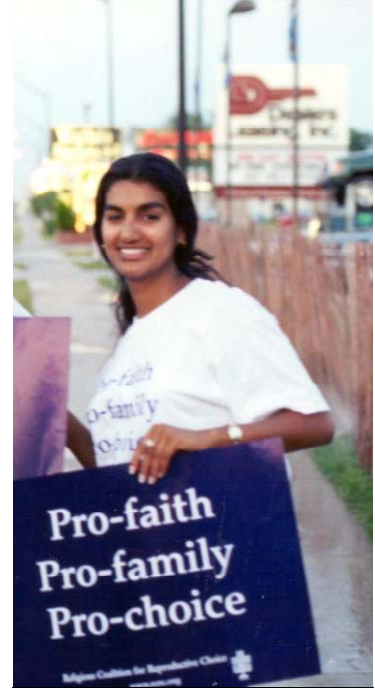


## PEACEFUL PRESENCE A Guide for Volunteers

*Peaceful Presence is a pro-choice, non-violent, non-confrontational, law-abiding, volunteer-based program of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice. Peaceful Presence offers solace and moral support to patients, families and providers of comprehensive reproductive health care services, and supports pro-choice students at campuses targeted by anti-choice protests.*



UC Berkeley Student at Peaceful Presence in Wichita Kansas, July 2001



A University Baptist Church Pastor and Spiritual Youth for Reproductive Freedom student at a Peaceful Presence on the campus of the University of Minnesota, September 2002.



Students and community members at a Peaceful Presence in Morristown, NJ in March 2002.

## **Welcome to the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice training in Peaceful Presence! Thank you in advance for being part of this important program.**

The following guide is an overview to how the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice handles a protest environment. Students and other volunteers may replicate the program on their campuses and in their communities to diffuse tensions and promote the message that our communities affirm women as moral decision makers. The Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice accepts no responsibility for "Peaceful Presence" unless a member of the Religious Coalition has trained individuals participating in "Peaceful Presence" in the program for Reproductive Choice. To receive official "Peaceful Presence" training, contact [info@syrff.org](mailto:info@syrff.org).

### **About the Religious Coalition**

The Religious Coalition FOR Reproductive Choice ([www.rcrc.org](http://www.rcrc.org)) was organized in 1973 as a temporary project to deal with the controversy created when abortion became legalized. The coalition, created under the auspices of the United Methodist General Board of Church and Society with clergy from the Clergy Consultation Service (the pre-Roe clergy underground to get women to safe albeit illegal abortions) continues today with membership of organizations from 15 denominations and faith traditions, and affiliates in 21 states. Having entered its third decade, the Religious Coalition and its affiliates are recognized for their sound, reasonable and their representation of the religious community and its views on abortion and reproduction.

In October 1988 the Religious Coalition began "Operation Respect," calling on people of faith to participate as a peaceful, religious opposition to clinic harassment and so-called rescue attempts. Based upon the general principles of non-violence, non-confrontation, and loving support of patients, families, and providers, the Oklahoma Religious Coalition organized its Peaceful\_Presence task force in 1989. They brought together volunteer pro-choice clergy and lay people to calmly counteract those who would deny women and their families' access to clinics through harassment and intimidation. The New Jersey Religious Coalition brought Peaceful Presence to New Jersey in 1996, and since then it has spread to many states across the nation.

Religious Coalition affiliates provide some of the most effective responses to the organized effort to deny access to abortion, family planning, and family life education. Besides Peaceful Presence, we train clergy to provide All Options Clergy Counseling and provide the technical assistance and resources to start up new affiliates and campus chapters. The affiliates publish newsletters, provide statewide educational efforts, and coordinate legislative advocacy.

## **What is Peaceful Presence?**

Peaceful Presence is a peaceful, respectful, law-abiding interfaith response to anti-choice harassment, intimidation, and picketing against those who seek, support or provide reproductive health care services. Peaceful Presence lessens the stress for providers and their families, and it helps women feel safer when arriving at the medical site. Peaceful Presence also diffuses tension in the often-hostile protest environment. Plus, we help to spread the word to the general public that people of faith support choice!

## **Things to remember...**

Keep in mind ways that you can keep cool and silent when anti-choice demonstrators are trying to aggravate you. Some people find it helpful to count to one thousand, sing a song or prayer under breath or to self, visualize yourself in another place, hold hands with a neighbor, look at the person, smile, look away from the person. Find what works for you.

Bring warm/cool clothing depending on the weather, sunscreen if you tend to burn, water, umbrellas.

We are not martyrs! In most cases there will be security there! Often there are clinic escorts there to protect the entrance to the clinic. The most important thing is to be safe and not put others or our selves at risk. If you feel threatened or uncomfortable at any moment do not remain in the situation. Before leaving tell the coordinator.

Peaceful Presence is not for everyone! If you prefer to do the chants or protect the entrance to the clinic then perhaps volunteering with another group would be a better fit for you. Coalition work is important. Our strength as a pro-choice movement is in our ability to work together!

Also, if you are not comfortable doing Peaceful Presence there are other ways to put your faith into action for choice! You can work the phones, fundraise, write letters, be the photographer, legal observer, drive, or provide pastoral care! We appreciate your support and assistance no matter how you decide to help out!

**If Peaceful Presence is for you, then:**

Review, sign, make a copy for yourself, and return the attached contract and know that we thank you for becoming a Peaceful Presence volunteer!

**RELIGIOUS COALITION FOR REPRODUCTIVE CHOICE**

Field Services Department  
1025 Vermont Ave. NW  
Suite 1130  
Washington, DC 20005  
202-628-7700

**AGREEMENT FOR OUR PEACEFUL PRESENCE VOLUNTEERS**

1. As an invited guest, I will co-operate with the spirit and goals of this reproductive choice support effort.
2. I will follow the instructions of the designated supervisor. When I arrive for duty I will sign in, including my local or cell phone number.
3. I commit to being peaceful and law-abiding. I will not raise my voice in anger or make threatening gestures or statements. I will not touch anyone without their permission unless in self-defense.
4. I will immediately remove myself from any dangerous or confrontational scene. If I am witness to an altercation involving the protestors, I will write an account of the incident and appear in court if necessary.
5. I understand that I cannot hold Religious Coalition FOR Reproductive Choice nor those whose home, church, synagogue, clinic or office I am helping through my participation in this volunteer effort responsible for any physical injury, medical expense, damage to personal property, or legal expenses incurred as a result of my volunteer support of this effort.
6. I will respect patients' and staffs' rights to confidentiality by refraining from making any reference to the identity of any patient, client, or staff member whom I see while being part of the Peaceful Presence, whether while serving as a volunteer or at any other time.
7. Should there ever be an extraordinary event at a site where I am providing Peaceful Presence, after I have left and sought safety, I will call the Religious Coalition 202-628-7700, to let them know that I am safe.

**I promise to abide by these policies that are established to provide spiritual and emotional support to those who seek and those who provide reproductive health care services and to reduce the risk of violence to anyone.**

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Signature

Please print your name too

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e-mail address

---

Address

Zip code

---

Phone number

date

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Parent or legal guardian signature for volunteers under age 18