

The Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice uses faith-based sexuality education in South Africa “Keeping It Real!” program

The Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice launched our South Africa Initiative four years ago to share our unique and well-regarded faith-based comprehensive sexuality dialogue model with South African teens. Our National Black Church Initiative’s “Keeping It Real!” (KIR) curriculum and best practices have been applied in South Africa to encourage behavior change among teens. South African youth, clergy and lay leaders have embraced our training as a practical approach that helps to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS, teen pregnancy and sexually-transmitted infections among youth and empower them by increasing their self-esteem and strengthening their feelings of self-worth. Our 7-session model increases the influence of faith communities in young people’s education and choices about sexuality. Our program is a useful, theologically-grounded approach to addressing reproductive health issues at a critical time in teens’ sexual development.

Our South Africa Initiative has generated steady and measurable progress and continued to make solid inroads into sexuality education for South African teens. Through this program, we are able to bridge gaps, create platforms for dialogue and provide a voice for these youth, many of whom are facing poverty, ill treatment, rejection, abuse and neglect. Some selected accomplishments are listed below.

- We have taken advantage of many opportunities to reach large groups of teens and clergy. For example, the Church of the Resurrection provided the “KIR!” program for their confirmation candidates, which included 120 teens who graduated from our program this year. After publicity received through the *Athlone News*, the Assembly of God, Nyanga requested further information and then facilitator training for church members, through an interpreter, since all were Xhosa speaking. We also addressed 40 churches (30 pastors and 400 lay leaders) at the District Youth Convention for the AME Church of Cape Town.
- Because of our network of contacts and extensive outreach to churches, community organizations and health providers, “KIR!” is often the preferred referral for churches and other organizations who request sexuality training. For example, we have introduced “KIR!” at youth forums for the YMCA in Cape Town, which has its own sexuality program. The YMCA refers churches to our South Africa Initiative because they predominately work with high schools.
- Our exhibit and additional promotion through local newspapers and radio stations helped us reach more than 22,000 Christian leaders and Pastors at the World Hope Pastors and Leadership conference at the Good Hope Centre in Cape Town this year. Because of our participation, we have held 4 facilitator training sessions and 27 introductory sessions since the conference.
- We continue to emphasize comprehensive sexuality education in our “KIR!” program, while we also build teens’ awareness of their options and enhance their self-respect and self-esteem. Much of the focus with teens in South Africa is HIV prevention, but the “KIR!” program also teaches basics such as establishing healthy relationships and making good decisions, while also offering motivation and guidance.

The South Africa Initiative has continued to use a straightforward and practical approach to address HIV/AIDS, teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases as well as peer pressure and sexual coercion and other obstacles for South African teens. We are pleased to see “Keeping It Real!” make such steady progress and continue as a definite catalyst for change. We will continue to work with South African youth to help them successfully negotiate this important developmental stage of life.

Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice Launches Clergy Institute

The Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC) launched its first Clergy Leadership Institute for Reproductive Justice in September, which included a briefing for members of Congress. The Institute aims to bring pro-choice religious perspectives to the public debate on abortion, contraception, and sexuality education. Christian and Jewish clergy explored the topic of “Religion and Reproductive Justice” at the briefing, held in cooperation with Congresswoman Louise Slaughter of New York, a co-chair of the Bipartisan Congressional Pro-Choice Caucus.

Fifteen clergy from throughout the nation were selected to take part in the institute, a two-day educational and leadership program for religious leaders who are advocates for reproductive choice.

Well-informed religious leaders have successfully dispelled the misperception that to be religious is to be anti-choice. They have also made progress in re-shaping the debate about abortion to focus on respect for decisions of conscience and for women’s moral agency. The Institute will expand the corps of pro-choice religious leaders who are educating the public about contraception, sexuality education, abortion, and reproductive healthcare.

The Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC) is the national coalition of religious organizations with officially adopted positions in support of reproductive choice on religious grounds. Members include agencies of the Presbyterian Church (USA), United Church of Christ, and United Methodist Church, the Episcopal Church, the Unitarian Universalist Association, Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist Judaism, and Catholics for a Free Choice and other independent religious organizations.