

Discussion Guide
***The Faithful Struggle for Reproductive
Justice:***
The Clergy Consultation Service on Abortion
***Introduction by Reverend Carlton W. Veazey, President of the
Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice***

We hope you find this short video on the Clergy Consultation Service on Abortion enlightening. This courageous group of clergy, led by Reverend Howard Moody, helped many women secure safe abortion before *Roe v. Wade*.

Below are thought-provoking questions to aid in your discussion of the film and the past, present and future of the reproductive justice movement.

Many women died of complications after unsafe, illegal abortions. Reverend Howard Moody explains that he started the Clergy Consultation Service because “There was no way you could care for people’s spirits without caring about their bodies.”

- Do you think people today would be surprised to learn that clergy members helped women find abortions?
- How does this kind of activism conflict or mesh with commonly held views about religious leaders?
- What is the value of passing these stories of back-alley abortions down to young people?

Reverend James Lawson says that “For a woman not to be counted as being able to make adequate decisions, medical, spiritual, moral...is a denial of a woman’s basic humanity, basic ability, basic God-given rights.”

- Do laws restricting access to abortion violate women’s rights? If so, how?

One of the women who started a network to provide referrals for safe abortions when abortion was illegal, said that she felt there was “a philosophical obligation on our part, to disrespect a law that disrespected women.”

- If someone feels that a law is ‘wrong’, do you think it is correct for that person to break the law? Why or why not?



- Are there situations in which it would be justifiable to break the law?
- If abortion became illegal again today, do you think networks would organize to provide referrals and perform abortions? What kind of groups might organize?

Spurred by religious conviction, opponents of abortion carry out their mission on two fronts. One is through legislation, where state by state, laws are being passed that create barriers for women seeking abortions. The other is through clinic demonstrations, targeted harassment, and violence.

- Discuss using the justification of “what God wants” as a basis for violence or breaking the law.
- What do you feel the difference is, if any, between the law-breakers who provided safe abortions before *Roe v. Wade*, and the law breakers who picket clinics, harass abortion providers and vandalize clinics today?

Dr. Boyd describes the difficult position of many emergency room physicians in the years when abortion was illegal. He himself provided safe abortions for women.

- If you were a doctor at that time, facing loss of your license and/or imprisonment, how might you have acted?
- What do you think some of the motivations of the few doctors who did provide abortions might have been? What were some of the costs to them personally? Their rewards?
- Did the film change the way you view health practitioners who perform abortions today?

The majority of Americans support choice. They believe that a woman has a right to make her own decision. However, since the 1973 Supreme Court decision in Roe v. Wade ensuring a woman's right to abortion in most situations, access to abortion in the United States is being eroded. In what has become an embattled environment, fewer and fewer doctors are willing to provide abortion services. More than 80% of counties in the United States have no local provider. Many clinics, especially those in rural areas, are forced to fly doctors in from out of state.

- What does abortion being legal mean in reality, given that the availability of resources and providers is shrinking every year in the United States?



- What does the fact that abortion is legal mean if a woman is unable to find a provider?

Today, if a poor woman has an unplanned pregnancy, her options are limited. Medicaid restrictions on abortion funding, combined with limits to family planning services and reduced welfare allocations, place a heavy burden on low-income families.

- If a woman chooses to have an abortion and cannot afford one, what challenges does she face? What are her alternatives?
- Do taxpayers have a right to decide (or have a say) in whether or not tax money is used to perform abortions? Why or why not?
- Discuss the comparative care the following groups of women might receive if they sought an illegal abortion 40 years ago: Rich women vs. poor women? Young women vs. older women? Women in cities or in rural areas? Women of one particular ethnic background? Do these same issues affect a woman's ability to get a safe, affordable abortion today?

Questions adapted from the discussion guide from Dorothy Fadiman's trilogy of videos, From the Back-alleys to the Supreme Court and Beyond.



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Ways to Be Active Today

- Make a generous contribution to the RCRC Clergy Consultation Service Fund, which helps to continue the work begun by Howard Moody. Your donation will help fund All Options Clergy Counseling, which helps clergy and women explore parenting, adoption, and abortion choices. Contributions to the Clergy Consultation Service Fund will provide scholarships for clergy and seminary students to attend All Options Clergy Counseling trainings and seed money for trainings around the country. In addition, contributions will support conferences to teach clergy to lead trainings in another RCRC counseling program, Reproductive Loss, and to develop a cadre of trainees to spread this work as widely as possible. More information is available at: www.rcrc.org/programs/clergyconsultationservice_fund.cfm
- Become trained in Peaceful Presence. Peaceful Presence is a respectful, law-abiding, non-confrontational 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 demonstration environment. Plus, you will help to spread the word to the general public that people of faith support choice! To learn more about how to become trained in Peaceful Presence, contact RCRC Field Services department director Barbara Kavadias at bkavadias@rcrc.org.
- Support an abortion fund. When women and girls cannot afford a safe, legal abortion, they can turn to the funds set up by members of the National Network of Abortion Funds. These funds subsidize the cost of an abortion. Many abortion funds provide information and support, and some provide related services such as transportation, housing, child care, options counseling, or funding for ultrasound, pregnancy testing, or followup care. NNAF member funds try to fill the gap left by Medicaid, which does not cover abortion in most states, by health insurance plans that provide limited or no coverage, or by the growing numbers of uninsured people. More information is available at www.nnaf.org/.



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