

“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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# Clergy VOICES

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

## Slow and Steady Wins the Race



By **Rev. Dr. Paula J. Gravelle**, Chairperson, PPFA Clergy Advisory Board; Director of Pastoral Care, Ellis Hospital, Schenectady, NY

How easy it could be to become complacent. We elected a president who is supportive of the full spectrum of health care for all women. It is likely he will

have the opportunity to appoint a U.S. Supreme Court justice or two who will not allow personal bias to get in the way of justice for all people. In many areas of the country, senators and representatives who support our issues were elected to Congress. So even in the midst of tough economic times, we might find ourselves relaxing a bit, celebrating, and putting away our files on reproductive rights.

My plea to each of you is to keep the files open — continue to celebrate, but please don't relax

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## The PPFA Latino Outreach Initiative



PPFA National Chaplain Rev. Ignacio Castuera and Actor Lupe Ontiveros celebrated the launch of the Latino Outreach Initiative at the opening of the Planned Parenthood of Southern Nevada East Flamingo health center in Las Vegas. Rev. Castuera blessed the health center with a prayer (see right box).

#### REV. CASTUERA BLESSING

“We bless this building as sacred ground, where the voices and stories of women and men are welcomed, valued, and affirmed, sacred ground where voices and stories are not silenced, belittled, or judged, but given full freedom of expression; sacred ground where women and men are treated with dignity, supported in their role as moral decision makers; sacred ground where body, mind, and soul find healing and compassion and where justice is the standard by which success is measured; sacred ground where the violent voices of hatred and oppression are quelled and where women and men are empowered to stand on their own ground.”

— Adapted from the prayer “On Scared Ground,” written by Rev. Larry Phillips, Minister, Emmanuel Baptist Church - Friedens United Church of Christ, Schenectady, NY, Member of the PPFA Pro-Choice Religious Network.  
*SEE STORY ON PAGE 5*



Dear Friends,

It is hard to overstate the enormous impact the November 4 landslide victory will have on Planned Parenthood and women across America. The election of President Barack Obama and Vice President Joe Biden spells the end of eight long years of an administration that used every legislative, judicial, and administrative weapon in its arsenal to attack women's health and liberty of con-

science. Voters sent a clear message up and down the ballot that they support candidates who want to promote women's rights and protect our democratic, pluralistic society.

But our work is not over. We need to become the change we seek. Clergy and religious leaders can lead the way by letting our elected officials know how important it is for them to support programs that expand access to reproductive health care — particularly efforts to restore access to affordable birth control for low-income women and college students, and efforts to guarantee that pharmacies dispense contraception without delay or discrimination.

The privileged in this world have access to the services necessary to decide for themselves when and whether to plan for a family. Low-income women and couples often do not. We cannot let our elected officials ignore the fact that the limited choices imposed by poverty restrict a woman's access to the type of reproductive health care best suited to her needs.

Our government also can no longer forsake the health of our nation's young people. At least one in four teenage girls has a sexually transmitted infection, and that statistic rises to one in two for African-American teenage girls. Last year alone, an estimated 750,000 teenagers became pregnant. Comprehensive sex education has been demonstrated to help prevent these tragedies. We must remind the new administration and the new Congress that people of faith believe providing medically accurate, age-appropriate sex education is a moral imperative for a responsible and just society. We must urge our new leaders to make comprehensive sex education a reality in all our nation's schools.

The quest for economic, social, and reproductive justice must be an integrated effort if we are to achieve the sacred vision of a truly just society for the whole of humanity.

I am looking forward to working with you to bring about the change we hope to seek.

All the best,

**Cecile Richards**

President, Planned Parenthood Federation of America

# Slow and Steady Wins the Race

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in terms of your commitment to the work we do. We must continue to be vocal advocates for comprehensive, medically accurate sex education; for stem cell research; for choice in reproductive health care; and for access to health care for all people, especially for low-income and immigrant women. We can't relax because those opposed to these rights will continue to chip away at them. As my six-year-old niece said to me one day as we were paddling a boat against the current, "Aunt Paula, slow and steady wins the race."

Perhaps in the era of change we are now entering, we can be the "slow and steady" voices that will help the American public better understand the need for justice in reproductive health. It is a powerful statement when we as clergy (no matter what the pulse of the nation) are consistent in our message to respect the moral agency of each woman regarding matters of individual conscience, to be public in our support of the work of Planned Parenthood, and to be prophets/teachers as we share information through forums/sermons/dialogues in our places of work and worship.

Perhaps we all breathed a sigh of relief after the elections. It was a deserved sigh. Now, however, is not the time to relax. It is the time to be filled with the breath of the Spirit so that, with renewed energy and commitment, we continue to call for justice to ensure that one day all people will have access to the health care they need and are able to make the choices appropriate for themselves and their families without fear. Then we can relax.

## Farewell

**Thank you and a fond farewell to Clergy Project Manager Rev. Karen Senecal for her invaluable contributions to the PPFA clergy program during the past two years. From organizing the inspirational Interfaith Prayer Service and Plenary at the Planned Parenthood National Conference to publishing *Clergy Voices* and drafting position papers on the theological bases for Planned Parenthood's work, Karen's dedication brought energy, enthusiasm, and passion to the clergy program. As one Clergy Advisory Board member remarked, "Karen has truly been a blessing to everyone!"**

# Planned Parenthood and Its Clergy Alliances

## Early Clergy Supporters – 1916

In 1916, when Margaret Sanger opened the first birth control clinic in the United States, buying birth control was a criminal act. Sending information about it through the mail was even illegal. At that time, there was, as there is now, powerful opposition from faith-based institutions and religious leaders. Yet Sanger quickly recognized that progressive clergy could serve among her most effective spokespersons, and she wrote to individual ministers and rabbis enlisting their support. She shared with them some of the 50,000 letters she had received from women begging for help in preventing the birth of more children than they could handle. In 1930, the Episcopal Church became the first denomination to publicly state that using contraception was a moral act. Soon many Protestant and Jewish denominations also endorsed the use of contraception. But the big battles lay ahead. Sanger would need the help of clergy to get birth control into American hospitals and welfare programs.

## The Battle Over New York City Public Hospitals – 1958

As late as 1958, New York City public hospitals — which served the poor — would not allow doctors to give birth control to women.

Finally, a courageous doctor tried to give a birth control device to a diabetic woman, because another pregnancy would have severely threatened her health. When the hospital administrator stopped him, the doctor went to the press. As a result, the Protestant Council of New York City, the New York Board of Rabbis, and other religious organizations and clergy demanded that the policy be changed. The protests were so effective that the city hospitals had to change their policy and provide birth control.

## The Battle Over Welfare Offices – 1962

In 1962, religious opposition was still preventing the Maryland State Department of Welfare from giving contraception to people on welfare. Planned Parenthood of Maryland had a strong clergy committee that took on the issue, believing the policy was unjust. Committee members went to the Department of Welfare and explained that, while some people of faith believed birth control to be immoral, they believed that it was, in fact, a moral obligation. The board agreed and changed its policy. Since then, married people on welfare have been able to get referrals for contraception.

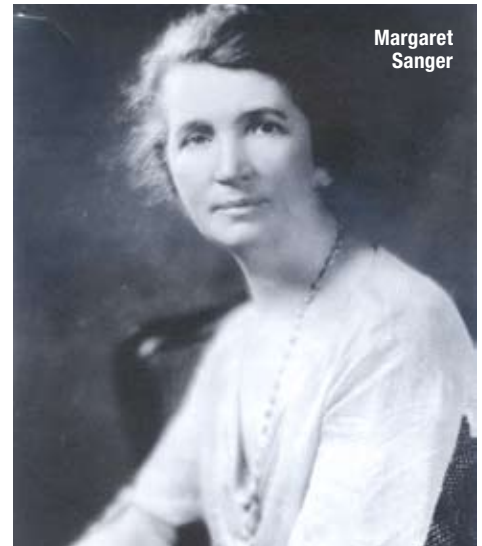
## Birth Control Is a Matter of Justice – 1965

The Planned Parenthood clergy from Maryland were not done. They thought the state should provide birth control to unmarried women, as well. In the 1960s, some people still believed that helping unmarried women access birth control fostered promiscuity. But clergy argued that a woman's right to contraception was a matter of justice — that unmarried women had a moral right to control their bodies. And birth control, they asserted, was the best way to reduce the number of unintended pregnancies. In 1965, the influence of Planned Parenthood's clergy allies carried the day, and since then unmarried women on welfare in Maryland have been able to get referrals for contraception.

Because it was clergy who made this moral argument, society listened.

## The Laws Begin to Change – 1967

In 1967, clergy began the fight for safe, legal abortion. On May 22 of that year, 19 ministers and two rabbis announced on the front page of *The New York*



Margaret  
Sanger

**It is a little known fact that the first legal abortion clinic in the United States was opened by the clergy.**

*Times* that they were establishing the Clergy Consultation Service on Abortion (CCSA). The consultation service would help women find safe, but not legal, abortions. CCSA grew to include 1,400 clergy. By 1970, the clergy network had referred more than 100,000 women for abortions. In April of 1970, the state of New York legalized abortion. The law went into effect on July 1 of that year.

## Clergy Open the First Abortion Clinic in America – 1970

The Clergy Consultation Service knew that thousands of women would be

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# Planned Parenthood and Its Clergy Alliances

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coming from around the country to New York State when the law took effect. New York City hospital staff were in a state of denial and unprepared for this influx, so the clergy opened their own clinic. It is a little known fact that the first legal abortion clinic in the United States was opened by the clergy. It was called Women's Services and was located on the Upper East Side of Manhattan. The clinic performed thousands of procedures — at reduced rates — during the 13 months it was open. The clinic closed in 1973, as other clinics were established to replace it.

## The Legacy Continues

Today, there are still many remarkable clergy advocating the theological and moral basis for reproductive health and justice. Believing that it is profoundly unjust for the state to control the intimate

reproductive lives of women, more than two thousand clergy and religious leaders have joined the Planned Parenthood Federation of America Pro-Choice Religious Network. Members of the network educate the public about the historic and widespread support within the religious community for the pro-choice position.

In addition, Planned Parenthood Federation of America has an extraordinary group of 21 religious leaders, representing diverse faith and cultural traditions, who serve on its Clergy Advisory Board. These committed individuals continue the work begun back in 1916 to further the goal of full reproductive freedom for all people.

The information in this article was taken from The Reverend Tom Davis' book, *Sacred Work: Planned Parenthood and Its Clergy Alliances*, copyright 2005, Rutgers University Press.

*The article was adapted from "The History of Clergy in Planned Parenthood," produced by Planned Parenthood of the Great Northwest.*

## PPFA Clergy Advisory Board's Pastoral Letter on Abortion

***In response to affiliate requests for literature highlighting clergy support for a patient's decision to have an abortion, the PPFA Clergy Advisory Board has written a pastoral letter. Affiliates have printed this letter on their letterhead and placed it in their waiting rooms as a discreet and respectful way of ministering to women who view their medical decision making in a religious or spiritual framework. If you are working with local clergy, the Clergy Advisory Board suggests that you ask them to sign the letter. Seeing clergy names on the letter will serve to remind patients that Planned Parenthood's mission and programs reflect the religious teachings of most denominations in this country.***

### DEAR FRIEND,

The decision to have an abortion is very personal. Though the reason may be complicated and private, you are not alone. As religious leaders, we hope this letter reassures you of the support that you enjoy from clergy from a number of religious traditions.

Many people wrongly assume that the Bible disapproves of abortion. The truth is that abor-

tion is not even mentioned in the Scriptures — Jewish or Christian. While the beliefs of each person are deserving of respect, no one should be allowed to force their faith teachings on anyone else. We believe this decision is yours, made with your doctor, or nurse, and anyone else you choose to bring into the conversation, such as a spouse, partner, parent, or clergy.

We support your right and your ability to choose what is best for you and your loved ones.

Our religious traditions have somewhat different opinions about abortion, but we share some basic understandings.

- No one knows the circumstances of your life as well as you know them; no one knows what is in your heart better than you. Allow yourself to be at peace with your decision.
- Know that God loves you and is with you no matter what you decide. You can find strength, understanding, and comfort in that love.

If you would like to speak to a clergy person, Planned Parenthood can refer you to someone

who will be supportive of you and your decision. Your privacy will be protected and all conversations will be completely confidential.

Our hope for you is for peace in your heart.

**I loved the letter that was recently sent to us from the PPFA Clergy Advisory Board. Maybe it's because we live in the Bible belt, or maybe it's the protesters yelling ugly things at our patients on their way into the door of our clinics, but we have many patients ask how God will view their decision to end their pregnancy. Our staff members and volunteer hand-holders are not always comfortable answering religious questions. The letter is beautifully written and provides an assurance to those patients who are struggling with their decision from a faith perspective.**

— Karen Pieper Hildebrand, MPA  
President/CEO of  
Planned Parenthood of West Texas

# The PPFA Latino Outreach Initiative

## Combating Health Disparities; Mobilizing Latino Activists

Perhaps you've noticed the change in your communities and among your congregations — the face of America is changing — and it is increasingly young and Latino. According to the U.S. Census, Latinos are this nation's fastest-growing demographic, making up 15 percent of the U.S. population — approximately 45 million people. Currently, one in seven Americans is Latino, but by 2050 it is projected that one in three Americans will be Latino. More importantly, while the adolescent population among non-Hispanics is expected to grow by eight percent over the next 20 years, the adolescent Latino population is expected to grow by 60 percent.

The sheer size and growth of this population has had a significant impact on many areas of American life, including business, faith communities, health care, and most recently in politics. According to the Pew Hispanic Center, the Latino electorate significantly affected the 2008 presidential elections,

particularly in states that were battleground states, such as Colorado, Florida, Nevada, and New Mexico.

However, while the Latino community is growing in size and power, it also suffers disproportionately from negative sexual and reproductive health outcomes:

- Among Latina adolescents, the pregnancy rate and the birthrate are almost three times higher than those of non-Hispanic white adolescents.
- In 2007, the rate of gonorrhea was almost twice as high for Latinas as for non-Hispanic white women. The rate of chlamydia among Latinas has risen. When chlamydia and gonorrhea are left untreated, they can lead to infertility, pelvic inflammatory disease, and life-threatening ectopic pregnancies and increase the risk of becoming infected with HIV, leaving Latinas at higher risk for HIV infection.
- Because Latinas are at high risk for sexually transmitted infections, they are also at high risk for cervical cancer. In fact, they have a higher incidence of cervical cancer than any other race/ethnic category.

Latinos are a young population: The average age of Latinos is 27 — a full decade younger than the average age of 40 for the overall population. Thus they will spend the next decade in their reproductive years and will need accessible family planning and prenatal care services. Access to these services is extremely important, because in addition to suffering disproportionately from the negative health outcomes described above, Latinos also are the least likely to have health insurance of any kind. In fact, approximately 15 million Latinos lack health insurance, making it difficult to seek the care they so desperately need.

In response to this dire public health need, Planned Parenthood Federation of America launched the Latino Outreach Initiative. The initiative aims to increase awareness among Latinos of their sexual and reproductive health risks and increase awareness of Planned Parenthood as a source for high-quality and low-cost reproductive health care services. Another goal is to organize and mobilize Latinos to advocate for progressive sexual and reproductive health policies.

We are currently working in Las Vegas, Nevada. Nevada ranks number one for the highest teen pregnancy rate and the fourth-highest teen abortion rate nationwide. Planned Parenthood outreach workers in Las Vegas are forming partnerships with local businesses, elected officials, schools, parents, and most importantly, clergy.

The faith community is extremely influential in the Latino population, and we cannot hope to be successful without the input and help of local faith leaders as partners, supporters, and spokespersons. If you are a clergy person in Las Vegas, or know of other clergy colleagues who would be interested in this important work, please contact Estelle Raboni at [estelle.raboni@ppfa.org](mailto:estelle.raboni@ppfa.org) or 212-261-4661.



In January, Planned Parenthood Los Angeles opened its new facility located within walking distance of the University of Southern California. The occasion was marked with a luncheon for donors and VIP's, a tour, and a ceremony of dedication. PPFA National Chaplain Rev. Dr. Ignacio Castuera gave an Invocation and offered brief remarks in Spanish and English.

The event was well attended and included several elected officials, donors, and other supporters.

**Rev. Dr. Castuera offers an Invocation and Los Angeles Councilwoman Jan Perry is one of the special guests at PPLA's new clinic opening.**





## Why I Work with Planned Parenthood

By **Rev. Jane Emma Newall**, Member, PPFA Clergy Advisory Board; Minister, Rainbow Cathedral MCC, Yakima WA

I believe that helping to provide affordable health care is a ministry of healing. There is a story from my faith tradition about an ailing man who was forced to lay on the banks of a pool of healing water simply because no one would help him get into the pool. When I read this story I cannot help but think about how many people in our society cannot gain access to the health care they need. I am involved with Planned Parenthood because it helps people to get into the healing pool.

I believe that as people of faith we are called to stir the waters of healing and also to trouble the waters. We stir the waters of justice when we affirm a woman's right to self-determination. We trouble the waters when we remove the barriers that deny people access to comprehensive medical care. When we help people into the healing waters, we get wet ourselves. We become healed.

The work of Planned Parenthood is a ministry of healing.

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**Clergy Project Manager**, The Reverend Karen H. Senecal

*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:**  
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