

Addressing Teen Pregnancy

A Resource for the Faith Community

June 18, 2008

According to the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, at least two conclusions can be drawn from the recently conducted survey, *With One Voice 2007*. First, it is clear that most young people make decisions about sex based not just on what is safe but also on what they believe is right. Second, there is a real opportunity for religious leaders and faith communities to do more to help young people on this front – based on the strong support of adults and growing interest of teens. In the *With One Voice 2007* survey, the National Campaign discovered:

- The overwhelming majority of teens (71%) and adults (65%) believe that religious leaders and groups should be doing more to help prevent teen pregnancy.

Bridging the Divide: Involving the Faith Community in Teen Pregnancy Prevention recognizes that Faith leaders and religious organizations are in a unique position to make a difference in preventing teen pregnancy:

- Research and survey data both show that religious faith and a strong moral sense play important roles in protecting young people from too-early sexual activity, teen pregnancy, and other risky behaviors.
- Research finds that teens whose parents hold strong religious beliefs or attend religious services frequently are less likely to have sex before age 18 than their peers whose parents have religious beliefs that are not as strong or do not attend religious services as frequently. Similarly, teens who report that their peers attend religious services regularly are less likely to have sex before age 18 than teens whose peers do not.
- In a nationally representative survey, sixty-four percent of teens report morals and values are equally important as health information and services in influencing teen sexual behavior, while nearly one-quarter of teens (23%) say that morals and values are more influential.
- When asked *who* most influences teens' sexual decisions, however, only 7 percent of teens (and 1 percent of adults) said ministers, rabbis, or other religious leaders.
- This disconnect does not suggest that teens and their parents do not want faith leaders to be involved on this issue — in fact, just the opposite is true. The overwhelming majority of teens (76%) and adults (64%) want more involvement from churches and other houses of worship in teen pregnancy prevention, according to National Campaign polling. In the same nationally representative survey that over-sampled Latino teens and adults, the

overwhelming majority of Latino teens (82%) wish faith leaders and religious communities were doing more to help prevent teen pregnancy.

- A federal survey found that for the increasing proportion of teens who report not being sexually active, the most common reason teens gave for delaying sex was because it was against their religion or moral values (38% of girls and 31% of boys) – more important than not wanting to get pregnant, get a disease, and other reasons.
- And, when the National Campaign asked a teen survey question on its website about which types of things would best help parents discuss sex, love, and relationships with their children, the (non-scientific) response that got the overwhelming majority of votes was “religious leaders” (65% responded this way, compared to no more than 11% for any of the other answers).

Nine Tips to Help Faith Communities and Leaders Address Teen Pregnancy;

- 1) Address the need teens have for **spiritual fulfillment** and offer them answers to the many challenging problems they face.
- 2) **Encourage parents** to talk with their children about sex and morality within the context of your faith tradition.
- 3) **Enlist adults** in your faith community to help young people.
- 4) Make sure children and teenagers in your faith community understand what your **faith tradition** says about sex, love, and marriage in general and teen pregnancy, in particular. Use clear and unambiguous language.
- 5) Learn about **contemporary youth culture** – what your young people are reading, listening to, watching, and doing.
- 6) Organize supervised **group activities** for teenagers in your faith community.
- 7) **Reach out** to teenagers who are not involved in any faith community.
- 8) **Celebrate** achievement and excellence.
- 9) Reach out to **other faith communities**, neighborhoods organizations, and institutions that work with young people.

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