

# Are We Doing Enough?

*Our parish does a reasonably good job teaching teens what is prohibited. The Church's positions on premarital sex, birth control, homosexuality, and abortion are made clear. In the process, I'm afraid our teens aren't helped to see sex as a good gift from God. We do far too little to help them prepare for healthy sexual relationships in marriage or for eventual parenting themselves.*

Roman Catholic Priest

*When I got pregnant, my minister was so kind and helpful to me. I'll never forget how he got my parents to stop being angry...But where was the church before I got pregnant? If I'd understood the way my faith should shape my decisions, I don't think I would have had intercourse. And why didn't the church or anyone else teach me about pills or condoms? I know what I did is my responsibility, but the right information could have changed my life.*

Female Teen

*My priest rocks and is not negative on sex. He helped me see how God intends marriage to be. I feel good about myself, and I know I'm worth waiting for.*

Female Teen, Roman Catholic Church

*Our youth group advisor went on this big rant and rave about how corrupting the Internet is, about how dangerous it is for teens to be getting information about sex from the Net. He's been great to me, and I don't mean to put him down. But he's like all the other adults in not wanting to give us information and then being shocked that we get it from other places. Health and Daily Living classes in school don't begin to tell you what you need. Your parents sure don't, and the church sure doesn't. So where do you find things out? The internet and television and your friends. Don't blame us for where we go when you don't tell us anything.*

Female Teen, United Methodist Church

*I have the opinion that the faith should have a lot to say about my relationship with a guy. It's not just whether or not to have sex. What about honesty? What about communication? What about touching? What about respecting and being respected? No one helps you with this. The Torah has all these confusing teachings. Which parts really apply to life today?*

Female Teen, Synagogue (Reformed)

*Our pastor and teachers make me feel like sex is an ugly, dangerous thing. But if that's what it is, why would anyone want to do it?*

Male teen, Southern Baptist Church

*Our youth pastor keeps telling us that it's wrong to have premarital intercourse. But when you read the Scriptures, it isn't all that clear. People got married when they were fourteen and fifteen years old in Bible times, so premarital sex wasn't a concern.*

Male teen, Missouri Synod Lutheran

Excerpted from: Clapp, Steve, Kristen Leverton Helbert, and Angela Zizak. Faith Matters: Teenagers, Religion and Sexuality. Fort Wayne: LifeQuest, 2003.

## **What Can Religious Leaders Do?**

### **Educate Families in Your Congregation**

1. Make yourself available to talk with young people in your congregation. Consult Guidelines for Answering Questions for tips.
2. Organize a program for parents about how to talk to their kids.
3. Organize a sexuality education program for youth in your congregation.
4. Create an adult education forum on faith and sexuality education.
5. Invite an MBPP Health Educator to do a program on any subject – see the brochure for details.
6. Using the list provided, review and purchase a faith-based sexuality education curriculum for your church library.
7. Organize a forum for yourself and young people in your congregation to learn about the issues they experience.
8. Provide factual information through bulletin boards or newsletters.

### **Speak out for Comprehensive, Accurate, Effective Sexuality Education**

1. Use your position as a religious leader to promote spiritual, moral, emotional and physical health for children.
2. Encourage the social action committee to address the issue.
3. Inform local reporters that you are available to provide commentary for religious views on sexuality.
4. Offer to testify before the local school board, or in the state legislature.
5. Contact your legislators about sexuality education.
6. Write a Letter to the Editor, identifying yourself as a faith leader.
7. Contact MBPP about participating in their Clergy Group.

### **Collaborate With Other Religious Leaders**

1. Work in partnership with several congregations to co-host a community-wide forum or meeting on sexuality education.
2. Develop a program on sexuality education for a meeting of the interfaith clergy council.