



# Voice for Choice

A Newsletter from the Minnesota Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice

## Reframing the Abortion Debate—A Note from the Executive Director *Kiely Todd Roska*

Every year on Good Friday, many people go to Planned Parenthood to protest the abortion clinic. Many conservative Christians participate in these protests, presumably because they see a connection between Jesus' execution and abortion.

This year, I participated in a pro-choice counter-protest organized by Planned Parenthood because as a Christian I believe that women making difficult reproductive decisions deserve compassion and love, not judgment and protest.

I was uncomfortable, however, with the way the protest was set up. A whole lane of the street was blocked in front of the clinic. At one end of the building were the anti-abortion people, carrying a large wooden cross, saying prayers, and singing hymns. At the other end of the building, on the other side of a large divider, were pro-choice people, carrying signs that read "Planned Parenthood: Celebrating 80 years of Serving Women" and waving at the supportive people in cars, who were honking as they passed. To witnesses driving by, the protest was clearly divided into a secular pro-choice side and a religious anti-abortion side.

Most of the network news stations were there, and reporters interviewed people on both sides of the dividers. Unfortunately, the story that reported was of secular pro-choicers vs. religious pro-lifers. As I

watched the news coverage that evening, I kept wishing that they had interviewed some of the religious pro-choice people who were there that day, so that we could have shared our stories of commitment to women as moral decision-makers and our commitment to religious freedom.

My experience at Planned Parenthood on

Pro-Faith  
Pro-Family  
Pro-Choice

Good Friday reminded me how important our work is as the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice. Decisions about when or whether to have children are some of the most important decisions we make as human beings.

Many factors influence our decisions about when or whether to become parents—how we understand sexuality and our bodies, our access to adequate health care and contraception, our economic situation, our family and friend support systems, and our belief systems.

The public discussion about reproductive decision-making in this country has become very narrow. Religious anti-abortion activists have self-righteously claimed the moral high ground in public discussions about abortion.

Unfortunately, the general public has come to believe that anti-abortion activists speak for all religious people. I respect that religious people can have different opinions about the morality of birth control and abortion. However, in a country where people come from a wide variety of religious traditions and beliefs,

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# LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

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We believe that the decision to become a parent is one of life's most important decisions, and should not be determined by one's income or access to health care. This legislative session, we worked with other Minnesota pro-choice groups to ensure that every woman is free to make decisions about having children according to her own conscience and religious beliefs. In April, we co-sponsored our lobby day with NARAL Pro-Choice Minnesota and the MN Women's Campaign Fund (now called Women Winning).

## The Successes:

### **EC in the ER: The Compassionate Care for Sexual Assault Victims Act (SF.1266)**

Emergency contraception is a safe way to prevent an unwanted pregnancy, and it empowers a woman who has been raped with a sense of control. Sexual assault victims will soon have immediate access to emergency contraception and sexually transmitted infection treatment at every emergency room in the state. The "Compassionate Care for Sexual Assault Victims Act" received overwhelming bipartisan support and was signed into law by Governor Pawlenty on May 4.

### **Family Planning Clinics Funding Increase**

In Minnesota, poor women have unequal access to comprehensive reproductive health care. State funding to support over 160 nonprofit family-planning clinics that serve over 130,000 Minnesotans has reached a 15-year low.

This year, some of the cuts that were made to family planning clinics have been restored. The Family Planning Clinics Funding Increase (HF.298/SF.184) passed, securing a \$2.3 million increase in family planning grants, a 25% increase in Medicaid reimbursement rates, and new policies that will allow clinics to reduce costs and better serve their patients.



Amelia Kahn and Abbie McMillan from First Universalist Church of Minneapolis joined us on Pro-Choice Lobby Day in support of comprehensive sexuality education in schools.

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## Reframing the Abortion Debate, continued from page 1

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we must distinguish between personal theological views and good public policy. Ultimate decisions about when to bring life into the world are sacred, personal decisions, and one theological position should not become the policy by which all people are forced to make decisions about having children.

As we try to broaden the current debate about reproductive decision-making, we should remember the history of the pro-choice movement in this country. Forty years ago, in 1967, a group of 21 rabbis and ministers formed a network to counsel women who needed to make a decision about whether or not to terminate a pregnancy. If a woman decided to terminate a pregnancy, they connected her with a doctor who would perform the procedure safely. If a woman decided to carry the pregnancy to term, they would connect her with adoption or parenting resources. The network grew to include 1400 clergy across the United States. After abortion was legalized in 1973, this informal network formed what would later become the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice. In addition, many Protestant and Jewish denominations had pro-choice position statements, (supporting safe, legal abortions, access to contraception, and holistic sexuality education) in the 1960's and 1970's. Religious people have been active in the pro-choice movement for a long time.

Pro-choice religious people understand that reproductive decision-making is complicated and difficult. Our beliefs do not usually fit neatly on a sign at a protest or on a bumper sticker. Our voices often get drowned out by louder, more strident voices—both pro-choice and anti-abortion. While protests are necessary, they are not usually the best place to have an honest discussion with people who might disagree with you. We should be having conversations in our religious communities. We have been scared to do this because these conversations can be difficult and divisive. But, if we create a covenant of understanding for the discussion, it can be very healthy to have a conversation, even when we disagree. Our silence will not help us protect women's reproductive rights. I challenge you to claim your religious pro-choice voice and start the conversation.

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## New Financial Consultant

We are happy to welcome Julie Champ, who joined the MN Religious Coalition in January as our new Financial Consultant.

Julie is currently in her 11<sup>th</sup> year with Barthe & Wahrman as Director of Assurance Services. The CPA firm is comprised of former Ernst & Young professionals and focuses on closely-held businesses and their owners.

After many years of working on a volunteer basis with church and schools, she came to believe that her talents should also be utilized to provide efficient, quality financial information to nonprofits. Julie coined the name "Count Your Blessings" for her work in this field. She has held various volunteer

treasurer positions in the Edina School District and is currently Treasurer for Edina Meals on Wheels and Linden Hills UCC.

Julie also can be found at the organ bench at Linden Hills UCC and has played organ/piano her entire life. She is a member at Mayflower UCC and just completed chairing Mayflower's Capital Appeal. She grew up on a family farm outside Moorhead, MN, and was raised in a UCC church.

She is blessed with 2 children (Jonathan, 24 and Linnea, 14), 4 stepchildren (Josh, 32, Joe, 26, Jeff, 22 and Megan, 16) and lives with her husband, Bob, the two girls and two cats in Edina.

*Voice for Choice* is a publication of the Minnesota Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice. If you would like your article or letter considered for our next newsletter, please e-mail Kate at [kate@mnrerc.org](mailto:kate@mnrerc.org), and write "newsletter submission" in the subject line.

## LEGISLATIVE UPDATE CONTINUED

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### **We Will Continue to Fight for Comprehensive Family Life and Sexuality Education**

Many faith traditions teach that sexuality is a good part of human creation. Unfortunately, our public policies are often driven by fear and an understanding that sexuality is shameful and should not be discussed openly. In our state, young people are not given the information they need to make healthy decisions about sexuality. A few loud minority voices have dominated the debate about sexuality education in our schools.

It has been proven time and time again that comprehensive sex education and access to family planning significantly reduces unintended pregnancies. The Comprehensive Sexuality Education Act garnered widespread support this year. Unfortunately, in last minute negotiations with the Governor, the policy language regarding comprehensive sexuality education was removed from the bill. Please help us continue to fight for comprehensive sexuality education for our children, and make sure that they have all the information they need to lead happy, healthy lives.

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### **Stay in the loop!**

If you would like to receive our monthly e-newsletters with important legislative updates, please send your name and e-mail address to [info@mnrcc.org](mailto:info@mnrcc.org)

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## **MARK YOUR CALENDARS:**

### **Fall *Our Whole Lives* Curriculum Training**

**Where: Peace UCC in Rochester, MN**

**When: October 5-7, 2007**

Join us and learn how to teach the *Our Whole Lives* comprehensive sexuality curriculum in your congregation. The training is co-hosted by the Minnesota Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, the MN Conference United Church of Christ, and the Prairie Star District Unitarian Universalist Association. To register online with a credit card or to print out a paper application, please visit the Prairie Star District at [www.psduua.org](http://www.psduua.org). For more information, please call Kiely at 612-870-0974.

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## **Welcome to our Summer Interns**

We would also like to welcome our summer interns, Willa Ahlschwede and Carolyn Browender, who will be working on strengthening MNRCC's relationships with local college campuses to establish new Spiritual Youth for Reproductive Freedom groups. Willa just graduated from Macalester College with a religious studies major and a dance minor. Carolyn is a political science major at American University in Washington, D.C.

Welcome Willa and Carolyn!

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## A Setback for Women's Health

We've fought for decades to ensure that women have reproductive rights. But the Supreme Court's April 18 decision in *Gonzales vs. Carhart* turned back the clock on women's health and upheld an abortion procedures ban. This decision is not only about rare third-trimester or late-term procedures. It will affect second-trimester abortions performed to protect women's lives.

*Gonzales vs. Carhart* upholds the "Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act of 2003," which was approved by Congress and signed by President Bush. This ban does not include an exception if a woman's life is in danger.

The national Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice filed an amici curiae brief with the Supreme Court in *Gonzales vs. Carhart*, challenging the ban on religious grounds. The brief asked the court to "not allow Congress to force a moral consensus where there is none, but rather to let the individual women who face the agonizing decision of whether to terminate a pregnancy or risk their own health do so legally, in consultation and accordance with their own conscience and faith."

Help us protect women's lives and ensure that every woman is free to make decisions about having children according to her own conscience and religious beliefs by supporting our work. Make a contribution to the Minnesota Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice at [www.mnrcrc.org](http://www.mnrcrc.org).

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## 2007 Faith and Freedom Banquet and Silent Auction

Don't miss our bi-annual Faith and Freedom Banquet! Join us in celebrating and honoring individuals and organizations dedicated to supporting comprehensive sexuality education and reproductive choice. We are pleased to welcome our keynote speaker, Rabbi Marcia Zimmerman.

**Where:** Mt. Zion Banquet Room

**When:** Tuesday, October 23<sup>rd</sup>

**Who:** Supporters from the religious and pro-choice communities

### HELP MAKE OUR SILENT AUCTION A SUCCESS!

This year's banquet will feature a silent auction. Please contact Kate at [kate@mnrcrc.org](mailto:kate@mnrcrc.org) if you would like to donate something to the silent auction or volunteer at the event.

Make a contribution to the MN Religious Coalition

[www.mnrcrc.org](http://www.mnrcrc.org)



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## Minnesota Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice

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 Catholics For a Free Choice-Minnesota  
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 Midwest Federation of Temple Sisterhoods  
 Minneapolis YWCA  
 Mt. Zion Temple Sisterhood  
 National Council of Jewish Women, State Public Affairs  
 Temple Israel Sisterhood  
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 United Church of Christ, Minnesota Conference  
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