

“No woman can call herself free who does not own and control her body. No woman can call herself free until she can choose consciously whether she will or will not be a mother.”

— Margaret Sanger

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Federation of America, Inc.

# Clergy VOICES

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THE NEWSLETTER OF THE PLANNED PARENTHOOD® FEDERATION OF AMERICA CLERGY ADVISORY BOARD

## Why Health Care Reform Still Matters

by Rev. Mark Pawlowski

I am now in my 13th year as a Planned Parenthood CEO, and what I learned way back at the beginning was that there are many people — women, specifically — in our service area (and, indeed, across the 50 states) who do not have ready access to affordable reproductive health care. This is true for a variety of reasons, but the most important reason is lack of insurance coverage.

So it is no mystery why “my” affiliate, Planned Parenthood of South Central Michigan (PPSCM), and its Board of Directors could not sit by while women, teens, and men in the rural counties we serve were denied access to the much-needed medical and educational services we offer in our two urban health centers. We stepped into a void created by the local health department when it abandoned family planning services in three rural counties. We applied for and received Title X funding to serve those areas.

Planned Parenthood’s mission and core values compel us to act on behalf of the millions of women we serve in our health centers each year, as well as

millions of other women who need access to affordable, life-saving preventive care and the full range of reproductive health care. It is well documented that family planning reduces the number of unintended pregnancies, abortions, infant deaths, low birth weight babies, and sexually transmitted infections by allowing people to maintain their reproductive health and make informed choices about the number and spacing of their pregnancies. In short, Planned Parenthood provides safe, accessible, high-quality, and confidential care that helps patients take good care of themselves.

We know that not everyone agrees with our philosophy. But we all ought to be able to agree on the same goal — fewer unintended pregnancies, fewer sexually transmitted infections, and more people educated with information about their sexuality so they can make responsible decisions about their well-being and futures.

The fight for health care reform has proven to be a long-distance race. Passing reform would result in lowering health care costs and guaranteeing ac-

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Dear Friends,

Members of the clergy of many faiths have played a unique and powerful role in furthering Planned Parenthood's mission since our very beginning. From our work to ensure young people's access to comprehensive sex education, to securing health care coverage for all – you have been with us every step of the way.

Over the past year, Planned Parenthood clergy leaders have provided a much-needed faith perspective on the moral imperative of ensuring access to affordable, quality health care coverage, including comprehensive reproductive health care. Nationwide, you've participated in numerous activities, including organizing sign-on letters that were submitted to local papers, penning op-eds for local newspapers, incorporating information about women's health care in your congregational bulletins, teachings and sermons, gathering petition signatures, distributing toolkits about organizing for health care reform, and visiting and praying with members of Congress.

In addition to advocacy on health care reform, Planned Parenthood clergy play an essential role in advocating for and providing spiritual leadership to help young people make healthy decisions about sex and sexuality. Faith traditions have developed their own sex education programs, encouraged parents to talk with their children about sex, helped teens understand the profound spiritual connection between humans through sexuality, and advocated for increased access to medically accurate sexual health information. I look forward to working with you closely on advancing the health and well-being of young people in the coming year.

I am grateful for the courageous, dedicated work of our clergy supporters of every faith. And I look forward to continuing our work together to promote women's health based upon respect for each individual's right to make informed, independent decisions about health, sex, and family planning.

All the best,

*Cecile Richards*

**Cecile Richards**

President, Planned Parenthood Federation of America

## Why Health Care Reform Matters

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cess to quality health care for millions of American women and families. Despite the recent setbacks, the bottom line remains the same: women need health care reform, and they need it now!

It is time for Congress to get health care reform done now — and to get it done right! Passing health care reform would be an enormous step forward for women — especially for the very women who seek care at more than 840 Planned Parenthood health centers every year.

*Rev. Mark Pawlowski, Member, PPFA Clergy Advisory Board;  
CEO, Planned Parenthood of South Central Michigan*



During the December 2 health care reform lobby day in Washington, DC, Rev. Larry Phillips and Beth LeGere, director of public affairs, Planned Parenthood Mohawk Hudson, prepared for their visits with U.S. Reps. Michael Arcuri (D-NY), Scott Murphy (D-NY), Bill Owens (D-NY), and Paul Tonko (D-NY).

# Looking Back and Moving Forward — Perspectives From the Chair of The Clergy Advisory Board

by Rev. Jill McAllister

Clergy persons are called to sit with, listen to, stand for, walk with, preach to, and generally support both individuals and causes of love and justice in the world — sometime 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Out of all of that I am called to do, my work with Planned Parenthood is among the most satisfying, even as it is often challenging.

I and my colleagues on the Clergy Advisory Board of Planned Parenthood of South Central Michigan (PPSCM) meet several times a year to coordinate our efforts. This year we

- organized to help provide education and outreach to our own congregations and other congregations
- raised our voices at forums, in the media, and in public events in support of choice and of the rights of sexual and gender minorities
- provided counseling and support for individuals faced with difficult decisions about reproduction, sexuality, and gender
- contributed (and solicited contributions of) financial support for PPSCM
- gave input and feedback to PPSCM staff on program ideas and initiatives



- gathered forces and raised voices in support of a local non-discrimination ordinance
- honored those who dedicate their work and their lives to these ideals, as well as remembered all the women and men who have struggled in these causes before us, in the annual ceremonial observance of the anniversary of *Roe. v. Wade*

We know these efforts have been multiplied manyfold by our colleagues around the country.

Clergy have been important to the causes of reproductive freedom and women's rights for a very long time. Our voices and our work are no less needed now than at any time in the past. In addition to their local efforts, the 20 members of the PPFA

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# What Is GYT, Why Is It Important, And How Can Members Of The Clergy Participate?

by Vanessa Cullins, MD

For the past few decades, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have estimated that half of the nearly 20 million sexually transmitted infections (STIs) that occur each year in the U.S. are among young people aged 15–24. Yet, in 2008, many were startled when the CDC reported its findings from a nationally representative sample: At least one in four young women age 14–19 in the U.S. tested positive for a sexually transmitted disease. The vast majority of these infections were human papillomavirus infections, which practically all sexually active people have, have had, or will have.

Clearly, we need early dialogue with young people about how common STIs are; the need to prevent long-term consequences of potentially curable, treatable, or preventable STIs; and the importance of periodic STI testing and of knowing one's STI status.

Hence, the birth of GYT — or Get Yourself Tested — a collaboration among Kaiser Family Foundation, MTV, CDC, PPFA, and Planned Parenthood affiliates. The acronym reflects the way young people communicate, especially when using cell phones and computers.

Launched in April 2009, STD Awareness Month, this national campaign to normalize the concept of routine, periodic testing for STIs among young sexually intimate or active people resulted in 100 percent participation by



Planned Parenthood of Nassau County (PPNC) Teen Advocates (TAP members) and college interns held a visibility event near Hofstra University to raise awareness of the need for testing. Participating were (l. to r. bottom row) Dayana Elie, PPNC intern SUNY Old Westbury; Adetutu Jones, TAP member; Brittany Consigli, PPNC intern Adelphi University; and Onisha Nichols, TAP member; (l. to r. top row) Adaysia David, Hofstra student; Wesleyan Smith, Hofstra student; Fatou Gueye, Hofstra student; Jessica Robles, PPNC intern Hofstra University; and Candis Tolliver, PPNC public affairs coordinator.

the then-97 Planned Parenthood affiliates, along with numerous local and state health departments.

Here are just a few of last year's GYT accomplishments: MTV ran public service announcements worth \$2.6 million; the GYT partners developed a special GYT website and produced 400,000 online streams of GYT 2009 videos; and Planned Parenthood health centers hosted more than 450 educational and outreach events. In addition, during April 2009, Planned Parenthood health centers provided STI testing services for more than 108,000 women and 15,000 men age 25 and younger. Some affiliates experienced more than a 100 percent increase in STI services as a result of special events that sometimes included free or low-cost STI testing.

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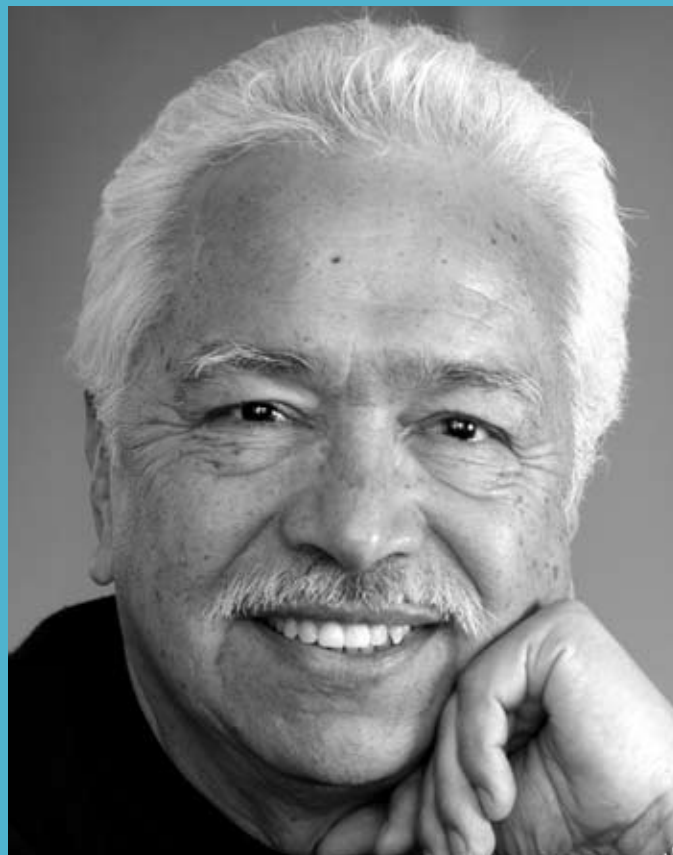
# The Chaplain's Corner

Six years ago I was invited to become PPFA's first national chaplain, a position created to help articulate the spiritual dimensions of sexuality and reproduction to the Planned Parenthood community and the general public, and to help dispel the illusion that religious people did not support Planned Parenthood.

Working toward those goals, I have spoken in a great number of venues across the nation, which has been most rewarding. However, it has been in the short, intimate conversations on planes, buses, and street corners that I have been

most personally edified. The majority of people have volunteered two reactions: the first is great appreciation for the role PPFA plays in our country and in their individual lives. The second is the pleasant surprise that PPFA has a national chaplain. The illusion that religious ultraconservatives and their public relations megaphones have created is that religious support for PPFA is an oxymoron; yet, nothing can be further from the truth.

PPFA affiliates are in the best position to correct the illusion and the imbalance — perhaps by



creating local clergy advisory boards, appointing active faith community leaders to their boards of directors, or working to connect affiliates to people of faith with renewed vigor.

The PPFA Clergy Advisory Board is working

very hard to connect affiliates with supportive clergy and active members of religious bodies, and we hope you will work with us to achieve this most important goal.

*Rev. Ignacio Castuera,  
PPFA National Chaplain*

**Clergy Voices welcomes articles on the theological basis for reproductive rights, pro-choice clergy events around the country, prayers and sermons, and more.**

**Please submit articles to**  
*Clergy Voices*

Planned Parenthood Federation of America  
1110 Vermont Avenue NW Suite 300  
Washington, DC 20005

**Or send articles via e-mail to:** [glenn.northern@ppfa.org](mailto:glenn.northern@ppfa.org).

# Looking Back, Moving Forward

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Clergy Advisory Board have spent this year working to reach more colleagues, to make our joint efforts more effective. Our primary goal is to build a stronger and more active network of clergy in every state who are committed PPFA supporters and advocates. This year, with the gracious support of PPFA staff in the Washington, DC, office, we

- surveyed all PPFA affiliates to learn about their clergy supporters

- began contacting all clergy who have been part of our database for several years
- began to design better plans and tools for timely communication with clergy
- raised our voices in the debates and discussions surrounding the health care bills in Congress

Perhaps you are a clergy person interested in being more actively in-

involved in this work, or perhaps you know a clergy person in your region who would appreciate being more connected to it. All of us are needed, so we would love to hear from you. Please contact Glenn Northern, at [glenn.northern@ppfa.org](mailto:glenn.northern@ppfa.org) if you want to become part of the network of clergy supporters of PPFA and its work.

*Rev. Jill McAllister, Chair,  
PPFA Clergy Advisory Board;  
People's Church, Kalamazoo, MI*

# Teens Need Sex Education

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themselves to potentially life-altering medical and emotional difficulties.

The need for comprehensive sex education is urgent. Most young people have sex for the first time at about age 17 and do not marry until their middle or late 20s, encountering risks of unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, on average, for nearly a decade. The results are 18.9 million new cases of sexually transmitted infections each year, and 9.1 million occur among 15-24-year-olds. Equally disturbing is that the pregnancy rate among girls ages 15-19 recently increased by three percent, and the teenage abortion rate rose for the first time in a decade, by one percent. It's tragic that so many communities do not provide the sex education that could have protected their teens. And each day without sex education can become a lifetime of opportunity squandered for the teen left to rely on urban sexual legend to make a critical decision. Without sex education, our teens — and our communities — are left to pay the price.

Religious leaders from a wide spectrum of faiths have endorsed denominational statements in support of sex education. My organization, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, came forward two decades ago in support of comprehensive sex education “in the public

schools on all levels, from grade school through high school.” Congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association and the United Church of Christ have for years provided sex education in their programs of religious instruction. And clergy from a wide variety of faiths personally signed a statement from the Planned Parenthood Federation of America affirming, “Our sexuality is God given, and so, too, is the command that we instruct our children so that they will gain understanding and the ability to make wise choices. ...[W]e, like a substantial majority of Americans, encourage teenagers to abstain from sexual intercourse. But like a substantial majority of Americans, we also recognize that many will not. ... Each must be taught about human sexuality, so that each can make informed and responsible choices about his or her sexual life, including the choice to remain abstinent.”

Honest sex education also supports trusting relationships between teens and their parents and teachers. As a pastor to teens and families, I witness the trust and security that honesty earns. And when teens trust us to be truthful with the most sensitive matters, should they face a time of need, they will come to us immediately, knowing we will be there for them, as we should be and want to be.


*Dennis Ross, PPFA Clergy Advisory Board Member,  
Director of Concerned Clergy for Choice, Albany, NY*

# GYT: Why It Is Important

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Building on last year's success, the GYT campaign in 2010 will focus on normalizing conversations among parents, their children, and young adults about sexual health, safety, and STI testing. Thus, GYT also stands for Get Yourself Talking. Within this context, we are very much hoping for more expansive clergy involvement. With April 2010 almost here, we invite clergy to participate in this very important campaign, as capacity and resources permit. Please let your imaginations "run wild" about how this campaign might fit into your programs and your congregation's plans around parent-child communications. Contact [glenn.northern@ppfa.org](mailto:glenn.northern@ppfa.org) if you have questions or would like additional information.

*Vanessa Cullins, MD, PPFA Vice President for Medical Affairs*



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**Would you like to join the PPFA Clergy Advisory Board's Pro-Choice Religious Network?**

To become a member, please fill out this form and mail or fax it to  
The Pro-Choice Religious Network  
Planned Parenthood Federation of America  
1110 Vermont Avenue NW Suite 300  
Washington, DC 20005  
Phone: 202-973-4861 Fax: 202-296-3481

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