

Reproductive Justice is a Religious Issue

One of the most common misperceptions that we hear at Planned Parenthood is that there is one religious view on birth control and abortion and that the view is negative. In fact, there are a range of religious views on birth control and abortion, and religious texts to support each interpretation. While the religious right may get the most coverage, that doesn't make them the most correct. There are many clergy of all religions that take a pro-choice position on birth control, family planning, and abortion.

Pro-choice religions are mainstream institutions in the United States. These traditions, with more than 20 million members in the United States, support reproductive choice as the most responsible position a religious institution can take on this issue.

The Episcopal Church, Presbyterian Church (USA), United Church of Christ, United Methodist Church, Unitarian Universalist Association, and Reform, Reconstructionist, and Conservative Judaism all have official statements in support of reproductive choice as a matter of conscience, adopted by their governing bodies. Religious and religiously affiliated organizations from these and other traditions (and independent religious organizations such as Catholics for a Free Choice) also support reproductive choice.

“Governments that criminalize... abortion have taken sides in a religious debate. Since there are good religious authorities on both sides of the debate, government has no right to intrude.”

—DANIEL C. MAGUIRE, *Sacred Choices: The Right to Contraception and Abortion in Ten World Religions*

Clergy Organizing for Reproductive Justice

Members of the clergy are often our most effective advocates when we go to lobby our elected officials. Every year, Planned Parenthood coordinates a Clergy Lobby Day to ensure that representatives hear from pro-choice religious leaders. Many elected officials have never heard a progressive, religious voice when it comes to matters of reproductive rights and health. Recently, clergy have joined Planned Parenthood of New York City to lobby for comprehensive sex education in New York's schools.

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Reproductive Justice *in a* Just Society

In 2005, Planned Parenthood of New York City convened a group of clergy to draft a religious statement in support of reproductive justice. The statement grounds pro-choice positions in a broader vision of economic and social justice. The statement also contains specific sections of support for sex education, family planning, and abortion.

“... The decisions we make about our reproductive and sexual lives, but most especially, the decision to have a child, are among the most important decisions that we, as human beings, can make. Having a child is a precious responsibility that changes our lives forever. The privileged in this world, for the most part, have unfettered access to the reproductive health and education services necessary to decide for themselves when and whether to bear or raise a child. The poor and the disadvantaged do not. Thus, the struggle for reproductive justice is inextricably bound up with the effort to secure a more just society. Accordingly, those who would labor to achieve economic and social justice are called upon to join in the effort to achieve reproductive justice and, thereby, help realize the sacred vision of a truly just society for all.”

Reproductive Justice *in a* Just Society



You can read the entire statement online at http://www.ppnyc.org/facts/facts/clergy_statement.pdf.

Additionally, we encourage members of the clergy to endorse the statement and add their names to our list of signatories. For more information, visit:

http://www.ppnyc.org/facts/facts/endorsement_form.php.

HISTORY OF PLANNED PARENTHOOD AND CLERGY



“When Margaret Sanger began the movement in 1916 that grew into Planned Parenthood, birth control was illegal in America and powerful churches were opposing it with all their might. Ms. Sanger, who was herself an atheist, understood what a powerful — and underestimated—role religion played in American society. She asked Protestant and Jewish clergy to help her. And they did.

In 1934, the Episcopal Church in America became the first religious body to say that birth control was acceptable for married people. In the next ten years, Jewish denominations and most Protestant denominations also endorsed it. But it took years to get birth control into public hospitals and welfare programs. In 1958, when the New York City hospitals would not give birth control to poor women, the clergy protested and the policy was changed. In 1965 the Planned Parenthood clergy group of Baltimore persuaded the Maryland State Welfare Board to provide contraception to poor women, married and unmarried.

In 1967, clergy came together to form the Clergy Consultation on Abortion, a network of 1500 clergy from all around America who helped women find abortions that were safe, even if they were not legal. Until *Roe v. Wade* was decided, they helped over 100,000 women find safe procedures.

From 1943 to 1974, Planned Parenthood always had some form of a National Clergy Advisory Board. In the 1940s and 50s, many thousands of clergy were members. The National Clergymen's Advisory Council planned and conducted Planned Parenthood's 25th anniversary celebration which was held at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York City in 1946. The Clergy Advisory Board was re-started in 1994, and we have been active since. We publish a newsletter, *Clergy Voices*, and we sponsor the Interfaith Breakfast at the annual meeting.

Clergy support Planned Parenthood because it recognizes that women have a right to control their own bodies. It is a matter of justice. And justice is what the Bible commands.”

WRITTEN BY REV. TOM DAVIS

Davis is the author of

Sacred Work: Planned Parenthood and Its Clergy Alliances

Spotlight: Sex Education in Church?

Yes! One of the best, most comprehensive sex education programs comes from the Unitarian Universalist Association and the United Church of Christ. *Our Whole Lives (OWL)* is a series of sexuality education curricula for five age groups: grades K-1, grades 4-6, grades 7-9, grades 10-12, and adults. Not only does it include up-to-date information and honest, age-appropriate answers, it encourages young people to clarify their values and improve their decision-making skills. For more information about OWL, visit: <http://www.uua.org/owl/>.

Where Can I Learn More about Pro-Choice Religious Work?

Websites:

Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice: www.rcrc.org

Planned Parenthood's Clergy Network:

<http://www.plannedparenthood.org/get-involved/take-political-action/pro-choice-clergy.htm>

Catholics for a Free Choice: <http://www.catholicsforchoice.org>

Religious Institute on Sexual Morality, Justice, and Healing:
<http://www.religioustheology.org/>

Books:

Sacred Choices: The Right to Contraception and Abortion in Ten World Religions by Daniel C. Maguire.

Sacred Work: Planned Parenthood and Its Clergy Alliances by Rev. Tom Davis

What Can I Do?

- Talk to your religious leader and find out what his or her position on reproductive justice is. If he or she is supportive, recommend signing on to the “Reproductive Justice in a Just Society” statement (available at http://www.ppnyc.org/facts/facts/endorsement_form.php) or incorporating reproductive justice into an upcoming sermon.
- Encourage your religious leader to join Planned Parenthood of New York City's Religious Leaders Advisory Board. Contact Rachel Strauber (212) 274-7216 or Margarita Hernandez (212) 274-7290 for more information.
- Begin a pro-choice or women's issues group in your congregation.
- Get the facts about your own religion — what do different experts say?