

The Importance of Faith Leaders Standing With Planned Parenthood

Dr. Laura Meyers, President & CEO Planned Parenthood of Metropolitan Washington, DC

At a time of great division and rancor, faith leaders have a special responsibility to heal and unify. This week, a group of interfaith clergy performed a blessing of Planned Parenthood of Metropolitan Washington's (PPMW) newest health center, The Carol Whitehill Moses Center. I want to take this moment to express my gratitude to these spiritual leaders for their courage in conferring a blessing on our mission and to articulate for readers what it means to those who work inside.

In my regular messages to PPMW staff, I refer to our work here as sacred work because as we provide reproductive health care and sex education-whether preventive care such as cancer screenings or STI testing and treatment, sex education or abortion, we intersect with people at a deeply personal, intimate and potentially vulnerable moment in their lives. Our goal is to affirm each person's dignity and empower self-determination through information and care.

Regardless of what patients who come to the health center seek in terms of care, they and our staff, nevertheless occupy the foreground of America's hottest hot button issue - abortion. Planned Parenthood of Metropolitan Washington staff are fiercely dedicated to providing safe, compassionate abortion care as well as a full range of reproductive health care, but there is no question that working in this area of healthcare is more challenging personally and spiritually because of how the intense stigma about abortion and sexuality more generally play out in the public square.

The religious right has sought to frame the narrative about abortion and sex. They have sought to render voiceless those who do not share their narrow and controlling belief system. Regardless of the long history of connection between clergy and Planned Parenthood as well as the clergy's role in the abortion rights movement more generally, those on the right seek to separate those of us in the reproductive rights movement from a sense of deep spirituality and religious connection. Their binary moral framework leaves no space for individual questions of conscience nor the moral ambiguity that is an inevitable fact of life.

Having a group of interfaith clergy perform a ceremony focused on unity and wholeness therefore takes on special meaning to empower and celebrate rather than to stigmatize, control and dehumanize. Having such a ceremony take place at this moment in history is especially powerful for us as we seek to mobilize our communities of different faiths to come together to affirm and support the reproductive freedoms we cherish and have fought so hard to achieve. It is a moment of profound calling and we hope those of conscience will hear its clarion call and move to action.