

Communities of Faith Project - 2002

The goal is to work closely with faith communities to support young people in developing healthy sexual attitudes and behaviors. The Rights, Respect, Responsibility® (RRR®) initiative is the vehicle for moving this effort forward.

In 2002 Planned Parenthood Health Services of Southwestern Oregon (PPHSSO) proposed:

- conducting six faith community leadership forums reaching clergy and faith community leaders from 100 congregations
- developing RRR® implementation manuals to be provided to forum participants
- providing follow-up support and resources

Thus far, four faith community leadership events have been provided, reaching 187 clergy and people of faith from 74 congregations. Implementation manuals were developed and provided to participants; follow up resources and support are continuing. The response has been quite encouraging.

This effort is providing PPHSSO with important opportunities to forge ties with clergy and people of faith in a way that we have never done before. Planned Parenthood has called upon religious congregations to work within their own communities to support healthy sexuality and to promote the pieces of the Rights, Respect, Responsibility® initiative that make sense within their own beliefs. The response has been remarkable. Those who attended the leadership events walked away with a heightened awareness of adolescent sexuality issues and their faith community's important role in addressing them. We have witnessed an encouraging commitment to take on this role. There have been a number of follow-up events, activities and applications to note, some of which are ambitious, others quite simple but profound. For example:

- a Catholic priest who attended the leadership forum called PPHSSO to say he was using the information and materials from the forum in a confirmation class he was preparing on the topic of freedom; he requested additional handouts from Planned Parenthood and stopped by the office to check out the resource library;
- a Presbyterian pastor hosted a Rights, Respect, Responsibility® breakfast for the Cottage Grove school board and invited PP staff to present; that same minister is working with PPHSSO staff and members of his community to conduct a town hall forum on adolescent sexual health issues;
- a local church has subsequently created a sexuality education library with 75 books, curricula and resources;
- training in the OWL (Our Whole Lives) curriculum is being hosted in January by a local church, with faith communities from around the region being invited to participate. Our Whole Lives is a faith-based K-adult healthy sexuality curriculum developed by United Church of Christ and the Unitarian Universalist Church;
- a church-sponsored three week RRR® educational series was attended by 70 participants;
- a church-sponsored PPHSSO workshop for parents on talking with children about sexual issues was attended by 45 parents;

- clergy have signed on to the Planned Parenthood Federation of America endorsement for comprehensive sexuality education and have decided to send this statement to school superintendents with a request to share it with school boards;
- local ministers developed the attached pastoral letters, which have been distributed to clinics and medical offices around the community;
- a local church developed a “statement of faith” in support of RRR[®] for inclusion in all new member packets;
- two church pastors have received approval from their boards to participate in the 2003 Advocates for Youth European Study Tour to explore western Europe’s dramatically successful approaches to adolescent sexual health issues. These pastors will become part of the Oregon Rights, Respect, Responsibility[®] Team, a 32-member cadre of advocates who have participated in the study tour. This team actively works to advance the RRR[®] mission in Oregon;
- Two strong and committed clergy groups, Religious Leaders for Responsible Sexual Choices (Eugene) and Clergy for Responsible Sexual Choices (Medford/Grants Pass) have rallied around the Rights, Respect, Responsibility[®] initiative and are spearheading much of the faith community effort;
- clergy have written endorsement letters for RRR[®];
- several ministers have preached the vision of RRR[®] from the pulpit, and have incorporated the language into their daily work;
- a Lutheran pastor has begun discussing sexuality and sharing the RRR[®] message with young people while they work on projects at church;
- UO campus ministries have begun initial planning for RRR[®] events geared toward students on campus;
- planning for a faith lobby day in Salem is underway, with clergy committing to go themselves and/or recruit congregants to go;
- The clergy groups have agreed to host the Planned Parenthood legislative reception in 2003.

These are but a few of the important outcomes of this “Communities of Faith Project,” – and the work continues. PPHSSO is planning an additional leadership forum in the southeastern part of Oregon, and of course the follow-up support is ongoing.