



RELIGIOUS  
COMMUNITY *for*  
REPRODUCTIVE  
CHOICE

20  
23

ANNUAL  
REPORT

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# MESSAGE FROM LEADERSHIP

Throughout our sacred lineages are stories and metaphors that capture one of life's most mysterious truths: that new beginnings are born from endings. The moments of great upheaval, loss, and change, when we've felt the rug has been pulled out from under us, are somehow always the foundation for our next chapter.

I would say that the day that six judges overturned nearly 50 years of constitutionally protected legal abortion access was one of these moments. We have seen the destruction unfold all around us: abortion bans spreading like wildfire, doctors struggling to care for their patients in times of great need, pregnant people traveling hundreds of miles for life-saving care – and far too often being turned away.

We cannot deny the severity of the reproductive health crisis we are living in. And yet, the death of *Roe v. Wade* was not the beginning of it. Though it was a landmark decision and critical for the advancement of reproductive rights, *Roe* was a shaky



**Rev. Katey Zeh, CEO**

**foundation from the very beginning. It was based on a doctor's right to privacy, not the patient's; moreover, legality does not equal accessibility. A singular focus on legal rights to abortion excludes the spectrum of reproductive needs, desires, injustices, and crises that so many people face, especially within communities of color.**

**The more I examine moments of upheaval, the more I realize that while these experiences do bring real destruction and suffering, they also present us with an opportunity to begin again. Sometimes what is destroyed no longer serves our highest good and needs to be broken down so that something new may be reborn out of the rubble – or made with completely new materials altogether.**

**RCRC turns 50 this year, and we have been talking about what a complicated time it is to honor our history in this post-Roe reality. We grew out of what was known as the Clergy Consultation Service on Abortion (CCS), a network of clergy and lay leaders who formed grassroots networks across 38 states to help nearly half a million people access safe abortion care in the years pre-Roe. This is a part of our national religious history that is often forgotten or actively erased, and in these moments, we must reclaim what has always been true: people of faith throughout history, including in ancient times, have always stood for reproductive freedom, bodily autonomy, and human dignity.**

**We must celebrate and honor this history while also being careful not to idealize or romanticize it. Times like these call us to reflect**

**on what we can learn from our past – what can we glean from those who came before us? What can we learn from their shortcomings?**

**So, here we are. Everything that we thought we knew has crumbled at our feet. The fall of Roe gives us the opportunity to examine the rubble and decide how we are going to rebuild for a different kind of future.**

**This is the question I leave you with:**

**What would human flourishing truly look like?**

**How might we, in this moment of extreme reproductive crisis, envision a different way of moving forward with our work for reproductive freedom and justice? What is the vision of the world that we have not yet seen in reality but we believe is not only possible but is inevitable?**

**We have to be willing and daring enough to imagine that reality and then do everything now in alignment with that vision. That is our challenge and our opportunity.**

**Faithfully yours,**

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katy". The script is cursive and fluid, with a large, stylized 'K' and a long, sweeping tail on the 'y'.

# LOOKING BACK

**RCRC turns 50 this year. At this moment in history, with the overturning of Roe and abortion access once again becoming a patchwork of ever-shifting laws across the country, the story of our origins seems closer than ever.**

**RCRC as we exist today evolved from a pre-Roe underground network of ministers and rabbis called the Clergy Consultation Service (CCS). In response to the deaths and injuries caused by unsafe abortions, this group formed to shepherd pregnant people across state lines to obtain safe abortions.**

**Let's take a look at the history of our founding:**



## **Early 1966 An Awareness Grows**

At his church in Greenwich Village, Rev. Finley Schaef, a Methodist minister, was asked by a mother for help arranging an abortion – illegal at the time – for her pregnant teenage daughter. Schaef was sympathetic but troubled he had no way to assist.

## **Spring 1966 Spark of a Solution**

Rev. Schaef and Rev. Howard Moody, an American Baptist minister, led neighboring churches in Greenwich Village. On the street one day, these former civil rights activists discussed the health risks illegal abortions posed to pregnant people. Empowered by their faith to defy laws they considered unjust, they agreed to find ways to refer people to safe providers.



## **May 1967**

### **The CCS is Born**

After a series of meetings, Revs. Schaef and Moody joined with Methodist Rev. Jesse Lyons and lay leaders to develop the Clergy Consultation Service on Abortion, as it was first called, to help people decide what to do about unintended pregnancies and to refer them to safe abortion providers if they wished.

The CCS had 21 members (nineteen interfaith Christian ministers and two rabbis) when it went public on the *New York Times* front page.



## **1967 - 1971**

### **A Local Network Becomes a Movement**


Over the next several years, Rev. Moody transformed CCS from a local New York City initiative to a movement that spanned the nation. Within its first year, CCS drew 1,400 members nationwide.

CCS members were folks like Rev. Tom Davis, a United Church of Christ minister who worked as a chaplain at a women's college and helped pregnant students talk to their parents and locate providers, and Rev. Peggy Howland, a Presbyterian minister and one of the few ordained women at the time. Even prior to the CCS, Rev. Howland had accompanied one college student to Puerto Rico for an abortion with a trusted provider, making clandestine arrangements in collaboration with the student's parents and a fellow minister.



## **April 1971 A National Conference**

Rev. Moody and Arlene Carmen held a national conference of CCS counselors at their church, Judson Memorial. Their ongoing work included producing a newsletter, encouraging public education and urging recruitment and training of new clergy counselors.



## **January 1973 The Roe V. Wade Decision**

More than 1,000 clergy members nationwide from various denominations were participating in CCS by the time the landmark Roe decision made abortions legal. Clergy had joined from congregations and college campuses in states such as Michigan, Missouri, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Massachusetts.

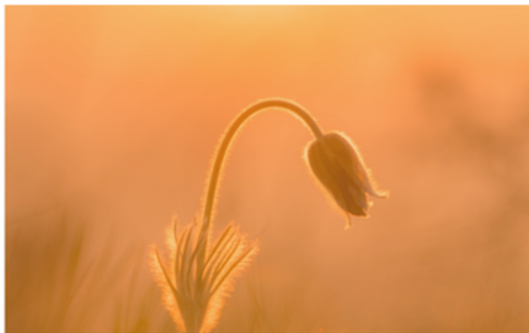


## **Summer 1973 A Step Toward Today's RCRC**

**While some faith groups quickly moved to oppose Roe v. Wade, mainline Protestant and Jewish denominations began organizing to defend it. Their first meeting at the United Methodist Building in Washington, D.C., led to formation of the Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights (RCAR), later renamed RCRC.**

# Abortions Welcome

Abortions Welcome is a digital resource that we created and launched in 2022 as an affirming and compassionate spiritual companion for people before, during, and after abortion.



## **Prayer for wholeness**

*Teach me now to be like the leaves.*



## **Spell of protection before going to the clinic**

*Be with me as I remember the sovereignty and wholeness of my body.*

In a sea of religious anti-abortion extremism, our site is meant to be a resting place, a sacred space of comfort and care for people on their abortion journeys.

In 2023, RCRC worked with Emma Thomas, a student at Harvard Divinity School who serves as an abortion doula, to update and expand the offerings on Abortions Welcome to reflect the ever-evolving needs of abortion seekers in a post-Roe world. The site now has four additional original resources, including blessings, prayers, and rituals, that reflect the current reality of abortion access in the United States. Abortions Welcome's reach continues to expand. Our Instagram account gained over 1,000 followers, and more than 11,000 people visited the site this year.

# Spiritual Youth for Reproductive Freedom

We continue to revive and reimagine this youth leadership and organizing program, which engages students and young people in spiritually-based pro-choice activism grounded in a deep understanding of justice (including reproductive justice) issues and their intersections with religion and spirituality. In the past year, we've heard from a number of students from campuses across the country with interest in joining RCRC's work in some way, including Georgetown University, Union Seminary, Yale Divinity School, Lutheran School of Theology, and the Medical School at the University of Alabama.

One of the partners that has emerged this past year is the Michigan Organization for Adolescent Sexual Health (MOASH). RCRC provided training and technical assistance to their staff as they prepared to develop their first faith-oriented youth advisory council called MY Faith which is now up and running with 15 youth from Michigan. We worked with MOASH on its fall programming, and there is continued interest in deepening this partnership, especially around abortion storytelling and creating sacred space. MOASH is a great example of a group of young people engaging with the kind of work that we do at RCRC, and they're especially interested in how they can talk about religious freedom, even as a secular organization, in support of their faithful youth advocates.

# Speaking

Building on the momentum of increased media visibility in 2022, Rev. Katey Zeh leveraged her thought leadership work and media connections to amplify the work of RCRC through speaking engagements and interviews.



In 2023 she served as the keynote speaker and featured panelist for three major conferences: the eighth annual Diane and Adam E. Max Conference on Women's History at the New-York Historical Society, the Katherine M. Bray Women's Leadership Conference at Davidson College, and the inaugural interfaith symposium on reproductive freedom held at the Church of Reconciliation in Chapel Hill, NC.

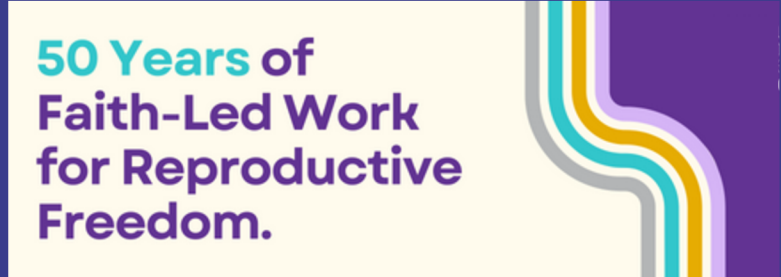
Throughout the year, RCRC was featured in interviews with USA Today, Newsweek, Sojourners, Cardinal & Pine, and The Christian Century.

The Newsweek logo, featuring the word "Newsweek" in a white, bold, sans-serif font, centered on a solid red rectangular background.The Sojourners logo, featuring the words "SO" and "JO" stacked vertically in a white, bold, sans-serif font, centered on a solid black rectangular background.The Christian Century logo, featuring the words "The Christian Century" in a white, serif font, centered on a solid orange rectangular background.The USA Today logo, featuring a solid blue circle to the left of the words "USA" and "TODAY" stacked vertically in a bold, black, sans-serif font, centered on a white rectangular background.

# Honoring Our 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

Given the current reproductive crisis in the wake of the overturn of Roe, we knew that celebrating our 50th

anniversary would need to be nuanced. Rather than hold an in-person event, which would have been costly and logistically challenging, we decided to honor our anniversary through telling the story of who RCRC has been and how that informs who we are now. Throughout the year, we have shared with our supporters various key moments throughout our 50 years, highlighting some of the early accomplishments of the organization that are less familiar to newer subscribers. We also capped off the year with a series of storytelling “spotlights” that featured the personal stories and contributions of key leaders throughout RCRC’s 50 year history.



# Gratitude

## Major Donors

**Sandra Angotti  
Phoebe Bender  
Barbara B. Blake  
David Skopin &  
Natalee Braun  
Carolyn Bronston  
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Nancy Drennen  
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## **Foundations**

**The David and Lucille Packard Foundation**

**Martin and Brown Foundation**

**Reynolds Family Foundation**

**Stephen M. and Lucia H. Bailey Family Foundation**

## **Trusts & Funds**

**The Green Fund, Inc.**

## **Congregations**

**Sunnyvale Presbyterian Church**

**Prince of Peace Lutheran Church**

**United Church of Christ**

## **Partners**

**Planned Parenthood Federation of America**

# 2023 FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

**2023 Support and Revenues**  
**\$800, 657**

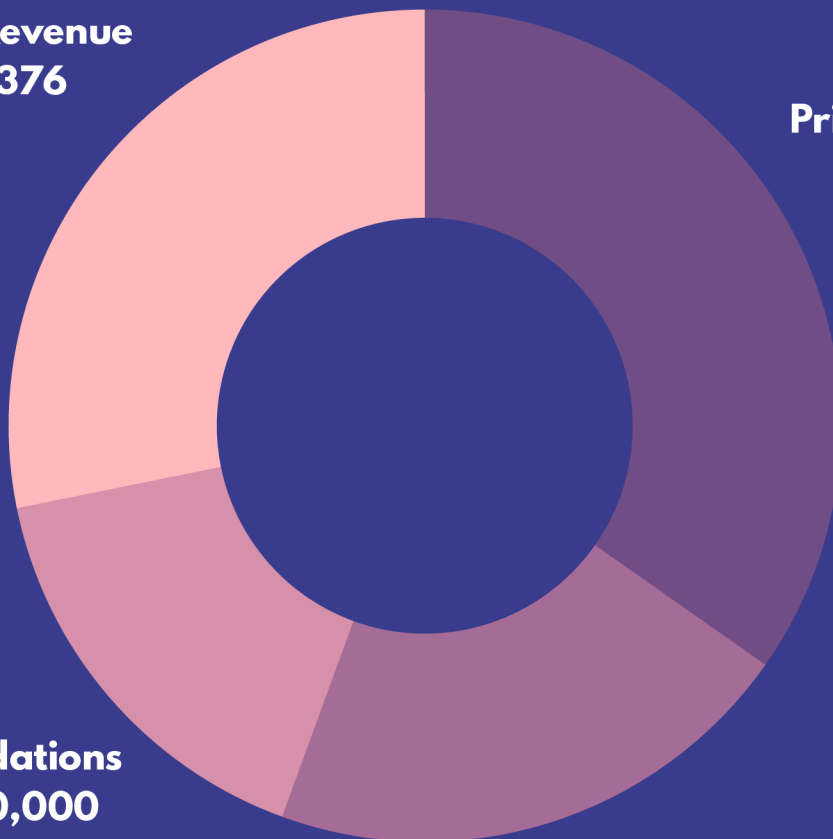
**Prior Yr. Revenue**  
**\$225,376**

**Private Individuals**  
**\$277,874**

**Misc.**  
**\$800**

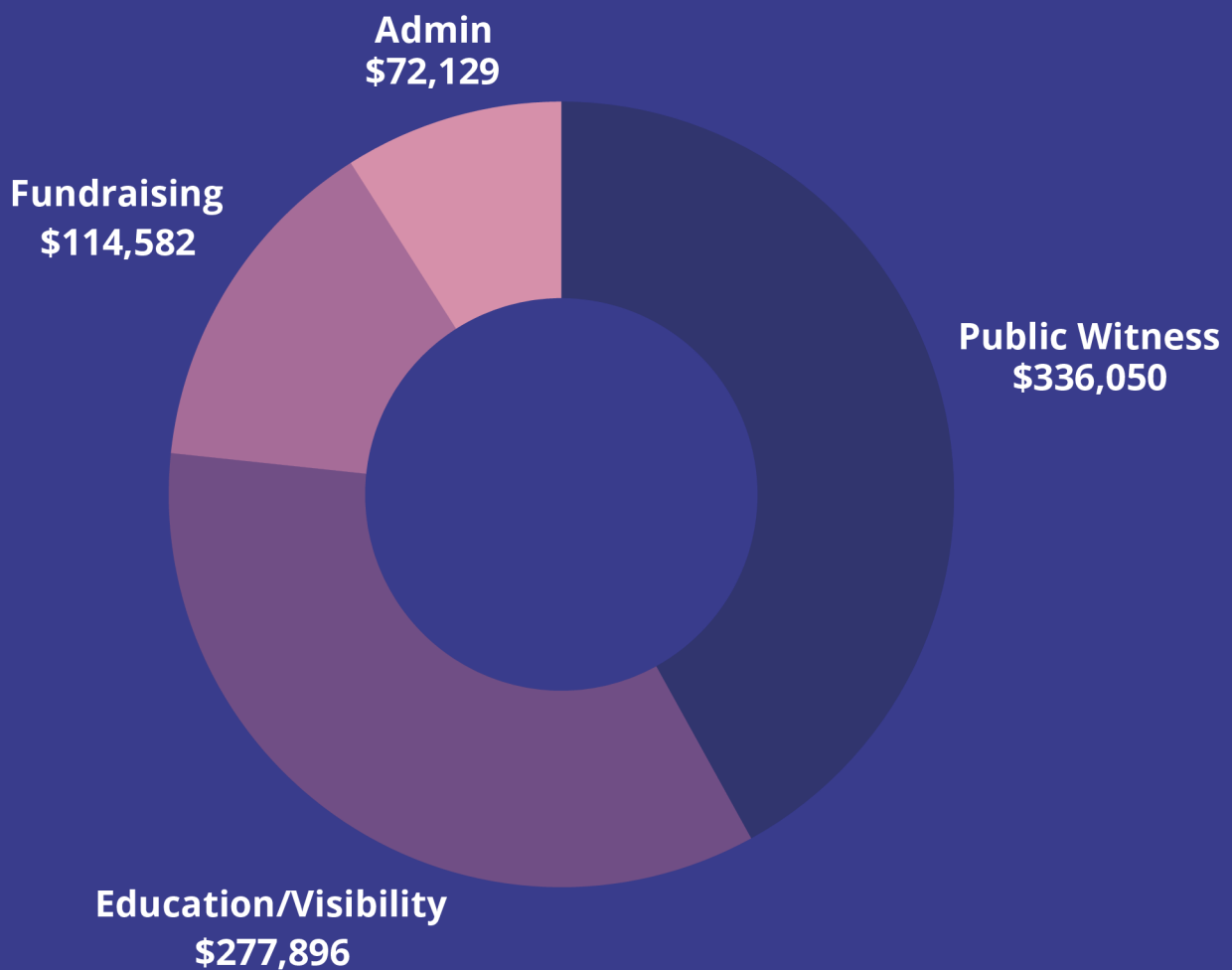
**Bequests**  
**\$166,607**

**Foundations**  
**\$130,000**



# 2023 FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

**2023 Expenses**  
**\$800,657**



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*Director of Communications and Outreach*

**Carolyn Miller**

*Chief Operating Officer*

**Rev. Katey Zeh**

*Chief Executive Officer*