

All in the Same Boat: Justice for Reproductive Health and Same-Sex Love
Welcome and Introduction by Kaye McSpadden
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Welcome to All in the Same Boat: Justice for Reproductive Health and Same-Sex Love, A Public Forum and Dialogue. I am Kaye McSpadden, President of the Indiana Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice. We are proud to be sponsoring this unique event today and we are happy that you came

What brought us here today to engage in an exploration of the commonalities between reproductive rights and gay rights? The idea was born as a result of three developments of the past couple of years, and the questions that arose from these developments.

First is the influence of George Lakoff. How many of you are familiar with George Lakoff and the progressive think-tank he founded, the Rockridge Institute? Lakoff is a linguist who has done some important work in recent years analyzing political and social movements and the way people communicate and frame their ideas. Lakoff says that one of the problems of liberals and progressives is that we are too fragmented and issue-oriented. Right-wing conservatives tend to be more cohesive, working across various social issues, grounded in a single unifying principle. For instance, you're more likely to find one single right-wing organization that will engage on many different fronts (such as abortion, gay rights, religion in the schools, and so forth), whereas liberals will have 10 different organizations -- one working on reproductive rights, one working on gay rights, one working on separation of church and state, and so on. According to Lakoff, this fragmentation weakens our strength and effectiveness. More importantly, it ignores the possibility that, like right-wing conservatives, we may in fact, have a common message based on common values. Is it possible that we share a common principle that cuts across all the various issues?

Second, last year, in an attempt to control who gets to be a parent and who doesn't, an Indiana legislator proposed a bill that would require that people who need to use assisted reproductive services such as in vitro fertilization would first have to apply for approval. And of course, only heterosexuals would be approved. All of a sudden, we were confronted with legislation that encompassed both gay rights and reproductive rights. People in both gay rights and pro-choice groups found themselves working together to fight this outrageous proposal. (And we did so successfully, I might add.) Is it possible that our efforts would be stronger and more effective if we found more areas in which we could work together?

Third, new national and international initiatives are beginning to explore the idea that reproductive rights and gay rights are very closely related. Recently, the idea was advanced in an initiative called "mappingourrights." Mappingourrights is a partnership of 3 groups: Ipas (an international reproductive rights org), the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force, and the SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Health Collective. The highlight of this new initiative is a website which advances the idea that "issues of sexual and reproductive rights are inherently linked together and must be approached holistically." Furthermore, this project evaluates and ranks the states according to a variety of criteria that include laws, services, and public policy relating to both reproductive health and gay issues. Using these criteria, Indiana is currently ranked the 47th worst in the nation. Another notable initiative along these lines is the Religious Institute, a group begun by Rev. Debra Haffner. The work of the Religious Institute, including the stunning "Religious Declaration on Sexual Morality, Justice, and Healing" addresses the religious dimensions of sexuality, including both issues of reproduction and sexual orientation, and calls for understanding and justice in both. There are copies of the Declaration on the back table, and, I might add, the declaration has been signed by thousands of clergy across the nation, including many right here in Indiana. So, is it possible that there are common principles of faith that can guide us as we think about both reproductive rights and gay rights?

These are some of the questions which led us to organize today's session. Since we were founded three years ago, the Indiana RCRC has encouraged people to think about vital issues in new ways, and so... when we realized what a golden opportunity we had with Mary Hunt in town, we knew this was the right moment to push the envelope a bit. Mary E. Hunt is a distinguished theologian with impressive accomplishments in BOTH the areas of reproductive rights and gay rights. Mary is the co-founder and co-director of WATER, the Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual in Silver Spring, Maryland. Mary is the author of several publications and serves on several editorial boards. Also, she is a member of the Society for Christian Ethics and the American Academy of Religion where she co-chaired the Women and Religion Section. Mary is also on several advisory boards, including one for the Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Religious Archives Network. Please welcome Mary Hunt.

Rev. Richard Clough is the senior pastor at First Congregational United Church of Christ, Indianapolis. Rev. Clough's congregation is notable because (1) it is an open and affirming congregation, welcoming people of all sexual orientations, and (2) it offers a strong comprehensive sexuality education program for all ages. Rev. Clough spoke forcefully and eloquently about the need for comprehensive sex ed at the "Prevention Now" Rally which was held at the Statehouse last February. Rev. Clough, we're thrilled that you were able to be with us today.

Patricia Boling is an associate professor of political science at Purdue University. With her Masters and a PhD degrees from University of California Berkeley, Pat has specialized in areas relating to women's studies and feminist democratic theory. Her research has focused on how problems rooted in private life (such as the family, sexuality, reproductive matters and intimate relationship) come to be understood as political issues. Thank you, Pat, for being with us today.

Dan Funk is the executive director of ICON, Indiana Interfaith Coalition on Nondiscrimination.