

Concerned Clergy for CHOICE



A PROJECT OF THE EDUCATION FUND OF FAMILY PLANNING ADVOCATES

JOIN US FOR CLERGY DAY IN ALBANY: WEDNESDAY, APRIL 29

Clergy from across New York State will meet with policy makers in Albany on Wednesday, April 29, to offer pro-choice faith perspectives on family planning issues, reproductive choice and health and sex education. The Rev. Steven Baines, Director of Interfaith Outreach for the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC), a 35 year-old alliance of religious groups from 15 denominations committed to reproductive justice, will speak at the policy briefing.



From Clergy Day, 2008

(above) The Rev. Carlton Veazey, president and CEO of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice

(right) The Rev. Donna Schaper, senior minister of Judson Memorial Church

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RCRC Co-SPONSORS CLERGY DAY

Time and time again, policy makers ask to hear about the experiences and perspectives of pro-choice religious leaders.




To join your clergy colleagues in raising a voice for reproductive justice on April, 29, please register for Clergy Day by contacting info@fpaofnys.org or call 518-436-8408, extension 238.



The Rev. Steven Baines

ON-CAMERA MEDIA TRAINING FOR CLERGY

 Media training on Tuesday, April 28 in Albany

 Anticipate the tough questions!

 Get comfortable making your point!

 Take control of your interview!

Concerned Clergy for Choice will offer **two tracks** (see box) of "On-Camera Media Training for Clergy," on Tuesday, April 28 at 6:00 p.m., the evening before Clergy Day.

Dozens of clergy have trained with Concerned Clergy and report greater comfort and effectiveness in media relations. There is no charge to participate, and a light dinner is included. Registration is required.

To sign up and learn more, please contact info@edfundfpa.org or call 518-436-8408, extension 238.

Track I, "On-Camera Basics,"

will cover the nuances of deciding to accept an interview, staying "on message," and holding one's ground with the media.

Track II, "Talk Show Talk,"

designed for clergy with some media experience, will offer "in the moment" opportunities that simulate being a call-in radio guest. Both tracks will include on-camera interviews and immediate feedback and support. Dianne Patterson, FPA's director of communications, and Rabbi Dennis Ross, will lead the sessions.

MORAL AGENCY AS A RELIGIOUS VALUE: THE CONSEQUENCES FOR WOMEN'S HEALTH IN NEW YORK STATE

FROM THE DIRECTOR

A newspaper cartoon pictured a classroom table with a preschooler inundated by an array of toys, games and crafts supplies. The caption read "Do we have to do what we want to do?"

There is a world of difference between a young student overwhelmed by play options and a person facing a health decision. Yet when it comes to making up one's mind, the response is the same: You have to do what you want to do. You are the expert in yourself. No one can make up your mind for you. You are the one to decide. As clergy, we know what it is like to counsel a person facing a decision. We listen, reflect, offer sympathy and comfort, but when it comes to giving advice, we recognize that we are not the ones to live with the outcome; the patient faces the consequences. The patient must be the one to come to the conclusion and act upon it. We clergy expect people to do what they want to do. We do not exercise moral agency for them.



Rabbi Dennis S. Ross, Director

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MORAL AGENCY IS AT THE HEART OF MANY A FAITH

It's also at the center of medical decision making. The value of personal conscience that informs interpretation of Scripture, deliberation over religious belief and practice, and consideration of contraception and abortion also occupies an important role in religion. What is more, the United States Supreme Court decisions *Roe v. Wade*, *Griswold v. Connecticut* and *Cruzan v. Director, Missouri Department of Health*, for instance, reflect the Court's respect for the capacity to come to personal conclusions over electing and forgoing medical care as enshrined in the United States Constitution.

We have recently witnessed the Court's inclination to curtail the Constitutional protections of *Roe* and related decisions. Fortunately, for New Yorkers, the Reproductive Health Act (RHA) is currently under consideration by the State legislature. RHA would safeguard the right to elect or forgo contraception and abortion, thereby protecting the religious liberties and moral agency of all who live here.

A PERSONAL REFLECTION

THE REV. CHARLES H. STRAUT, JR., UNITED METHODIST CHURCH, BROOKLYN

I became involved in the Clergy Consultation Service on Abortion in the late 1960's when colleagues from our town's (Protestant) clergy group talked me into hearing the avant garde ideas of a "radical" pastor in the City by the name of Howard Moody. After a couple of hours, we were all convinced that it is more important to protect the quality of life of a woman who has an unplanned pregnancy than to tie her hands morally or punish her. Why should she have to obey someone else's judgment of her situation? So, we resolved to establish the New Jersey Clergy Consultation Service on Abortion and my clergy colleagues asked me to be the organization's coordinator. We gathered 36 pastors and rabbis throughout the state. Both the white and yellow phone directories listed our number under "A", for abortion. We clergy were on call for a week at a time. An answering machine in my parsonage contained the voice of my wife, Judy, who provided the name and phone number of the week's clergy.



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VOICES OF FAITH:

[A]ny proposed legislation on the part of national or state governments regarding abortions must take special care to see that individual conscience is respected and that the responsibility of individuals to reach informed decisions in this matter is acknowledged and honored.

- Episcopal Church

We affirm the ability and responsibility of women, guided by the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit, to make good moral choices.

- Presbyterian Church (U.S.A)

Affirm our unwavering commitment to the protection and preservation of the reproductive rights of women.

- Union for Reform Judaism

We call all Christians to a searching and prayerful inquiry into the sorts of conditions that may warrant abortion. We commit our Church to continue to provide nurturing ministries to those who terminate a pregnancy, to those in the midst of a crisis pregnancy and to those who give birth.

- United Methodist Church

Recognizing that each person is ultimately responsible to God, we encourage women and men in these circumstances to seek spiritual counsel as they prayerfully and conscientiously consider their decision.

- American Baptist Churches, USA

Jewish obligation begins with the informed will of every individual.

- Central Conference of American Rabbis

AFFIRMING THE MORAL AGENCY OF WOMEN

...a consistent position supporting a woman's right to follow her own conscience...free of the coercion of poverty, racial discrimination and availability of services to those who cannot pay.

- American Friends Services Committee

...an examination of core principles of Catholic theology reveals a tradition that respects the capacity of individuals to make moral decisions.

- Catholics for a Free Choice

...the right to individual conscience... the personal right to choose in regard to contraception and abortion.

- Unitarian Universalist Association

Medical Opinion

The respect for the right of individual patients to make their own choices about their health care (autonomy) is fundamental.

- The Code of Professional Ethics of the American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology

The principle of patient autonomy holds that an individual's physical, emotional, and psychological integrity should be respected and upheld. This principle also recognizes the human capacity to self-govern and choose a course of action from among different alternative options.

- The Code of Medical Ethics of the American Medical Association

FROM THE DIRECTOR, CONTINUED FROM PG 2

The debate about the role of moral agency in faith goes back for centuries. The invention of the printing press, for instance, put the Bible in the hands of the people and provided an expanded opportunity to read and interpret Scripture according to conscience. Some religious authorities did not take kindly to freedom of belief and interpretation. Many continue to attack such responsible exercise of informed will. Other clergy, then and today, affirm and cherish conscience in the reading of the sacred text as well as in the most intimate and personal decisions in life.

Even as we affirm moral agency as a value of faith, we witness recent and blatant faith-driven challenges to private decision making. Those who seek to impair or overturn the protections of *Roe* need to accept these lessons of history: only the woman knows whether or not she is ready to have a child, neither government nor religious leaders can impose themselves on her decision, and that restricting or impairing access to abortion services will not encourage a woman to carry an unplanned pregnancy to term. Abortion cannot be legislated away.

It is a far cry from the nursery school play table to the study of scripture to the doctor-patient relationship and medical decision making. Yet the principle is the same: The person in the situation is best equipped to make a decision. God gives a woman the capacity to become pregnant and come to her conclusion. She has to do what she wants to do. She knows what is right for herself and her family. No one else can or should make that decision for her.

A PERSONAL REFLECTION, CONTINUED FROM PG 3

We, of course, only offered abortion referrals to women who, after the counseling, decided for themselves that was their option. I remained as coordinator of the Service for a little more than a year when we referred 1,100 women. So, it is through these eyes that we view the impending threat to repeal or impair the constitutional protections affirmed by *Roe v. Wade*. We are thinking of the women – and their men and children. My faith calls for the most good for the most people, to be decided ultimately by each sovereign creation of God for themselves, without coercive interference from the State or even the Church. I pray that viewpoint will prevail.

CLERGY ADVISORY BOARD

The Clergy Advisory Board, a group of pro-choice clergy spanning an array of faiths and regions of New York State, advises the Concerned Clergy for Choice project.

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