



Ohio Religious Coalition  
for  
Reproductive Choice

# UPDATE

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Winter 2007

## Prevention First Lobby Day, April 17

Please join Ohio RCRC and our pro-choice allies at the second Prevention First Lobby Day sponsored by Freedom of Choice Ohio, the state pro-choice coalition. Although we elected a governor and other state leaders who support reducing unintended pregnancies with honest, medically accurate sex education and better access to family planning services, we still have a state legislature which listens to the anti-choice minority. Our legislators need to hear your religious pro-choice voices!

Read more on page six about the education and advocacy opportunities provided on Lobby Day. Use the enclosed Lobby Day brochure to register—soon!

### MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS

*The Ohio Religious Coalition is an affiliate of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice comprised of over 40 religious denominations and faith groups. The Ohio Coalition Board is made up of individuals representing Ohio organizations and interests.*

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### EDUCATION MISSION

*The Ohio Religious Coalition works toward an educated society in which people make reproductive choices freely and according to conscience and faith.*

Send comments to:

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Greg Arnold and  
Rev. Penny Willis

## New Ohio Black Church Initiative Coordinator

Rev. Penny Willis, the new Multicultural Program Director at the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, recently appointed Greg Arnold to be the Ohio Black Church Initiative (BCI) Coordinator. For several years, Greg facilitated the BCI's Model Faith-based Dialogues, "Keeping It Real" for teens and "Breaking the Silence" for adults at Second Baptist Church and recently piloted the teen dialogue at New Salem Baptist Church, both in Columbus. He organized trips for teens to the National Black Religious Summit on Sexuality in Washington D.C., and participated as a workshop facilitator for the teen track.

Recently, Greg participated in a retreat with other Coordinators in Washington, D.C., to get to know Rev. Willis, revise the Dialogues, and make plans. Rev. Willis and Greg staffed a BCI booth at the Samuel Dewitt Proctor Conference in New Orleans for African-American clergy, and 60 clergy requested more information about BCI.

Greg's goal for BCI Ohio is to fully implement one of the Dialogues at seven churches before the National Black Religious Summit Eleven in July.

**ACTION:** To find out more about the BCI Model Dialogues, email Greg Arnold at [melanic7@aol.com](mailto:melanic7@aol.com) or call him at 614-794-9003.



Rev. Woody Berry and Rev. Gil Schoerlucke.



Rev. Annie Foerster, Rev. Carolyn Piper, and Rabbi Sigma Coran.

## Pro-choice Clergy Panel at Northern Kentucky University

Ohio RCRC organized one of its pro-choice clergy panels for “Pro-choice Day at Northern Kentucky University” sponsored by the Educators for Reproductive Freedom (EFRF), a faculty-staff group and the “NKU Students for Choice.” Over 150 students, faculty, and staff heard the panel.

Director Barb Avery, moderator of the panel, introduced RCRC and described Ohio RCRC’s programs. Panel members Rev. Annie Foerster, (Northern Hills Unitarian Universalist Church), Rabbi Sigma (Cissy) Coran, (Rockdale Temple, Reform Judaism), of Cincinnati; Rev. Gil Schoerlucke (retired, United Methodist, Louisville);

Rev. Woody Berry (Presbyterian USA, Lexington), and Rev. Carolyn Piper (Baptist, Columbus) talked about their denominations and their own pro-choice stances for 5 minutes each.

Rabbi Coran explained that Reform Judaism, relying on Genesis and Exodus, believes life begins at birth with the first breath, not at conception, and that the fetus is part of a woman’s body, not a person. The Rev. Foerster reviewed pro-choice resolutions by Unitarian Universalist General Assemblies, starting in 1963. The Revs. Schoerlucke and Berry explained their denominations’ stances, printed in RCRC’s *We Affirm*, supporting women

in making reproductive choices based on their own religious beliefs and values.

The Rev. Piper regretted that Southern Baptists, who once believed that each individual conscience must respond to God’s call, had adopted an authoritarian model which devalued women. Other Baptist groups value each person as a capable, competent decision maker, created in the image of God, and are committed to the separation of church and state.

Director Avery concluded by talking about how the decision in *Roe v. Wade* was based on an understanding that religious liberty requires that women be free to make reproductive choices based on their own beliefs.

During the question period, a student wanted the panel to talk about what God thought of abortion, and a Catholic priest asked what the panelists thought about the many women who are depressed and suicidal after abortions. The panelists all responded with their counseling experiences, while social workers on the NKU staff stated that in their experiences, depression after abortion was unlikely to be the sole factor in a suicide. Director Avery described the RCRC seminar on “Pastoral Counseling for Reproductive Loss,” which helps clergy meet the needs of women who have emotional difficulty after many kinds of reproductive losses.

Fran Zaniello, Stephanie Baker, and Nancy Hancock, the EFRF organizers of the event, agreed the religious pro-choice panel presentation should be repeated every year.

**ACTION:** To request a religious pro-choice panel for your group’s event, call Director Barb Avery at Ohio RCRC.

## Cleveland *Roe v. Wade* Commemoration

The Cleveland celebration of the 34th *Roe v. Wade* anniversary, sponsored by Freedom of Choice Cleveland (FOCC), held on Jan. 25, drew over 150 participants. Ohio RCRC’s Education Series, which explains diverse pro-choice religious perspectives on

abortion, was very popular at our table.

Guest speaker, Michelle Goldberg, a reporter for Salon.com, spoke about her experiences and perceptions while gathering material for *Kingdom Coming: the Rise of Christian Nationalism*. She conducted interviews with Christian evangelists and lay leaders who have an enormous amount of political influence. She accompanied them to Supreme Court proceedings and home schooling conferences to learn about their “alternate universe” in which history books record only 6000 years of history. Kellie Copeland, Director of NARAL Pro-Choice Ohio concluded the evening with a summary of legislative events.

**ACTION:** See Michelle’s blog at [www.ohiorcrc.org](http://www.ohiorcrc.org); borrow Ohio RCRC’s autographed copy of her book to read.



Michelle Goldberg

## New SYRF Interns at Oberlin

Christina James and Aisha Hadlock, SYRF (Spiritual Youth for Reproductive Freedom) interns, were required by Oberlin College to use a different name for the group. A campus group called SURF (Students for Reproductive Freedom) already existed! So, on February 15, the interns filed a charter for ACTS, "Affirming Choice Through Spirituality." Although ACTS will be an independent religious pro-choice

group, James and Hadlock plan to work with the existing SURF group on joint programming. Membership in ACTS is open to Oberlin community members, but the majority must be Oberlin students.

RCRC had recognized the new SYRF group, which had the required five applicants, including Valerie Morley, secretary, and Jasmine Mote and Joel Solow. RCRC and Ohio RCRC signed internship contracts with Aisha and Christina, in which they receive a monthly stipend, and gave them a



Interns Aisha Hadlock and Christina James (2nd and 3rd from left) with "Sex and the Environment" presenters Ty Dawson, Cassie Gardener from the Sierra Club, and Adriana Varillas.

program grant as well. They have held an informational meeting, and are co-sponsoring an event with the Sierra Club. In the spring, they plan to raise awareness about the religious basis for reproductive rights by sponsoring a movie and a panel of pro-choice clergy.

The Sierra Club workshop, "Sex and the Environment," held February 24, which ACTS co-sponsored with EPIG and Ohio PIRG, explained the connections between accurate sex education and environmental conservation, how

women's population and the environment are linked, what can be done, and why it is critical for young people to take a stand, demand change, and make a difference!

**ACTION:** To find out how to start a SYRF group, see [www.syrf.org](http://www.syrf.org) for general information, then contact Emily Goodstein, SYRF Director at RCRC at [egoodstein@rcrc.org](mailto:egoodstein@rcrc.org) or call her at 1-202-628-7700. To get involved in ACTS at Oberlin, send an email to [Christina.James@oberlin.edu](mailto:Christina.James@oberlin.edu) or [Aisha.Hadlock@oberlin.edu](mailto:Aisha.Hadlock@oberlin.edu).

## Action Results from Faith and Choices Workshop at Temple Beth Shalom

In July, Dr. Hilda Glazer, Nancy Heiden, Susan Bugenstein, and Rabbi Howard Apothaker led a Faith and Choices workshop at Temple Beth Shalom. (See Fall *Update* for article on the workshop.) After considering several action projects, the workshop group decided the Temple should ask to pilot the new sex education program for youth, "Sacred Choices," developed by the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ).

Religious Education director Lynn Tallan asked Dr. Glazer, a psychologist, to lead the pilot course, whose focus is on how to behave in an ethical

way in relationships, following Jewish principles. Participation has been enthusiastic among the 15 youth who regularly attend the six week course, once the initial discomfort was over. The course has a manual which encourages discussion of hard issues. In the first class, in which parents were included, they discussed "How do we (parents and children) talk to each other without embarrassing each other?"

Students are guaranteed confidentiality in the last five classes in which they discuss: When Am I Ready? How Do I Decide? Interpreting Messages from

Others, Healthy Relationships, Breaking Up, Sexually Appropriate Behavior, and Sexual Identity.

Dr. Glazer is impressed with the quality of the course, and says no parents balked at giving permission for attendance. Dr. Glazer has a 22-year-old assistant, Josh Levine, who is entering medical school next fall. After each class, she completes an evaluation online for URJ, which will help to improve the course.

**ACTION:** For information about "Faith and Choices" workshops, call or email the Ohio RCRC office.

## Central Ohio Commemorates Roe v. Wade 34<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

The Commemoration of the 34<sup>th</sup> anniversary *Roe v. Wade* was sponsored by Freedom of Choice Ohio, of which Ohio RCRC is a member. Ohio RCRC supporters filled nearly two tables at a delicious pasta dinner at La Scala Restaurant in Dublin on January 23.

Jaime Miracle, Chair of FOCO, of NARAL Pro-Choice Ohio, launched the event with an Ohio legislative wrap-up. Her upbeat summary pointed out that of three anti-choice bills, only one gutted version made it out of committee to a vote.

Featured speaker Stefany Stern, of the National Partnership for Women & Families, talked about campaigning



Stefany Stern

for the Campaign for Healthy Families against the South Dakota ban on abortion last fall.

Stefany was shocked by the misinformation and scare tactics used by "Vote Yes for Life," in their campaign supporting the ban. The S.D. ban contained only one legal exception—for an abortion to save the life of a woman. However, "Vote Yes" lied to the public, saying that an exception for rape and incest was built into the law, because of the "widespread availability of emergency contraception (EC)" which, they averred, could be used for up to two weeks after unprotected sex! In reality, EC is hard to find in South Dakota, because many pharmacies do not carry it, and is effective only if taken in the first 72 hours after unprotected sex.

The evening ended with the annual raffle, run by Kellie Copeland of NARAL, which raised funds for the next FOCO event, the Lobby Day on April 17. (See page one article.)

**ACTION:** Read Stefany's blog about her S.D. experiences at our website: [www.ohiorcrg.org](http://www.ohiorcrg.org).

## Legislative Summary—Success at last!

**Defeat of anti-choice bills:** Although three anti-choice bills were introduced during the 126<sup>th</sup> General Assembly's last two years, only one seriously gutted bill was passed by the legislature in their lame duck session. The three bills introduced were:

- H.B. 228, which would have banned all abortions, with no exceptions, and made a felon of anyone who caused a woman to be transported across state or county lines for an abortion. *H. B. 228 was given a one-day hearing, but never voted out of committee. Although the sponsor tried to get a vote on it during the lame duck session, the Republican leadership was afraid of backlash from their moderate constituents.*
- H.B. 469, which would have given legal protection to pharmacists who refuse to dispense any medication to which they have religious objections. *Although it was given a hearing, it did not make it out of committee either.*
- H.B. 239, which banned the use of state funds, facilities and employees for abortions, eliminated insurance coverage for state employees for abortions due to rape and incest, and codified the rules promulgating the Hyde Amendment. After several days of hearing, H.B. 239 was gutted and most of it never made it out of committee.

During the lame duck session, the legislature passed only Substitute H.B. 239, codifying into law the current rules implementing the Hyde Amendment, preventing the use of Medicaid funds for abortions for poor women, as well as a statement

that the policy of the state is to support childbirth over abortion.

### Religious Pro-choice influence:

The voices of religious pro-choice constituents were important factors in discouraging legislators from voting for bills that would restrict and ban abortion.

Our Email Advocacy Network alerted clergy and laypersons of upcoming bills and gave them sample letters to send to their legislators. We brought religious pro-choice people to legislative hearings to make their voices heard for the first time. Volunteer clergy and layperson lobbyists provided intelligent, passionate testimony, their pro-choice views based on their religious beliefs and should be protected by religious liberty. (Their testimony and Director Avery's has been reported in earlier newsletters and can be found on our website.)

Many Ohio RCRC members participated in Prevention First Ohio Lobby Day in May, carrying the message to our legislators that a bill reducing the number of unintended pregnancies through honest, medically accurate sex education and access to contraceptives will reduce the number of abortions, while a ban would not.

**Next legislative session:** Anti-choice legislators will try to pass restrictive legislation—which Governor Strickland will veto—in hopes of convincing their constituents to vote against him (and for them) in the next election.

**ACTION:** Join our "Call To Justice." Send your email address—and those of your pro-choice friends—to [ohiorcrg@sbcglobal.net](mailto:ohiorcrg@sbcglobal.net) to receive information and advocacy alerts about legislative and administrative action.

## Letter to the Editor Regarding Pharmacist's Refusal

On January 15, *The Columbus Dispatch* reported that a Walmart pharmacist in Springfield had refused to dispense Plan B, an emergency contraceptive, to an adult woman. Plan B is an over-the-counter drug for anyone over 18; an adult is not required to obtain a prescription. He told the *Dispatch* that he refused for religious reasons. On Feb. 10, the *Dispatch* printed a letter from Ohio RCRC Director Barbara Avery in which she pointed out that the pharmacist, who demanded respect for his religion, should also respect the religious values and choices of his customers. Fortunately, the American Pharmacists Association's Code of Ethics has policy guidelines for steps employers can take to protect the religious interests of both. (See the entire letter at [www.ohiorcrg.org](http://www.ohiorcrg.org).)

## COMMENTARY: N.Y. Times Article “Is There a Post-Abortion Syndrome?”

In her *New York Times Magazine* article, writer Emily Bazelon focuses on Rhonda Arias, who deeply regretted her abortion and has developed a ministry with prison inmates, identifying their abortions as the cause of their emotional problems, and giving them the chance to repent. Bazelon also points out that: the American Psychiatric Association does not recognize a post-abortion syndrome, 76% of women who have had abortions feel relief, the rate of depression is the same as women after childbirth (10%), and the rate of clinical depression is the same as for *all* women ages 15-35. (See the January 21, 2007 *New York Times Magazine*.)

**Comment:** The Rev. Carolyn Piper, Fellow in the American Association of

Pastoral Counselors. Emily Bazelon points to many factors which may cause a woman to grieve an abortion: her beliefs, values in her childhood culture, abandonment and financial insecurity, or guilt infused by an influential person. My experience as a pastoral counselor is that women have many different responses to abortion. Even the same woman can be both relieved and regretful. It all depends on her circumstances, her health, beliefs, support system, and more individual factors than I can recount.

Women have many different responses to other major life events also. After a miscarriage, some women are thankful and others are sad. Women who give up children for adoption sometimes suffer guilt and grief for a lifetime. Some women who have carried a pregnancy to full term have post-partum depression with mortal consequences. Even more complicated are the feelings and experiences of women who could not or did not take good care of their children.

In my counseling, I invite women to accept that they made the best decision they could with the information they had at the time, and then to plan how to live productive lives of hope and creativity.

**Comment:** Mary Hunt, Ph.D. Co-Director of WATER (Women’s Alliance for Theology, Ethics, and Ritual). In a presentation to the RCRC Board last month, Ms. Hunt suggested three ways to respond to the anti-choice movement’s strategy of identifying a “post-abortion syndrome,” as another weapon in their battle to make abortion illegal. She explored the reasons for this anti-choice strategy, applied a critical feminist religious analysis, and suggested pastoral and theological ways of handling it. She said that RCRC’s new counseling training for clergy “Pastoral Counseling for Reproductive Loss,” is an important response to the need of some women for help.

**ACTION:** See our website, [www.ohiorc.org](http://www.ohiorc.org), where Mary Hunt kindly allowed us to post her Feb. 28 presentation, “Taking Women Seriously.”

## RCRC Board Meeting

Ohio RCRC Director Barbara Avery represented the Eastern RCRC Affiliates at the February 28 meeting of the RCRC Board. She reported on the success of Matthew Fox, the new Northeast Regional Field Organizer, in helping new and growing affiliates.



Barbara Avery

Rebecca Edwards from Douglas Gould and Company presented a new strategic communications plan. The Board approved a new ethics policy on health care for a pluralistic society to be introduced at the national conference in April.

Mary Hunt, Co-director of WATER, spoke on “Taking Women Seriously: A Key Insight for Reproductive Justice,” suggesting how to respond to the anti-choice movement’s strategy of manipulating women who regret their abortions. (See *Commentary*, at left.)

Author Obery Hendricks spoke at lunch about his new book, *The politics of Jesus: rediscovering the true revolutionary nature of the teachings of Jesus and how they have been corrupted*.

Finally, Board member Frances Kissling asked us to join her in celebrating her retirement as Director of Catholics for Free Choice, which she founded 25 years ago.

The fine explanations of CFFC in its publications and its website of the pro-choice Catholic stance have been enormously helpful to our All Options Clergy counselors in responding to calls from Catholic women facing unintended pregnancies or coping with their feelings after an abortion. Ohio RCRC is grateful for Frances’ persistence in the face of opposition and hostility from the Church’s hierarchy. We wish her well in her new career as a Fellow at Radcliffe College.

**ACTION:** See [www.catholicsforchoice.org](http://www.catholicsforchoice.org) for more about Frances Kissling; see [www.ohiorc.org](http://www.ohiorc.org) for Mary Hunt’s speech.

### National News

#### Speaker Pelosi—Pro-choice and Catholic

Nancy Pelosi took office this January as Speaker of the House, the most powerful position in the legislative branch of government. She is a strong backer of abortion rights, with a 100% pro-choice voting record.

#### President Appoints Anti-Family Planning Advocate to Family Planning Post

President Bush has nominated Dr. Eric Keroack, the medical director of a chain of Christian crisis pregnancy centers, to oversee the program which provides family planning services to over five million low-income people annually.

**ACTION:** To read more about Speaker Pelosi and Dr. Keroack, and to send an email to voice your opposition to this appointment, see “Call to Justice” at [www.rcrc.org](http://www.rcrc.org). To receive regular National Reports from RCRC by email, answer our “Call to Justice” and send your email address to us at [ohiorc@sbcglobal.net](mailto:ohiorc@sbcglobal.net). Send your pro-choice friends’ email addresses too!

# What's Next?

## Prevention First Lobby Day

### April 17, Columbus

Lobby Day meets at the Columbus Athenaeum, at 32 N. 4<sup>th</sup> Street (corner of 4<sup>th</sup> and Gay) from 8:30-5:30. In the morning, join other voters in workshops about prevention issues and how to advocate for them. After lunch, visit your legislators.

**Faith and Choices Workshop:** Contact Ohio RCRC to arrange trainings for facilitators to hold workshops in your congregation if it is one of these denominations: Episcopal, United Methodist, Presbyterian USA, Unitarian Universalist Churches; United Church of Christ; Conservative,

Reform and ----- Judaism. Discuss your denomination's pro-choice stance, your feelings, and take action! Trainings at our office or at your synagogue or church.

**SYRF (Spiritual Youth for Reproductive Freedom) groups:** Contact Ohio RCRC to learn how to start a SYRF group at your college. Internships are available for two students per campus.

**Call to Justice:** Help expand our Email Advocacy Network to strengthen our lobbying clout. Send your email address and your friends' addresses to [ohiorcrc@sbcglobal.net](mailto:ohiorcrc@sbcglobal.net).

## Ohio RCRC Job Opportunity in Cleveland

In partnership with Planned Parenthood of Greater Cleveland and Christian Communities, Ohio RCRC has received a grant from the George Gund Foundation to implement our "Faith Matters" project by funding a Coordinator in Cleveland. The Coordinator will bring faith-based sexuality education to diverse congregations; develop faith-based advocacy for reproductive freedom, health care and education; perform targeted outreach to African-American congregations to address serious sexual health issues; and help clergy give support to family planning patients.

To find out more about this position and how to apply for it, contact Director Barb Avery by email at [ohiorcrc@sbcglobal.net](mailto:ohiorcrc@sbcglobal.net) or by phone at 800-587-2330.

## Ohio RCRC needs you!

Please send us the enclosed card to indicate how you would like to be involved. Also, send a generous check to become a member or renew your membership, and to support the newsletter and our other programs!

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