Parenthood of Connecticut (PPC) and seminarians from the Yale Divinity School have been working to provide a pastoral presence to women facing unplanned pregnancies. The project grew in response to concerns voiced by some patients with scheduled or recent abortions that could not be completely addressed by options counselors. These concerns were theological, faith issues raised by the clients themselves.

The staff at PPC understood that some women needed more “God-talk”

as a part of their decision-making process. So a team from PPC began to think about the possibility of designing a program with seminarians at the nearby divinity school who might provide an affirming presence at our New Haven health center.

No one was surprised when a couple of divinity school seminarians answered the request. Training sessions were held at the health center, a cell phone with a private number was acquired, and an on-call schedule was established. Center staff were invited to distribute cards with information about this pastoral



Maria
LaSala

presence to those who asked and to those who seemed unsettled about theological issues.

The calls often come from slightly older patients who have complicated personal and family lives. Clients who take advantage of the seminarians on call are often married, sometimes in

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abusive relationships, many times have other children, and frequently are part of more evangelical and conservative religious traditions with nowhere else to turn. These women have turned to Planned Parenthood not just for an abortion, but also for the ever-listening ear of volunteers and staff who understand that they are not making their decisions lightly.

One of the seminarians writes, “I was approached by a fellow student about volunteering as a pastoral counselor for the local Planned Parenthood clinic. I began attending trainings about counseling women who are dealing with reproductive issues, and soon after that I began volun-

teering not only for the counseling hotline, but also in the actual medical clinic on the days that abortion procedures were done. Suddenly the issue that had been almost entirely hypothetical, distant, and mostly faceless for most of my life had now become something deeply personal, emotional, and sometimes quite troubling. Reproductive choice was not just the polarizing political issue I had been taught to believe it was, but rather it was a intimate part of all women’s lives. As I stood for hours in the procedure room of the clinic, holding women’s hands during their abortion procedures, I began to feel more and more the deep conviction that this was an issue of justice — not just social justice, but one of religious justice, as

well. As I walked past protesters on the sidewalk, I knew that I needed to secure for myself my own theological reasons for supporting a woman’s right to choose. On my own time, I read and research, pray and journal, looking for sources and my own convictions for building a solid foundation for having a religiously pro-choice stance.”

Clearly this program is meeting a need ... the need of women for a compassionate listening ear and the need of seminarians to experience firsthand how to minister to women in the complexities of their lives.

by Rev. Maria LaSala, Member, PPFA Clergy Advisory Board, Pastor, First Presbyterian Church of New Haven, New Haven, CT

“WE NEED OUR CLERGY” One CEO’s Commentary

Since 1971, Planned Parenthood of Southern New Jersey (PPSNJ) has partnered with our local county health department to provide family planning services in various locations. Over the past few months, we have been surprised and saddened by a few outspoken individuals who have publicly criticized the valuable community service we provide. For the thousands of women who rely on medical care provided through PPSNJ, this has posed needless controversy and service interruption.

In the greater Planned Parenthood family, we work with clergy on a variety of

activities, including utilizing their expertise and compassion as chaplains, educators, and advocates. During our recent media controversy, members of our own PPSNJ clergy committee were extremely instrumental in helping to calm the waters.

The county asked that we meet with two local clergy from the community where the problem existed. County officials hosted the meeting, and I went with two of our PPSNJ clergy advocates. I needed those two allies by my side to add credibility and to dialogue in a rational and reasonable manner

with their colleagues in a potentially confrontational setting. Although we agreed to disagree on several points, I do believe that our opposition witnessed a different view of Planned Parenthood and, maybe, we even gained a little respect.

By concentrating on our shared values, we can keep women and families healthy. Let’s focus on prevention while we also work to ensure that women never lose the option to make a difficult choice and sometimes a necessary choice regarding an unplanned pregnancy. Communities are strengthened when the dignity of women

and families to make responsible decisions about their lives is respected.

As a Planned Parenthood affiliate CEO, I would feel a huge void without the clergy dedication to our affiliate. To my CEO colleagues nationwide, I say, clergy can play such a strong role as educators and advocates in your affiliates and help to spread the positive word about your work. Reach out — engage your clergy — their presence will prove affirming within your community.

*by G. Lynn Brown, President/CEO
Planned Parenthood of Southern
New Jersey*

People of Faith Sign Amicus Brief Opposing Pharmacy Refusals

The power and importance of relationships built between Planned Parenthood and faith communities becomes evident when a call for help is issued and the response is quick and supportive. Last year, Planned Parenthood and a broad coalition of organizations asked the Washington State Board of Pharmacy to craft a ruling that would require a pharmacy to fill all legal prescriptions, including those for emergency contraception, which requires a prescription for those who are younger than eighteen. After a lengthy hearing and a great deal of political wrangling, rules were issued by the board. The rules make clear that a pharmacy has the duty to dispense all lawfully prescribed drugs in a timely manner. If a pharmacist objects to dispensing a drug, the pharmacy is given the discretion to determine how it will comply with its obligation to fill all prescriptions, such as by ensuring that another pharmacist in the same pharmacy is available to fill the prescription in a timely manner.

In the summer of 2007, a small group of pharmacists funded by the Alliance Defense Fund (ADF), a right-wing religious organization, filed a challenge to the Pharmacy Board rules in the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Washington. The hope of the ADF is to couch the Pharmacy Board rules as interfering with the constitutional right to religious freedom. The judge responded by issuing a preliminary injunction prohibiting the ruling from being enforced. The defendants in the case – the State of Washington Department of Health and Board

of Pharmacy and a group of individuals who intervened in the case and who are represented by lawyers at Planned Parenthood, the Northwest Women's Law Center, the ACLU of Washington, and a Seattle law firm — filed an appeal to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. In support of this appeal, faith communities and faith-based organizations that oppose pharmacists being able to refuse to fill prescriptions based on religious bias agreed to file an *amicus curiae* (“friend of the court”) brief. Working with an outstanding Seattle law firm, I began the task of enlisting 10 nationally based faith organizations and 25 local clergy from a variety of faiths to sign the brief in support of our appeal. Not surprisingly, it took only a few days to secure all the signatures needed. Other clergy have since requested to be added to the list of signatures

Respect for religious pluralism and freedom remains an area of focus and attention for faith communities and leaders in Washington State and the Washington Planned Parenthood affiliates. Recently, Planned Parenthood of Western Washington held a national summit on health care refusals. Several panels such as God vs. the Gavel, Reigning in Health Care Refusals While Demonstrating Respect for the Faithful, and State Constitutions and Religious Expression, were dedicated to discussing the important and sometimes divisive role religion plays in public life.

by Rev. Vincent Lachina, Member, PPFA Clergy Advisory Board State Chapter, Planned Parenthood Public Policy Network of Washington

Let the Candidates Know: People of Faith Are Determined to Protect Women's Health

Election year — and the airwaves continue to be inundated with political ads promising whatever a candidate must in order to sway voters to his or her side. An amazing amount of time, energy, and money goes into these campaigns, which become the most major win-lose events many of us will ever witness or perhaps be actively involved with. Many of my clergy colleagues shy away from involvement

in the election process and for very valid reasons: the diversity of the people they are serving, their denomination's stance on certain issues, separation of church and state, to name a few.

I believe that the need for our involvement in the election process outweighs the reasons for non-involvement. Pro-choice clergy and religious leaders need to call the candidates to accountability regard-

ing the provision for reproductive health services for all women. It is our unique voice that cries out for medically accurate sex education for our children and teens. It is our voice that opens the candidates to the reality that there are people of faith — many people of faith — who are determined that abortion remain a legal choice for women, that stem cell research must

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Clergy Call on Legislators to Support the Reproductive Health and Privacy Protection Act

Clergy of many denominations met with legislators in the Albany, NY, state Capitol to discuss the religious support for the need to protect women's health. Members of Concerned Clergy for Choice, a statewide multi-faith network of more than 1,000 pro-choice religious leaders, were joined by members of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC), including President and CEO, Rev. Carlton Veazey, and Family Planning Advocates of New York State. They called for passage of the Reproductive Health and Privacy Protection Act, which would protect the right to elect or forgo contraception and abortion services.

The Reproductive Health Act was introduced just weeks after the U.S. Supreme Court issued a dangerous ruling in

Gonzales v. Carhart. For the first time since *Roe v. Wade* was decided 35 years ago, the court upheld an abortion restriction that lacked a safety protection for the woman's health. In the face of increasing attacks on reproductive rights, the Reproductive Health Act would strengthen abortion laws to reflect current medical practice and protect women's health and safety.

Clergy across the nation are concerned about federal policies that are making it increasingly difficult to access reproductive health services. New York clergy are taking a leadership role in protecting women's health and safety by working to strengthen state laws.

by Rabbi Dennis Ross, Member, PPFA Clergy Advisory Board Director, Concerned Clergy for Choice

People of Faith Are Determined to Protect Women's Health

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be funded, and that vaccination for the prevention of cervical cancer needs to be promoted to protect the health of more than half the population. As people of faith, we must continue to uphold the theological and moral basis for advocating reproductive freedom for all women and men.

The candidates know that we have some influence with the people they serve, but if we remain distant from the election process, they will neither trust that influence nor give our agenda the priority it deserves. There are steps we can take and still continue to share our ministry with congregants whose views may not reflect our views.

1. Write letters to the candidates stating that, as a person of faith, you consider the issue of reproductive rights to be high on your agenda. Let the candidate know that his/her position on this issue is im-

portant to you and why it holds ethical and/or pastoral importance.

2. Encourage your congregants to be involved in the election process, no matter what their political stance. As people of faith, such involvement can be a witness to others that faith-filled people are not naive about politics or the powerful role government plays in our lives. Perhaps your congregants will then be more understanding of your own efforts in this arena when they realize involvement in the process can be a living out of one's faith.

3. Seek out colleagues with whom you can share your views and work together so that, rather than feeling like a "voice crying in the wilderness," you can experience the solidarity of working with others for justice.

4. Let your local Planned Parenthood affiliate know of your willingness to assist



Paula Gravelle

them in communicating to the candidates that the quest for economic, social, and reproductive justice must be an integrated effort if we are to achieve the sacred vision of a truly just society for the whole of humanity.

There may be no better time than a national election year for the voices of pro-choice clergy to be heard. May your voice be among them.

by Rev. Dr. Paula J. Gravelle, Chairperson, PPFA Clergy Advisory Board, Director of Pastoral Care, Ellis Hospital, Schenectady, NY

Clergy Help Commemorate the 35th Anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*

Members of the clergy participated in Planned Parenthood affiliate events across the country this past January to commemorate the 35th anniversary of Roe v. Wade. A summary of selected events, which included interfaith services and vigils, follows.

Harrisburg, PA An interfaith service recognizing the importance of the *Roe v. Wade* decision in the lives of women and their families was held at the Unitarian Church of Harrisburg. The theme was "Remember, Reflect, Renew, and Rededicate." The service was organized by seminarian Jim Cavanaugh with the assistance of the church's Reproductive Rights Task Force. An offering was collected to benefit the Planned Parenthood of Susquehanna Valley Fund for Choice.

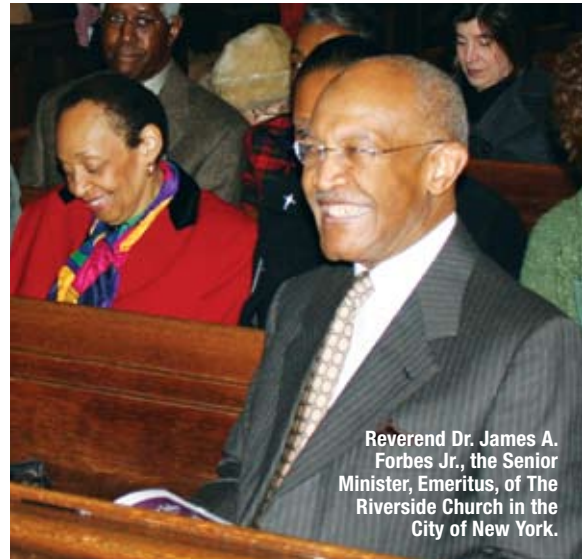
Houston, TX The Planned Parenthood of Houston and Southeast Texas (PPHSET) always-popular *Roe v. Wade* luncheon drew a crowd of nearly 800 people this year. Moved by the Interfaith Prayer Breakfast held each year at the Planned Parenthood national conference, PPHSET CEO Peter Durkin urged the planning committee for the event to invite PPFA Clergy Advisory Board member Rev. Tom Davis to be the keynote speaker at the luncheon. Davis offered an historical account of the significant role that clergy have played in the quest for reproductive

justice for women. Inspired by Davis' words, PPHSET staff will take a more concerted effort to reach out to religious leaders.

Durkin said, "Tom Davis is a well-kept secret in the federation. I would urge any and all affiliates to enlist his support in reaching out to their staff, boards, volunteers, donors, and members of the faith community. He is a holy man."

Kalamazoo, MI A candlelight vigil conducted by the Clergy Advisory Board of Planned Parenthood of South Central Michigan was one way the affiliate marked the 35th anniversary of *Roe*. Members of the clergy offered prayers for all who work on behalf of reproductive and social justice and they honored all those who came before them and who have given them strength and inspiration. Among the members of the clergy who participated in the service were two PPFA Clergy Advisory Board members, Revs. Jill McAllister and Mark Pawlowski.

New York, NY Hanson Place Central United Methodist Church and Planned Parenthood of New York City hosted an event to commemorate the anniversary of *Roe* and the 79th birthday of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The keynote speaker was Rev. Dr. James A. Forbes Jr., senior minister, emeritus, of the Riverside Church in New York City, founder of the Healing of the Nations Foundation, and host of *The Time Is Now* on Air America Radio. Dr. Forbes' remarks chal-



Reverend Dr. James A. Forbes Jr., the Senior Minister, Emeritus, of The Riverside Church in the City of New York.

lenged the audience to reconcile a reverence for life with the fact that, without the right to make decisions about how we conduct our lives and the obligation to take responsibility for those decisions, we cannot be fully human.

Rochester, NY Planned Parenthood of the Rochester/Syracuse Region along with Family Planning Advocates of New York State, the Greater Rochester National Organization for Women, the Genesee Valley Chapter of the New York Civil Liberties Union, and the Reproductive Rights Task Force of the First Unitarian Church of Rochester, held a "Conversation about Women's Health" to commemorate the anniversary of *Roe*. The main topic for the evening was the Reproductive Health and Privacy Protection Act (RHPPA). The act contains an affirmative statement of reproductive rights making it clear that in New York all individuals have the right to use or refuse contraceptives and that every woman has the right to carry a pregnancy to term or to terminate a pregnancy prior to viability or when necessary to protect her life or health. Attendees were encouraged to sign postcards and petitions and to join the local movement to pass RHPPA.



(l.-r.) Planned Parenthood supporters Ken and Ruth Arnold, Peter Durkin President and CEO of Planned Parenthood of Houston and Southeast Texas, and Rev. Tom Davis, CAB member.


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Schenectady, NY To commemorate the 35th anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, local clergy and other Planned Parenthood supporters gathered for a service, "On Sacred Ground," at the new Planned Parenthood Mohawk Hudson facility in Schenectady, NY. Rev. Bill Levering, a member of the PPFA Clergy Advisory Board, spoke and wrote a hymn, "In Praise of Wondrous Human Love," one verse of which reads, "We celebrate the freedom to choose our way of life. To choose our love, our path, our health, to even choose our strife."

The final and perhaps most moving component of the service involved a blessing of the building in which the work of Planned Parenthood takes place. Participants, including Planned Parenthood staff, laid their hands on the brick of the building and shared the following:

"We bless this building as sacred ground where women's voices and stories are welcomed, valued, and affirmed; sacred ground where women's voices and stories are not silenced, belittled, or judged, but given full freedom of expression; sacred ground where women are treated with dignity, supported in their role as moral decision makers; sacred ground where body, mind, and soul find healing and compassion and where justice is the standard by which success is measured; sacred ground where the violent voices of hatred and oppression are quelled and where women are empowered to stand on their own ground."



Planned Parenthood
Federation of America, Inc.

CLERGY VOICES is published by the Planned Parenthood® Federation of America Office of Special Projects (OSP), 434 West 33rd Street, New York, NY 10001.

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