

Faith Community Training Report **April 2005 – Medford event**

Event Description:

On April 1 and 2, 2005 a 9 1/2-hour retreat-style training was conducted at the United Methodist Church in Medford, entitled *Values for Life: A Holistic Approach to Sexuality*. Twenty-six total people attended, including 9 parents, 3 grandparents, 10 youth from 5th-8th grades and 5 presenters. Participants paid \$10 per adult and \$5 per youth. Dinner, lunch and snacks were provided, along with various handouts and resources for future use. Additional funding and resources were provided by PPHSSO through staff dedicated time and E.C. Brown Foundation Funding.

Program Goals:

- To help adults and youth understand the spiritual aspects of sexuality.
- To help participants learn how to dialogue a holistic view of sexuality using age-appropriate language.
- To understand how values about sexuality combine with spirituality and faith.
- To have fun while communicating about sexuality issues.
- To understand and be sensitive to others' difficulty communicating about sexuality and faith issues.
- To provide age-appropriate education for youth, and to further adult understanding of facts around sexuality issues.

Planning Process:

In October 2004, PPHSSO brought National presenter and author Steve Clapp to Medford to report on his book *Faith Matters*. This presentation to clergy leaders was based on his research in the field of faith based sexuality issues. This event helped fuel the momentum for a program with church leaders who were interested in addressing sexuality issues in their congregations, but wanted to do so in a faith-based training format that included both parents and their children.

In October 2004 a core group of clergy, church youth leaders and PPHSSO staff began meeting to plan a session or sessions of trainings that met the needs of parents and youth from a handful of churches in Medford. While initially there were several churches involved, United Method Church proved to be the main church with a strong youth contingent. Therefore, the event was hosted by Medford's UMC and some of the planning process was developed around their youth program design and participants, i.e. ages and past programs.

It was early on decided that a program focusing on both parents or guardians and youth would be the best comprehensive type of training. Originally, the age group to focus on was 4th-8th graders with a separation of 4th-5th and 6th-8th grades for the educational sessions. In the end, the numbers available for the 4th-5th graders was lower than projected, and therefore one 5th grader who attended was combined with the older youth.

Planning focused on a mix of educational sessions, communication opportunities, group-building exercises and decision-making activities. Various religious-based and secular curriculum programs were consulted during this process, including *Our Whole Lives, Created In God's Image*, (add additional resources and bibliography information) and materials the planning group had utilized in past trainings. The final program description is outlined below, but throughout the process, the planning group decided to keep several "games" available to fill time as needed, so not all games discussed were used. It was also decided that all worship sessions would relate to a positive outlook about the body and/or bring forth positive biblical passages about sexuality.

The group met twice a month from January – April to finalize the program, the registration plan, and discuss recruiting issues. Recruiting was a piece that was most vital to keep the program on track, and was done differently in each of the participating churches, with a constant reminder from a PPHSSO staff member. It is important for the local church contact to be the main recruiter, to establish trust between the church staff and the parents and youth.

Program Description:

The final program agenda is as follows:

Friday evening: 6 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

- Registration and Dinner
- Introductions and Overview of program
- Group building games:
 1. People to People – a body parts game
 2. Values game – “what influences you to...”
 3. Fruit basket game – “bring me a....”
 4. Body building die game
- Covenant – brainstorm on group rules
- Closing worship

Saturday: 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

- Opening worship
- Group breakout sessions for 1 1/2 hours
 1. Parents only group:
 - Facts Jeopardy game: subjects included puberty, contraception, STI/HIV, Statistics and Body Parts. The answers were designed to fuel discussions about other basic facts and issues.
 - Current Realities discussion:
 - Oral sex and anal sex and their relationship to “abstinence”
 - Current phrases: sex pacts, friends with benefits, bracelets that mean certain behaviors have or will be performed.
 - Average Puberty age vs. average marriage age and the relationship to abstinence-only until marriage programs.
 - School education: abstinence-only vs. comprehensive sex education, and what is happening or not happening in local schools.
 - Communication tips – basic tips on talking to kids about issues of sexuality.
 2. Youth only group:

- Sexuality Jeopardy game: subjects included Sex and the Bible, STD's, Myths and Truths, Body Parts and It's a Surprise.
 - Values auction game
 - M and M game on risk behavior
- *Break for 15 minutes*
- Child to parent interviews (45 minutes): youth participants were given a form with several questions to ask their parents or guardians about issues related to relationships, growing up, and decision-making. Youth were to interview adults and practice discussing issues that may not always be easy to talk about.
- *Lunch for 30 minutes*
- Communication Lego game (30 minutes): a game that involved teams practicing communication and listening skills.
- Timeline or "when's the right age to..." activity (45 minutes). Youth and adults had the same cards of possible "events" in a person's life, and decided on when would be the right age to do these types of activities. A discussion followed to get a sense of why adults and youth would view certain activities differently. Activities included things like have a cell phone, group date, get married, etc.
- *Break for 15 minutes*
- Scenario group discussion (30 minutes): youth and adults were separated and each got a different scenario to discuss. Each group then reported back to the other group what they would do in that situation. The other group was instructed just to listen, unless they needed to clarify an answer. Scenarios included issues about decision-making around sexuality and difficult situations, sexual harassment, body image and communication with family.
- Closing worship
- Class evaluation and pick-up resource material

Event Dynamics:

The group that attended this training was primarily from the UMC church, with the exception of two families from the local First Presbyterian Church. This included one 5th grader who was allowed to join the older group of students, primarily due to his advanced knowledge of these issues. Despite the few "outside" participants, the parents/grandparents and youth from the separate congregation integrated well with the other participants who knew each other. Some of this was best achieved via the multitude of games that were used as icebreakers on Friday night. These games seemed

to allow the youth to have fun, but also feel valued in expressing their opinions about various issues. While there was some shyness and/or lack of enthusiasm that existed initially, by the end of the first evening and throughout the second day, the youth seemed content to be a part of the program. This was solidified after the morning breakout session where the youth got to talk about all of these issues in their own group.

Many of the adults who attended are leaders in the local UMC church, which solidified the importance of this type of training for the group that attended, but also probably for many in the congregation who couldn't attend. This type of leadership is key in a program like this to succeed, and for additional programs to take place.

The core group of planners worked very well together throughout the two-day event. This cooperation allowed for changing or adding games/activities as needed, for extending time or shortening time as needed, and for keeping on track with both the program and the message.

Food and breaks were also keys to the success of this program. Though some adults weren't thrilled about pizza or doughnuts, these types of food were clearly important to keeping the youth engaged, and they commented almost unanimously on their evaluations about this. The youth also clearly needed the breaks as a time to have unstructured play that became a form of bonding. Adults primarily used the breaks to continue the conversation, also in a non-structured manner.

Evaluation Summary:

Participant's evaluation: see attached evaluation form for participant evaluation of the program.

In addition to the day of the event evaluations, some of the planners got additional feedback from the participants. This continued to be highly positive feedback, but also some amazement by parents that their involvement was so helpful to both themselves as parents, and to the teens to have that onsite time for conversation. Previous plans in some of the local churches was to have the youth group leaders provide an educational session to youth only, but it became obvious to parents that their involvement was useful and insightful. Parents and grandparents alike also noted that the program was very positive for youth to be able to discuss this information outside of home and school, and particularly with the faith perspective association.

Planning Group evaluation: In a debriefing meeting two weeks after the session, the planning group evaluated the event. All members of the planning team felt very positive about how the program was initiated, and have continued to get positive feedback from the participants. Though there were some adults who may have liked less games and more substance, it was clear to the planning team that the bulk of the games truly helped build the community group and bond the teens.

The planning committee also discussed the possibility of future trainings, with a primary focus on Medford churches. Although it was discussed that one church (particularly UMC) could hold these trainings on their own, due to their large youth group, it was agreed that the combination of churches is a great approach for two reasons: 1) the churches with small youth groups could easily tap into the bigger groups, and 2) some youth group participant's parents don't necessarily attend the same or any church, therefore they may feel more comfortable attending a "church community" event. In any event, it was decided that the group could and would work towards additional trainings sessions either in the fall or the following spring.