

# Faith & Choices

News from the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice

Winter 2009-2010

## From The President Justice!

**H**ealth care is a fundamental justice issue for most faiths. Yet anti-choice forces threatened to kill health care reform legislation if it did not comply with their narrow religious doctrine against abortion. RCRC's moral voice—as the national mainstream interfaith organization for reproductive justice—has been essential in pushing back the onerous restrictions demanded by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and their allies and moving forward to pass much-needed legislation.

Religious advocates have been key to this success. Each letter, email, phone call, visit and prayer has made a difference. Thank you for raising a faithful voice in favor of women and separation of church and state.

In meeting with White House and Congressional officials, I represented the views of thousands of clergy and millions of people of diverse faiths who seek respect for religious liberty and believe abortion is a moral choice.

My message has been clear: health care must be free of religious doctrine that will prevent women from making their own reproductive health care choices.

It is your support that makes it possible for us to pursue our work for justice.

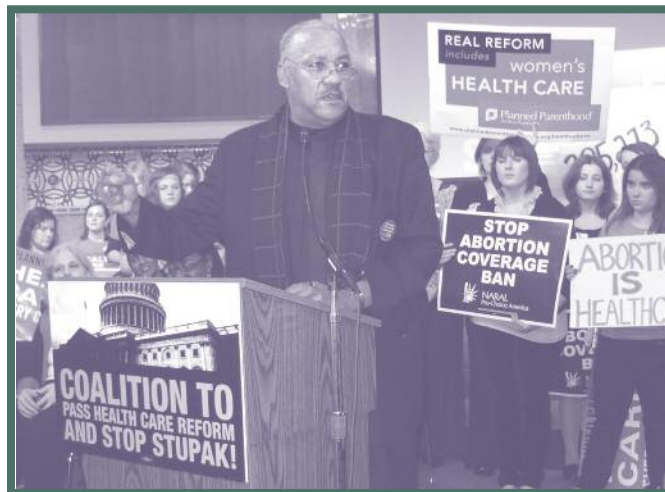
Peace and Blessings,



Reverend Dr. Carlton W. Veazey

## Rev. Veazey Leads Religious Advocacy For Comprehensive Health Care Reform

**R**CRC has been on the frontline of faith-centered activism for health care reform that includes full coverage of reproductive health services. RCRC's President and CEO, Reverend Carlton W. Veazey, met with White House and Congressional leaders to press for legislation that respects our nation's diverse religious views on access to abortion. He was one of a handful of pro-choice religious leaders whose views were sought out by the Obama administration. When anti-choice members of Congress threatened to



Reverend Veazey urges advocates for reproductive health care to defeat the Stupak-Pitts Amendment and hold the line on abortion coverage.

expand abortion restrictions in legislation, he organized religious leaders and people of faith to push back the assault on women's rights and religious freedom.

In talks with leaders in the House, Senate and White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, Reverend Veazey championed the rights of women to

follow their own faith and conscience in decisions about whether and when to have children. He spoke boldly about the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' ceaseless efforts to

*(continued on page 2)*

### WE HAVE A NEW ADDRESS!

#### Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice

1413 K Street NW, 14th Floor, Washington, DC 20005

Our phone, fax, website and email addresses are the same:

202-628-7700 phone • 202-628-7716 fax • [www.rcrc.org](http://www.rcrc.org) • [info@rcrc.org](mailto:info@rcrc.org)

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## Rev. Veazey Leads Religious Advocacy for Health Reform

*(continued from page 1)*

enshrine its dogma into law in the Stupak-Pitts Amendment in the House and the Nelson-Hatch Amendment in the Senate. In news coverage, he said that the Catholic bishops – a small but politically influential group of about 200 – had “crossed the line on morality” by threatening to block health reform unless Congress expanded restrictions on abortion coverage.

At RCRC’s press conference in November at the National Press Club in Washington, DC, Reverend Veazey and other religious leaders called on the Senate to ensure that the health care reform bill would be free of religious doctrine that will prevent women from making their own reproductive health care choices. The press conference earned important national press coverage—including CNN, PBS-TV, and Congressional Quarterly—for the mainstream faith community’s opposition to excluding coverage of abortion in private insurance plans as well as in government-subsidized plans. With support from the Communications Consortium Media Center and Women Donors Network, a radio report was sent to more than 500 AM stations across the country.

RCRC’s effort expanded across the nation. Clergy and religious leaders affiliated with RCRC held events and published articles to educate people about the need for comprehensive reproductive health care.



*Religious leaders from key states who lobbied Congress to maintain abortion coverage at current levels included (above) Reverends Mark Worth and Elsa Peters from Maine, (below left) RCRC Religious Leaders Working Group member Reverend Deborah Mero from Pennsylvania, and (below right) Rob Keithan and Reverend Meg Riley of the Unitarian Universalist Association.*



In Washington and in state capitals, RCRC organized clergy visits to legislators to remind officials that they were elected to serve all their constituents and provided resources for Interfaith Weekends of Action in congregations.

“Health care reform is about expanding access to health care for all, not rolling back women’s access to needed services,” said Reverend Veazey.

# Spiritual Youth for Reproductive Freedom

## Leading The Way!

**O**n campuses across the country, student activists are eagerly taking up the banner of reproductive justice. We'd like you to meet two dynamic Spiritual Youth for Reproductive Freedom (SYRF) student organizers who are helping to lead the next pro-choice generation. SYRF is RCRC's program for youth and young adults. Currently it's active on more than 100 campuses with a wide variety of events and activities.

At Pomona College in Claremont, California, Chrysanthe Oltmann was eager to get involved in reproductive justice issues when she met Kate Campbell Strauss, who had been a campus co-organizer for SYRF the semester before. Chrysanthe considers herself a spiritual person and was interested in learning about how religion and spirituality can be supportive of reproductive choice and justice. "I feel that I have a responsibility to inform the campus to reject the stereotype of religion as inherently fundamental and conservative," she told us.

Chrysanthe and Kate teamed up to organize a screening of the documentary "Sacred Choices: The Right to Contraception and Abortion in Ten World Religions." They had recently attended a workshop about community organizing, so instead of just putting flyers all over campus, they sent messages to listserves of academic departments and organizations that dealt with similar issues. A variety of people with different perspectives—from atheists to regular church- and synagogue-goers—showed up, and there was a probing discussion after the movie about various religious perspectives on family planning and abortion.

"Sacred Choices" perfectly illuminates the intersectionality of religion and pro-

choice beliefs, Chrysanthe said. "Organizing events is hard work. But I think it's ultimately rewarding when you see people leave with a different perspective."

At the University of Texas at Austin, a towering anti-choice display was the catalyst for student Jennifer Bell's involvement. When she saw the display, she was surprised that there wasn't more of an outcry from pro-choice students. She met the current SYRF organizer on campus, Courtney Stollon, and followed in her footsteps when she graduated. "I decided it would be a great way to get involved with pro-choice



*University of Texas at Austin SYRF activists have focused on educating students about religious support for comprehensive sexuality education.*

activism, and I was familiar with SYRF through my work with Young Religious Unitarian Universalists," she said.

Students at UT Austin have the benefit of an excellent health services department that has a peer educators program. Students learn to teach workshops on comprehensive sexuality, including healthy, safe behavior, as well as on drug and alcohol abuse. Jennifer and another SYRF organizer, Jessica Faerman, decided to focus on educating students about religious support for sexuality education. They partnered with a group on campus, Texas Freedom Network, to collect signatures on a petition urging legislators to fund comprehensive sexuality



education, at both the national and state level. The need for funding comprehensive sexuality education is critical. No federal funds have ever been allocated for comprehensive education, despite soaring rates of unintended teen pregnancy, although harmful and failed abstinence-only programs have received more than \$1 billion in funding since the early 1980s. Jennifer and Jessica highlighted religious support for sexuality education by asking students to be a "Sex Ed Superstar." Students noted their religion on a flyer that says "I support comprehensive sex ed." The SYRF organizers report it was a huge success.

# Faith in Action

## To Our Supporters: Thank You for Sustaining Our Counseling Program

**R**CRC supporters have always been compassionate and caring. But the hundreds of messages we received recently in response to our letter about a young woman with an unintended pregnancy were heartening beyond measure. Some bore just a signature, others had a hand-written note. They included personal anecdotes, blessings, and prayers—all expressing support and gratitude for the compassion and love our clergy counselors show to women and couples facing an unintended pregnancy, infertility, miscarriage, or stillbirth.

The young woman who called the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice for counsel was in a crisis. Like so many others, she was uncertain what to do and where to turn. She was troubled by economic insecurity and family turmoil. She wanted the kind of non-judgmental, spiritually grounded guidance that a trained clergy counselor could provide. We immediately put her in touch with a clergyperson trained in our All Options Clergy Counseling method. We can't tell you the outcome, of course—privacy and confidentiality are always respected. But we are confident she received the help she needed to do what she felt was right.

The messages we received from you, our supporters, have been passed on to our Clergy for Choice members, in appreciation of the work they do to counsel women in need. We thought you would also be interested in them. Your financial support is always needed to sustain our training programs for clergy counselors. You may donate online on our safe, secure site at [www.rcrc.org](http://www.rcrc.org) or by mail to RCRC, 1413 K Street NW, 14th floor, Washington DC, 20005.

"As a physician, I understand the need for women to have support and privacy in making their personal decisions about those issues and (that they) should have all choices open to them."

"Thank you for your faithful service to those in need of your compassionate wisdom. We are weary of the loud voices of the haters, especially those who invoke the name of the Lord from the pulpit to prove their righteousness."

"God never said anything about all this so he left it to women and the men they choose to figure it out. You are, by your help, fighting the (anti-choice) assault on God."

"A woman's decision will affect her for the rest of her life. Thank you for your wise advice."

"Thank you for being someone who trusts women to make their own decisions."



"I worked for 40 years in a variety of settings as a clinical social worker and dealt with many women and girls struggling with these issues. I can't tell you how helpful it was to me and to my clients to have supportive clergy they could also turn to—an alternative religious voice in contrast to the dogma of the religious right."

"Thank you for working with these women who so desperately need a kind listener."

"Keep up the good work. God does not take sides. He loves all of us, no matter what decisions we must make."

"Please know how valued your contribution is to families in need who turn to you for support."

"Thank you for showing respect and love to women who obviously need lots of both!"

"I appreciate your courage in helping women in these hazardous decisions."



"You are courageous and faithful to an ideal of dignity for women."

"Thank you, sisters and brothers for being there over the years! You helped me personally many years ago, and now I join you in providing pastoral support to others."

"I am an obstetrician often caring for couples who face difficult choices about whether to have an abortion when a fetus is found to have a serious malformation. Clergy are often very important to my patients. I am very grateful for your work."

"Thank you for having the courage to openly support and respect women; for respecting the integrity of their bodies, their intellect, their hearts, and their moral agency. It can't be easy."

"Many thanks for standing up for a more loving and less punitive view of God—and for all you do to support those women in need of support."

"Thank you for your compassion and courage. May God surround you and those you counsel with grace. In Christ."

"Thanks for being a voice for calm, clarity, and genuine love."

"As members of the most progressive UMC congregation between the Texas Dallas/Ft. Worth area and Arizona, we know the hard work faced by others like you who don't always find support for your work. Thanks for being steadfast."

"I am pro-choice and pro-life in that I believe a woman has a right to choose whether or not to have a child. I also consider myself a follower of Jesus' teachings. Thank you for giving voice to a more reasonable, compassionate, and loving undertaking of the human condition and its problems."

"When I sought care at my university health service (for a miscarriage), I was assumed to be a criminal and was separated from my husband for questioning. When I had the chance to study pregnancy losses later in clergy pastoral education, I documented the importance of honoring the parents' values and choices in after care."



"Thank you for protecting separation of church and state and individual freedom to choose what we think is good for our bodies."

"Your work gives me hope. Thank you."

# People of Faith for International Family Planning

## RCRC Brings Interfaith Voice To Advocacy for Health

**R**CRC has launched an educational and advocacy initiative with clergy and religious communities to advocate for greater U.S. involvement in international reproductive health and family planning programs. These programs are in developing countries in Africa, Asia and elsewhere where more than 500,000 women die each year from pregnancy-related causes, and 8 million more suffer serious complications, often due to pregnancies that occur at a young age or are too closely spaced.

“It is a moral imperative to provide basic health services that save the lives of women and safeguard their children and families,” said RCRC President Reverend Carlton Veazey. U.S. support for these

services declined during the Bush Administration. “The United States must resume its leadership in providing family planning assistance to the poorest countries of the world,” he said.

RCRC will work with our large network of clergy, seminarians and lay leaders and student activists in our Spiritual Youth for Reproductive Freedom (SYRF) program to provide faith-focused information on the need for these services and to mobilize people to contact their members of Congress. “Family planning is embraced by religions across the spectrum as a moral good, a responsible choice, and a basic human right. RCRC’s goal is to assist clergy and religious leaders in marshaling religious support for increased U.S. involvement in providing these services,” said Reverend Veazey.



“The United States must resume its leadership in family planning assistance to the poorest countries.”  
— Reverend Veazey

## Religious Support for Family Planning

**R**CRC member organizations and other religious bodies and leaders recognize that children fare best in body and spirit when they are born into nurturing environments and families prepared for parenthood. In fact, many religions believe that men and women must have access to information and services so they can act morally and responsibly about their sexual behavior.

Highly respected religious leaders have supported family planning as a moral good. Anglican Bishop Desmond Tutu has stated, “Planned parenthood is an obligation of those who are Christians.” The Dalai Lama has said, “Family planning is crucial, especially in the developing world.”

Leaders of RCRC member organizations have called for restored funding for international family planning services,

citing the critical importance of reducing maternal and infant deaths and of supporting equal rights for women around the world. The Rt. Reverend Jane Holmes Dixon, Episcopal Bishop of Washington (retired), has said: “Women are not, and can never be, an afterthought to human development.” Reverend Susan Anderson of the Presbyterian Church (USA) cited a 1997 PCUSA General Assembly statement urging Congress to fully fund all international comprehensive family planning programs.

### RCRC Member Organizations Support Family Planning

**The Episcopal Church** first approved of contraception for the purpose of family planning in 1930. In a 1994 resolution, it directed dioceses and agencies to “provide information to all men and women on the full range of affordable, acceptable, safe, and non-coercive contraceptive and reproductive health care services.”

**The Presbyterian Church (USA)** supports “full and equal access to contraceptive methods.” In a resolution endorsing insurance coverage for contraceptives, the church affirmed that “contraceptive services are part of basic health care” and cautioned that “unintended pregnancies lead to higher rates of infant mortality, low birth weight, and maternal morbidity, and threaten the economic viability of families.”

**Jewish movements** have a long history of support for family planning, dating to the 1929 Reform resolution noting that birth control contributes to social stability. In a pioneering 1935 resolution, Women of Reform Judaism supported lifting bans on the dissemination of information about birth control.

**Unitarian Universalists** consider the use of contraception to be a human right. The 1987 General Assembly opposed “any move to deny or restrict the distribution of government funds as a means of restricting access” to contraception in the U.S. or abroad.

**The United Church of Christ** General Synod, in affirming God as “the source of life—our life, all life, life to the full,” recognizes that “He has called us to share the work of creation with him, giving us the privileges and responsibilities of fellowship in this family and the wide units of society.”

**The United Methodist Church**, the nation’s second largest Protestant denomination, says that “each couple has the right and the duty prayerfully and responsibly to control conception according to their circumstances.” Its Resolution on Responsible Parenthood states that in order to “support the sacred dimensions of personhood, all possible efforts should be made by parents and the community to ensure that each child enters the world with a healthy body, and is born into an environment conducive to realization of his or her potential.” To this end, the United Methodist Church supports “adequate public funding and

“Family planning is crucial, especially in the developing world.”  
— The Dalai Lama

increased participation in family planning services by public and private agencies.”

### Other Religious Denominations

In 1954, **The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America** stated that “to enable them to more thankfully receive God’s blessing and reward, a married couple should plan and govern their sexual relations so that any child born to their union will be desired both for itself and in relation to the time of its birth.”

**The Southern Baptist Convention**, the nation’s largest Protestant denomination, supports the use of some forms of family planning by married couples. According to Dr. Richard Land, President of the denomination’s Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, “...in terms of regulating the number of children and how far apart they are, we would leave that as a moral decision for the couple, as long as they used means of birth control that prevented conception from taking place.”

**The Roman Catholic Church** is the only major faith institution in the U.S. to forbid the use of contraception. However, most Catholics disagree with the prohibition; 88% of Catholic women of childbearing age who are sexually active use a contraceptive method forbidden by the church, according to the 1995 National Survey of Family Growth.

## Support RCRC with Pro-Choice, Pro-Faith Resources!

### Show Your Support!

- Pro-Faith, Pro-Family, Pro-Choice buttons (2” round)
  - Pro-Faith, Pro-Family, Pro-Choice bumpersticker
- Both of the above: Suggested \$2 donation each

### Educational Resources

- Words of Choice—a 24-page glossary of pro-choice language (\$5)
- Education Series Kit (\$10)
- Speak Out for Choice Activist Kit (\$5)

### Contributions

- I’m enclosing a special contribution of \$\_\_\_\_\_.
- Send me information about supporting the Religious Coalition through my will or other planned giving strategy.
- Contact me with more information about becoming a monthly donor.

**You can also contribute on our convenient, secure online service at [www.rcrc.org](http://www.rcrc.org).**

### Resources

- Send me your list of publications and resources.
- Sign me up for action alerts.\*
- Send me the RCRC email newsletter.\*  
\* My email address is: \_\_\_\_\_
- Tell me about Spiritual Youth for Reproductive Freedom (SYRF).
- I’d like information about “Keeping It Real!” the Christian sexuality education curriculum for African-American youth ages 13 to 17.
- I’m interested in joining the Clergy for Choice Network.
- I’m interested in joining Seminarians for Choice.

**Please mail this form, along with payment, in the enclosed envelope.  
Thank you for your support of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice!**

**For more RCRC resources, or to order online, visit our online store at [www.rcrc.org/issues/resources.cfm](http://www.rcrc.org/issues/resources.cfm) or email [info@rcrc.org](mailto:info@rcrc.org)**



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**MISSION STATEMENT**

The Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice brings the moral power of religious communities to ensure reproductive choice through education and advocacy. The Coalition seeks to give clear voice to the reproductive issues of people of color, those living in poverty, and other underserved populations.

*Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice Member Organizations*

The names of members are in bold.

*Christian*

United Church of Christ  
 General Board of Church  
 and Society, United  
 Methodist Church  
 General Board of Global  
 Ministries, Women's  
 Division, United  
 Methodist Church  
 Episcopal Church  
 Presbyterian Church (USA)  
*Caucuses/Organizations*  
 Catholics for Choice  
 Christian Lesbians Out  
 Church of the Brethren  
 Womaen's Caucus  
 Disciples for Choice  
 Episcopal Urban Caucus  
 Episcopal Women's Caucus  
 Lutheran Women's Caucus  
 Methodist Federation for  
 Social Action

*Jewish*

*Conservative*  
 Rabbinical Assembly  
 United Synagogue of  
 Conservative Judaism  
 Women's League for  
 Conservative Judaism  
*Reform*  
 Central Conference of  
 American Rabbis  
 North American Federation  
 of Temple Youth  
 Union for Reform  
 Judaism  
 Women of Reform  
 Judaism, The Federation  
 of Temple Sisterhoods

*Women's Rabbinic*

Network of the  
 Central Conference of  
 American Rabbis  
*Reconstructionist*  
 Jewish Reconstructionist  
 Federation  
 Reconstructionist  
 Rabbinical Association  
 Society for Humanistic  
 Judaism  
*Caucuses/Organizations*  
 American Jewish  
 Committee  
 American Jewish Congress  
 Anti-Defamation League  
 of B'nai B'rith  
 Hadassah, WZOA  
 Jewish Women  
 International  
 NA'AMAT USA  
 National Council of  
 Jewish Women  
 Women's American ORT  
 YWCA of the USA  
*National Service*  
 Conference of the  
 American Ethical Union  
*Unitarian Universalist*  
 Association of  
 Congregations  
 Continental Unitarian  
 Universalist Young Adult  
 Network  
 Unitarian Universalist  
 Women's Federation  
 Young Religious Unitarian  
 Universalists

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**Make Your Voice Heard in Washington!**  
 Send your email address to  
 publicpolicy@rcrc.org  
 and you'll receive our action alerts.

**GET INVOLVED!**

As people of faith, we have the responsibility of ensuring that future generations can make decisions about childbearing and family in keeping with their religious beliefs and conscience. Help secure reproductive rights and justice!

- **Call us at 202-628-7700** to learn how to get involved in your state.
- **Visit our website at www.rcrc.org** to contact members of Congress and sign up for news and alerts.
- **Support RCRC financially.** Use the enclosed envelope or contribute safely and securely online at www.rcrc.org.
- **Contact us about planned giving.** Remembering RCRC in your will is an investment in the future!

**FAITH AND CONSCIENCE**

Pro-choice religions are among the most trusted institutions in the United States. These traditions, with more than 20 million members in the U.S., support reproductive choice as the most responsible position a religious institution can take on this issue. The Episcopal Church, Presbyterian Church (USA), United Church of Christ, United Methodist Church, Unitarian Universalist Association, and Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist Judaism all have official statements in support of reproductive choice as a matter of conscience. Religious and religiously affiliated organizations from these and other traditions are members of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice.