

“No woman is required to build the world by destroying herself.” - *Rabbi Moses Sofer*

Voice for Choice

Newsletter of the Kentucky Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice
Summer 2009

ABOUT A FALLEN HERO

George Tiller was a hero.

Our thoughts and prayers are with the family, friends and staff of this courageous and compassionate man. The Rev. Carlton Veazey, the President and CEO of RCRC wrote the following tribute to George Tiller that we are reprinting here in its entirety. To see statements by other members of the clergy, visit the website of RCRC (www.rcrc.org)



George Tiller

Dr. George Tiller - Dedicated to Women's Rights, Justice, and Liberty for All

Today, we mourn the death of a humble, courageous man who dedicated his life to justice, liberty and freedom - Dr. George Tiller. George Tiller was murdered yesterday in his church, a place of peace and worship. This good doctor put his life on the line every day to make sure that safe, legal abortion was available to women in the greatest need, women with late-term complications and emergencies, who often had nowhere else to turn. He did so in respect for each woman he served and in the service of a great and noble cause - preserving the promise of reproductive freedom for all women.

Dr. Tiller had a powerful vision that sustained his daily actions of courage. In a letter thanking RCRC for our support during the hate-filled assault on his Wichita clinic in the summer of 2001, he wrote: "Together, we will create a society and a paradigm shift so that every pregnancy is an invited guest in the woman's body and a welcome addition to her family."

Dr. Tiller was a military man. He was proud of his service to his country and to the cause of freedom - and he felt that providing abortion services was part of this country's commitment to upholding women's rights and democracy. He hung an American

flag at the clinic every day. After that summer assault on his clinic, he suggested to an RCRC staff member that those who harassed and threatened abortion providers and women needing services were tyrants - and he felt that in providing services, no matter the danger and difficulty, he was standing up to tyranny.

George Tiller was continually harassed - his home, church and clinic were picketed, his clinic was burned down, he was shot in both arms by a demonstrator who is now jailed, and he was recently targeted for investigation only to be acquitted by a jury just a few months ago. But he never backed down.

George Tiller began providing abortion services in the 1970s. We cannot say with certainty what motivated and inspired this man to persevere, despite almost daily threats. Perhaps it was the model of his father, also a doctor, who provided abortion services before it was legal to do so. After his father's untimely death in a plane crash, George Tiller took over the practice. Some women patients began to ask discreetly, "Are you going to help us out like your father did?" And so he did. This strong family connection is in the great tradition of American values.

Women in the greatest medical need came to Dr. Tiller's clinic in Wichita; women in the final weeks of pregnancy,

with crushing medical conditions were among his patients. His clinic was a warm, welcoming place. Once past the gauntlet of angry demonstrators, women found a compassionate staff, a well-run medical practice, and the sense they were respected and safe.

Reformation Lutheran Church, Dr. Tiller's church, also sought to be a safe place for all people. In a statement yesterday, church members wrote: "... we reject any notion that violence against another human being is an acceptable way to resolve differences over any issue. We must always strive to engage in peaceful discussion. Our faith calls us to this. Our humanity demands it."

With members of Dr. Tiller's church, we pray for healing and peace to be restored. We pray for Dr. Tiller's family, for the clinic staff, for patients and their families, for friends, and for our country.

We pray for George Tiller - a true American hero, who lived his life according to his values and his faith, who was selfless and fearless in the line of danger to the very end.

See you at the KY State Fair – August 20-30!

We're gearing up for another summer of important outreach at the KY State Fair. We will host a booth in order to get our message of justice and compassion out to the rest of the state. Our outreach this year will include getting people to sign the petition to Congress for the REAL Act (front page), and continuing to get the message out of why people of faith support choice.

The fair is a good opportunity to let people know we exist! So many people have never even heard of our organization so just getting our name out there is important in and of itself. We may reach women who are in the process of having to make complex decisions about a pregnancy, healthcare providers who want to share our information with their patients, and other people of faith who will join us as volunteers and advocates in continuing our mission.

Four shifts will be available each day: 9-1, 1-4, 4-7, and 7-10. As a volunteer, you will receive a free ticket to the fair (and includes parking) and have the opportunity to work with another motivated person with whom you can share conversation and enthusiasm (and coordinate the necessary potty breaks). We will have volunteer training, which will take place a week or two before the fair. So look for information on this and plan to attend for lots of food, fun, and fellowship! We want all volunteers to have the necessary support and information they need.

Please contact Melanie Phillips (melaniephillips77@gmail.com) or Lara Farinholt (lara.farinholt@gmail.com). Let us know the shift and day you are most interested in, and we will try to accommodate requests. If you have worked the booth in prior years, let your friends know how great it was and bring them with you this year! If you can't make the fair and still want to help KRCRC, please shoot us an email about your interest and we will get in touch with you to let you know about other opportunities to help out the KRCRC.

GET REAL... Sign On To REAL!

The Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice supports efforts to get Congress to pass the Responsible Education about Life Act (REAL, H.R. 1551, S. 611). This legislation would provide \$300 million dollars in funding to states for programs that provide medically accurate and age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education.

We know that comprehensive sexuality education can be effective for helping teens to delay sexual activity and stay healthy. In contrast, abstinence-only programs have proven to be unsuccessful, and we are pushing for a bill that would provide funding for education that teaches the value of abstinence, but also provides information on contraception, STDs and HIV/AIDS, encourages family communication, and teaches about healthy relationships. As people of faith, we feel it is our moral obligation to provide young people with all of the knowledge they need to make responsible and well-informed decisions.

As part of the RCRC National Convening (see page 6 for article), which took place May 12 – 15 in Arlington, VA, we made the importance of the REAL Act known by lobbying many of our senators and representatives. As the co-chair of the KY Board of Directors who represents Kentucky, I had the opportunity to speak with Senator Mitch McConnell's legislative aides as well as Congressman Ben Chandler's legal aide. Rep. Chandler has already signed on to co-sponsor the Prevention First Act, which is great, but REAL is more specifically focused on comprehensive sexuality education and providing the funding to accomplish it. So we are especially trying to get those who have already agreed to co-sponsor Prevention First to also co-sponsor The REAL Act. Senator McConnell's aides took notes, were friendly, and listened, but I did not get the impression that this is something he will agree to co-sponsor.

Many people have mixed feelings about whether lobbying has any value, but we must ask ourselves why we do what we do and surge ahead because the cause does have value. We also have to realize that sometimes we are speaking up for those who really don't have a voice and every effort counts. If lobbying isn't for you, then sign on to the petition at www.rcrc.org or stop by the KRCRC booth at the KY State Fair (Aug. 20-30) and sign it then. Please Show your support today!

Melanie Phillips, Co-Chair, KRCRC Board

Kentucky Social Forum Berea College, July 31 – Aug. 2, 2009

The inaugural Kentucky Social Forum – “Another Kentucky is Possible” – will be held July 31 through August 2 at Berea College! Join us for a weekend full of workshops, networking, and celebrating all the diversity and justice in our beautiful Commonwealth!

But this is more than just a conference... As the first statewide social forum in the southern United States, the KYSF will provide space for progressive activists to build relationships, learn from each other's experiences, share our analysis of the problems our communities face, and bring renewed insight and inspiration. We will help Kentuckians develop the leadership, consciousness, vision, and strategy needed to realize another world.

This forum will send a message to other people's movements around the country that there is an active movement to make Kentucky a place we can all call home. We must declare what we want our state to look like and begin planning the path to get there. A national movement is rising. The KYSF is our opportunity to demonstrate to the nation that “Another Kentucky is Possible!” For more details, go to <http://www.kysocialforum.org>. To register, go to www.facebook.com.

SEX and the CHURCH

Teaching abstinence in a world awash with sex.

by The Rev. Steven Baines

It seems everyone wants to talk about abstinence. Inevitably, though, there is rarely agreement on what it means.

Whenever I conduct teen sexuality education, I distribute to parents a list of human sexual behaviors. I ask the parents how they would describe it if their child were to remain abstinent. I ask them to put a check mark by behaviors that fit that description and an X by those that do not.

The results are astonishing. Rarely is there more than 50% to 60% agreement on what truly defines abstinence. If sexually mature adults can't define the term, how on earth do we expect our teens to do so?

As a Christian clergyman, I wholly embrace that God created us as sexual beings with the sacred intent of mutual love and intimacy. I also agree that the only sure way to prevent sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and unintended pregnancies is abstinence from intercourse.

I don't doubt that most parents would like their children to remain abstinent. But I also know that it is our moral imperative to provide for the spiritual, emotional and physical well being of our young people.

HIV/AIDS, teenage pregnancy, STDs, high suicide rates among gay and lesbian teens, and date rape are disturbing realities. As people of faith charged with caring for the least in society, we cannot allow pop culture, the media and our children's peers to be the major sources of information about sexuality. Nor can we rely on silence, unrealistic rules and pat answers.

If sexually mature adults can't define the term, how on earth do we expect our teens to do so?

For over ten years, the U.S. federal government has poured more than \$1.5 billion into abstinence-only programs. These programs have been medically and scientifically studied and repeatedly shown to be ineffective. The programs neither delay teen sexual activity nor reduce pregnancy rates or STDs. Program guidelines explicitly prohibit any discussion of contraceptives, except for failure rates.

The Kaiser Family Foundation reported in its 2005 U.S. Teen Sexual Activity study that, despite the federal government's abstinence-only programs:

- Each year, there are 750,000 teen pregnancies, 82% of which are unintended;
- 31% of young women become pregnant at least once before the age of 20; and
- Each year, 9 million teens and young adults acquire an STD.

A world awash with sex

When was the last time you heard a rip-roaring sermon by your pastor from the "Song of Solomon" on a Sunday morning, much less heard anyone utter the word "sex" in a Christian education class? Growing up in the Southern Baptist Church, I can sum up my sexuality education in one sentence, "Sex is dirty, save it for someone you love."

Sex is dirty, save it for someone you love.

The church might be suffering from a severe case of sexphobia, but our society certainly is not! According to the A.C. Nielsen Co., the television is on nearly seven hours each day in an average U.S. home. If you couple this with the Kaiser Family Foundation finding that 70% of all television shows include sexual content, we have a lot of young children being exposed to sex before they enter kindergarten.

Not so long ago, television shows had married couples in separate beds. Now, shows like *Gossip Girls* have teens "hooking up." Only loser kids are not "getting any." I could fill this entire essay on the sexual perils our young people face on the Internet. Advertisers and media mavens know sex sells.

To quote new, single, teenage-mother Bristol Palin: "But I think abstinence is, like, like, the – I don't know how to put it – like, the main – everyone should be abstinent or whatever – but it's not realistic at all ... Because [sex's] more and more accepted now."

How did you learn about sex?

Last year, the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC) put out a request: "Tell us your story: How did you learn about sex?" We received well over 400 responses from individuals, ages 17 through 94, around the United States. Their replies offer thoughtful reflections and often intimate, sometimes painful, glimpses

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into personal lives. Quite a few said they learned about sex “the hard way” from being abused as a child.

- If I had known what sex was, I would have understood what was happening to me when I was molested by a male relative beginning at age 8. – Stephanie, 45
- My uncle molested me at 12. If someone had shared the facts with me sooner, it may not have happened the way it did. – Tom, 50
- My father molested me. The earliest I remember was at age 6 or 7. – Helen, 76+
- Raped at 17 and found out the hard way! – Thelma, 79

Tragically, we also found that what you learn or don’t learn as a young person can have life-long repercussions. Abstinence-only programs intentionally leave out important health information.

- I wish I’d learned what intercourse was and how easy it is to get pregnant. – Joyce, 79
- I wish I’d learned about STDs and the way in which they can be transmitted. I was under the impression that oral sex was safe, since you couldn’t get pregnant from it. – Abigail, 26
- The good girl/bad girl images prevalent when I was young only served to instill a great deal of fear in me, which negatively impacted on my marriage for years. – Jean, 57

Sex and poverty

Former Surgeon General Joycelyn Elders addressed RCRC’s annual National Black Religious Summit on Sexuality. She succinctly described the linkage between sex and poverty. “Our problem with sexuality has contributed more to the poverty in the black community than anything else in our society,” said Dr. Elders. “A pregnant teenager who does not finish high school or marry has an 80% likelihood of being poor.”

In 2006 the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancies reported more details about the generational impact of teen pregnancy:

- Teen mothers are less likely to

complete high school;

- Sons of teen mothers are 13% more likely to end up in prison; and
- Teen daughters are 22% more likely to become teen mothers themselves.

It is the poor and communities of color that suffer from illogical, ineffective public policy. A low-income woman is four times as likely to have an unintended pregnancy and five times as likely to have an unintended birth as her higher-income counterpart.

Sacred texts across many faith traditions, including Hebrew and Christian, tell the faithful they will be judged on how they treat the poor, the marginalized and the oppressed. The prophet Ezekiel, for example, proclaims in Chapter 16, verse 49: “This was the guilt of your sister Sodom; she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy.” Neither clergy nor laity can continue to simply bury our heads in the sand and hope these tragic lives will disappear.

People of faith engaged in the world

Recently, the Responsible Education About Life (REAL) Act was reintroduced in the U.S. Congress. The REAL Act would establish the first dedicated federal funding stream for comprehensive sex education. It is important to note that comprehensive sex education not only stresses the value of abstinence, but also provides medically accurate information on forms of birth control crucial to health and safety.

Major faith traditions representing millions of Americans support comprehensive sexuality education. In keeping with the U.S.’s Constitutional guarantee of freedom of religion, they oppose civil laws that would impose specific religious views about sexuality education.

These faith communities take seriously their duty to instill a set of religious, moral values that will help guide young people to responsible, ethical life choices. They believe it is the role of government to ensure that the nation’s youths receive facts, unblemished by ideology, that will protect them from disease and

unintended pregnancy.

The United Methodist Church in its Social Principles declares:

The Church should support the family in providing age-appropriate education regarding sexuality to children, youths and adults. (§161F “Human Sexuality,” 2008 Book of Discipline)

All children have the right to quality education, including full sex education appropriate to their stage of development that utilizes the best educational techniques and insights. Christian parents and guardians and the Church have the responsibility to ensure that children receive sex education consistent with Christian morality, including faithfulness in marriage and abstinence in singleness. (§162C “Rights of Children,” 2008 Book of Discipline)

The answer to the nation’s high rate of unintended pregnancies and pandemic of sexually transmitted diseases cannot rest with houses of worship and non-profit organizations alone. While communities of faith must play a vital role in teaching values and ethical decision-making, public schools must be part of the solution.

Vows of abstinence break more easily than latex condoms.

We are morally compelled to empower our young people so they are equipped with the tools necessary to face the environment in which we live. As Dr. Elders so succinctly stated, “Vows of abstinence break more easily than latex condoms.”

It is the role of government to ensure that the nation’s youths receive the facts, unblemished by parochial beliefs, that will protect them from disease and unintended pregnancy. I am sure we can agree that we want all our young people to be safe.

When I hear the words of Jesus in Matthew 19:13-14 chiding the disciples for forbidding the little children to come to him, I see the faces of so many youths from my congregations past and present. My faith and love of Christ compel me to do all humanly possible to promote their spiritual,

emotional and physical growth and safety. I hope all young people would remain abstinent, but my years in the ministry have seen this hope thwarted repeatedly.

I therefore implore you to join me and millions of faithful believers across this country and:

1. Oppose any funding for abstinence-only programs; and
 2. Support the Responsible Education about Life (REAL) Act.
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Discussion questions

1. If there is not 100% universal agreement on the definition of abstinence, what foundational principles and values can religious leaders instill in today's teens?
2. Opponents of comprehensive sex education say that talking about proper birth control methods is tantamount to providing a license for promiscuity. Critics contend that line of reasoning is like saying "because I carry an umbrella it is going to rain." Given the complexities of sex education in our communities, what theological and spiritual issues arise in the context of this discussion?
3. A recent report from the Centers for Disease Control found that 1 in 20 people in Washington, D.C., is living with HIV/AIDS, a rate that far exceeds the pandemic in some African countries. Do religious leaders and people of faith have a moral obligation to not only stress abstinence, but also provide all the medically accurate information necessary to curb this pandemic?
4. How can faith communities create sacred spaces to have open, honest discussion of human sexuality and the responsibilities of sexual behavior?

Editor's note:

The Rev. Steven Baines is Director of Interfaith Outreach at the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice.



Steven Baines

RCRC brings the power of religious communities to ensure reproductive choice through education and advocacy. Its member organizations are religiously and theologically diverse, but are unified in a commitment to preserve reproductive choice as a basic part of religious liberty. The United Methodist General Board of Church & Society and the Women's Division of the General Board of Global Ministries are founding members of RCRC.

Before coming to RCRC, Baines served eight years in the same capacity at People for the American Way. He has also served as executive directors for Equal Partners in Faith, a national interfaith organization committed to fighting racism, sexism and homophobia, and AFFIRM Youth, a social service organization in Upstate South Carolina.

Baines has served as both senior pastor and associate in Southern Baptist churches in North and South Carolina. He graduated from Furman University in Greenville, S.C., with a degree in religious studies and later attended Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C. Now affiliated with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), he serves as the Chair of Elders at the denomination's national cathedral, National City Christian Church.

Baines is a national spokesperson on issues of faith and politics and has been featured on CNN, CSPAN, Court TV and numerous syndicated radio programs.

This article is one of an ongoing series. An overview and other articles are available on the General Board of Church & Society website at [Sex and the Church](#).

KRCRC Board Update

The KRCRC Board held annual officer elections at the April Meeting and are pleased to announce the officers for the 2009-2010 year:

Co-Chairs: Anne Maron
and Melanie Phillips

Vice Chair: Lara Farinholt

Treasurer: Kathy Schroerlucke

Secretary: Terri Hill

Board Members at Large:

Drew Patterson
Gil Schroerlucke
Dawn Kibler

Welcome to Lauren Sawayer who is brand new to the board!

Would you like to join us and support our advocacy?

The Board meets regularly on the third Sunday of each month at 4:00 p.m. at St. Matthew's Episcopal Church. If you have an interest, please email melaniephillips77@gmail.com for details, current times, and location in the event that changes may be made. There is a spot for everyone whether you choose to be a board member and/or work on various projects!

RCRC National Convening

I had a fantastic time attending RCRC's National Convening, which took place in Arlington, VA May 12-15, 2009. It was a great opportunity to talk with folks from other state affiliates and share in the enthusiasm for the important work everyone is doing! We also were able to connect with the wonderfully supportive staff from National RCRC, who provide us with much needed motivation and important resources and tools to keep us running here on the ground.

The convening kicked off on Tuesday evening with a wine reception where we had a chance to mingle and meet new faces. Wednesday morning, we began the day with an interfaith service, which was quite profound as clergy, lay leaders, and young adults shared about why they do this work. The service included drumming and performances by an African American youth choir.

The meaningful service inspired us into the rest of the conference where we held several "faith in action" discussions, which prompted everyone to think about the issues that are most important for RCRC and where we want to put our energies. Although there were sometimes differing opinions, we all worked well together and the sessions were productive.

Some of the most memorable events from the convening include Frances Kissling's speech about the current political climate and what it means for our work in reproductive justice. Kissling is the former president of Catholics for Choice and current RCRC National Board Member. She is quite a powerhouse when it comes to speaking the truth about the matters that are most important to us.

To prepare us for our lobbying day, public policy facilitators taught us about how a bill becomes a law by leading us in the singing of "Laws are made to serve the people, constitutional and equal..." to the tune of the Battle Hymn of the Republic. They also taught us about what not to do by performing a humorous skit – do not forget the

name of your organization, show up late, run off quickly because you need to Twitter, forget the senator's name, etc. They turned what could have been a boring training into something fun and very practical!

President of RCRC, Rev. Carlton Veazey shared with us details about his visit with Obama's top policy advisors. He attended a small meeting of people especially called to address the issue of the health and safety of young people and families. Obama's advisors shared our sentiments about what was important and assured Veazey that Obama wants to fully support the REAL ACT. Rev. Veazey also shared that several people were there from other organizations, some who echoed our sentiment and some who did not. Obama's staff revealed important health priorities for their administration, and comprehensive sexuality education is definitely one of them.

Even after the convening, I continue to be motivated and energized to do the work that is necessary for reproductive justice! I ask you to join me in whatever way you are able to support all of the choices women must make concerning their reproductive health including access to the knowledge that will help all young people make healthy, responsible decisions. As a person at the convening put it "All options are sacred." Please help us to carry that message throughout the state of Kentucky!

Melanie Phillips, Co-Chair, KRCRC Board

National Black Religious Summit 13 on Sexuality

The Church in a Changing World

The thirteenth annual National Black Religious Summit on Sexuality will be held July 8-10, 2009 at the Howard University School of Divinity, 1400 Shepherd Street NE, Washington, DC. This year's theme is "The Church in a Changing World."

RCRC is an interfaith coalition of national mainstream religious organizations dedicated to ensuring access to reproductive health care and achieving reproductive justice. Since 1996, RCRC has worked to reduce the high rates of unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases in the African American community through the National Black Church Initiative and the annual National Black Religious Summit on Sexuality. More than 700 churches have provided or are providing our "Keeping It Real!" faith-based sexuality education curriculum. For more information and to register for this conference, please go to www.rcrc.org

Mother's Day Abortion Protest

On May 9, 2009, the anti-choice protestors descended upon the EMW Womens' Surgical Center for their annual Mother's Day protest. Approximately 300 anti-choice protestors were present and actively attempted to block access to the clinic doors. They held graphic signs and shouted and jeered at patients entering the clinic. Several "sidewalk counselors" were present and harassed patients walking from the parking lot to the clinic.

Approximately 80 escorts were on hand to accompany patients through the gauntlet of protestors. A corridor of escorts was established at the door of the clinic in order to maintain access for patients. Frustrated protestors called the police claiming that the corridor created by escorts was violating their right to protest. Following that phone call, a total of seven uniformed police officers arrived at and remained at the clinic until the protest was over. After speaking with both sides, the officers allowed the escorts to maintain their corridor and required that all individuals within that corridor remain moving at all times.

A film crew and reporter from ABC were present to document the protest. Their filming and reporting will be a part of a series of reports on teen pregnancy in America. Unfortunately, some members of the film crew became more of a threat to patients' privacy than the protestors. One cameraman went so far as to push an escort away from a patient in order to get the shot he desired. The presence of cameras accompanied by the sheer presence and cacophony of the protestors' shouts and prayers made entering the clinic extremely intimidating and terrifying for patients, their friends, partners and other loved ones. Thanks to the dedication of the escorts and the presence of the police officers, the path to the clinic door was kept clear, and all patients attempting to enter the clinic were escorted safely through the throng of protestors.

The Mother's Day protest is a great reminder that access to a safe and legal abortion remains under constant attack. Protests, including graphic hand held signs, threatening words and physical harassment occur on a weekly basis at EMW Women's Surgical Center. In response, we must be vigilant in our dedication to peacefully work for reproductive freedom and justice and to speak out for and about reproductive freedom within our communities.

A dedicated team of escorts is present up every Saturday morning to walk with the patients and create a buffer between patient and protestors. KRCRC would like to give a special thank you to all of those dedicated individuals who are truly on the front lines protecting a woman's right to choose. If you are interested in volunteering as an escort or would like to come and observe the escorts at work, please contact KRCRC. If you are unable to attend on Saturday mornings, but would like to sponsor an escort training session or give a donation to fund escort training and/or to purchase necessary safety vests for escorts, please send your donation to: KRCRC, P.O. Box 4065, Louisville, KY 40204-0065.





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From March, 2008 through July, 2008, Kroger Gift Card earnings totaled \$1,357. This almost pays the printing costs of one newsletter. Please continue to use your KRCRC Kroger Gift Card. It's an easy way to support reproductive choice!



Order a \$5 gift card from KRCRC. Stop at the Kroger service desk and put some money on the gift card. Shop till you drop and pay the bill with your Kroger gift card. When you use your Kroger gift card, it helps raise funds for KRCRC. Consider giving KRCRC Kroger gift cards as gifts! It's the gift that keeps on giving!
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