

Memphis Regional Planned Parenthood®

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NEWS & VIEWS

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MRPP Intensifies HIV Outreach Efforts

Nearly three decades have passed since HIV was first identified in the United States among gay men in large, metropolitan cities. Despite significant medical advances, a vaccine and cure for HIV remain elusive. The disease now infects and affects people of all backgrounds. HIV has been particularly devastating to the African-American community in the MidSouth. The latest statistics show that African-Americans in Memphis and Shelby County account for 86% of the total diagnosed cases of HIV/AIDS. More staggering is the fact that African-Americans constitute 94% of the total diagnosed cases of HIV/AIDS among women in the region.

In response to this epidemic, Memphis Regional Planned Parenthood has increased its outreach efforts in the black community. Health Educator Stacey Luttrell orchestrated a successful World AIDS Day event Dec. 1 at the Orange Mound Community Center, at which 81 people were tested for HIV and counseled on sexual risk-reduction strategies. Hip-hop station HOT 107.1 FM broadcast live from the community center for six hours, and hip-hop duo *Da Volunteers* made a special guest appearance.

National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day presented another opportunity to administer free testing and counseling. Thirty-two individuals were tested at the Whitehaven Community Center Feb. 7. In addition, MRPP administered HIV tests to 64 people Feb. 11, following morning services at Christ Missionary Baptist Church.

MRPP has reached a diverse cross-section of Memphis through its outreach—from the retired firefighter to cosmetology students; from teenagers to married couples; from the childless to the woman with eight children. Whether you are gay, straight, bisexual or transgendered, it is important to practice safe sexual behaviors. Know your HIV status!

For more photos from recent community HIV testing events, see Page 4.



MRPP Director of Clinic Services LaDedria Penn conducted her first *Fundamentals of HIV Prevention Counseling* training for staff, volunteers and community leaders.

God Calls Faith Community to Support, Trust Women With Choices



By Casey Thompson

In January, we celebrated the 34th anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, the Supreme Court case that recognized that a woman's right to reproductive choice exists under the Ninth and Fourteenth Amendments of our constitution. Three decades after the ruling, however, this freedom remains tenuous at best—under pressure from our government and from people of faith.

Thompson is the Associate Pastor for Congregational Life at Idlewild Presbyterian Church and an MRPP board member.

It distresses me, as a pastor, that people of faith who are pro-choice have yielded this public discussion almost completely to our brothers and sisters who oppose it. The reality is that abortion is a deeply complex moral decision. At its easiest, it's a decision to save a mother's life when a pregnancy threatens her health—a scenario that is almost unconscionable to oppose. At its toughest, abortion is a choice between a fetus' potential for life and a woman's right to self-determination. It's a measure of how deeply we value both of these ends that we regularly grieve the loss of either.

Despite the common assumptions we make about the Bible, it makes no comment about abortion (the closest it comes to the question of the fetus might be Exodus 21:22-25, which is ambiguous for our purpose). Does this mean we cannot draw anything from scripture that might help us in determining which is the best path? Of course not. As a Presbyterian General Assembly noted in 1992, "There are no biblical texts that speak expressly to the topic of abortion, but that taken in their totality the Holy Scriptures are filled with messages that advocate respect for the woman and child before

and after birth." This respect is the crux of our moral dilemma. How can we respect both?

I would suggest that we could honor both by working toward the reduction of abortions rather than toward their prohibition. Prohibition, it should be noted, only reduces the instance of abortion but does not eliminate it. It also makes it more dangerous. Abortions will continue to occur as long as the social pressures that drive them are prominent. Susan Thistlethwaite, president of Chicago Theological Seminary, argues persuasively that abortion is the "end product of a society that fails to protect women from violence, fails to give young people truthful explanations of their own reproductive capacity and the tools to be able to act responsibly their whole reproductive lives and often fails to provide even the minimum needed to earn a living and care for your family in dignity and health."

I support the work of Memphis Regional Planned Parenthood with both my time and money because they are not afraid to stand in the difficult places to which God calls us and work toward ameliorating the circumstances that lead to abortion. Alongside the procedure of abortion, MRPP's work also includes medically accurate, age-appropriate sexuality education and contraception to the women and men in our communities and churches. They work toward increased access to quality, affordable reproductive health care for everyone. Most importantly, though, they advocate for young women who are stifled in a host of ways by the color of their skin or their economic status—those women most vulnerable to unintended pregnancy.

I do not believe that we can grow as a just society if we consistently limit the agency of women. In the end, it is a refusal to trust women as moral agents, made free and responsible by a loving creator. Rather, we should trust that women will make the wise choices about their bodies and their families—an end we simply cannot trust to an impersonal and inflexible law. *Roe v. Wade* recognizes that women are the proper locus for such decisions. For that insight, it's a decision worthy of celebration.

Give a Tribute Gift to MRPP!

Want to honor the friend who has everything?

Want to recognize your dearly departed's lifetime achievements?

Make a donation in honor or memory of a friend or family member!

In Memoriam

It is with extreme sorrow that we report the passing of MRPP Finance Manager Kim K. McDonald following a short battle with leukemia. Please keep her family and friends in your thoughts and prayers.





MRPP co-sponsored a viewing and panel discussion of *The Abortion Diaries* at First Congo Church Jan. 26. Top: MRPP board member Jakatae Jessup (left) speaks while Anna Mullins, of the Women's Action Coalition, and Jamie Russell, of Friends for Life, listen.



Above: MRPP Nurse Practitioner Leah Smith speaks, while Carolina De Robertis, co-founder and senior program associate at Exhale, looks on. Below: Medical Students for Choice president Amy Cline, MRPP intern Rachel Frantz and MRPP volunteer Christy Swatzell pose in front of MRPP's information table.



In Brief

- Congratulations to Troycie Sawyer on her promotion to Health Center Manager! Troycie now oversees clinic hours, employee schedules, human resources duties, and supply replenishment, in addition to being LaDedria's assistant.
- Free EC Day was a success! MRPP provided 160 packages of free emergency contraception in just one day, preventing innumerable pregnancies. An additional 112 packages were dispensed throughout December. MRPP was featured on all four television stations, in several newspaper articles, in a radio public service announcement and on numerous Internet calendars and blogs.
- Sincere thanks to University of Memphis and Rhodes College Vox members who assembled and distributed "safe sex kits" on their campuses. Valentine's Day provided a perfect opportunity for education!
- Make your appointment online! Clients can now use our website to request a specific time and date for an appointment. For more information, visit our website at www.plannedparenthood.org/memphis.
- "Sarah" in Nashville called her family doctor the morning after a condom failure. Sarah expected that her doctor, whom she had trusted with her health care for many years, would write a simple prescription for emergency contraception. Instead, the doctor refused to help, citing ethical reasons. Luckily for Sarah, she was able to obtain EC over the counter at a local pharmacy on the advice of a friend and MRPP volunteer. Remind *your* friends of their reproductive rights!

"It is so nice to be in an environment where I can openly discuss women's reproductive rights without whispering."

—Amy Cline,
Medical Students
for Choice



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NEWS & MEDIA



Top left: Community Affairs Manager Christie Petrone (right) learns the Orange Mound hand signal from *Da Volunteers* rapper Noon. *Da Volunteers* lent their celebrity to MRPP's World AIDS Day event at the Orange Mound Community Center Dec. 1. **Top right:** Intern Katie Lane (left) and Health Educator Porcha Davis greet visitors with safe-sex information. **Right:** Whitehaven Community Center Director Rory Campbell (far right) smiles as Health Educator Stacey Luttrell (left), volunteer Christy Swatzell and Certified Medical Assistant Samantha Cullis help with free HIV testing on National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day, Feb. 7.



Check us out on the web—www.plannedparenthood.org/memphis