

*From "Prevention Now," Rally held on 2/8/2007 at the Indiana Statehouse, sponsored by HAPA (Health Access and Privacy Alliance). The Indiana Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice is a member of HAPA.*

### **Remarks by Rev. Richard Clough**

As a twelve year old boy, I participated in a comprehensive sexuality education program which had a great impact on me. The program was wide-ranging and in-depth. It covered anatomy, pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. It met often - in fact the sessions were held twice each weekday. Session A began at 7:45 when I got on the school bus. Session B took place in the same classroom on the way home. My teachers were 15 and 16 year old boys who, leering and sneering, gave me the benefit of their collective wisdom and knowledge.

I had a certain skepticism toward these teachers. I doubted their expertise in this area. However I had nothing else to go on. My parents were silent on the topic. My school had nothing to say and, most significantly, my church offered no information or guidance. Thus, while I was skeptical, these leering, sneering teenagers were my only source of information.

As it turned out, my youthful teachers were wrong on many matters. And not just wrong but colossally wrong. If I were to tell you some of the things I believed about, for example, a woman's anatomy or about pregnancy, you would be highly amused. In fact, you would roar with laughter. Pride prevents me from telling you about any of them but – trust me – you'd enjoy them immensely.

As I grew older, I discovered these errors bit by bit. Many misconceptions were easily corrected by simply replacing one presumed fact with another more accurate one. But some errors are not so easily corrected. My 15 and 16 year old teachers, with my parents, my school and my church as silent co-conspirators, taught me that sex was dirty. Through their leering and sneering, or their silence, they taught me that sexuality was something to be ashamed of. They taught me that the urges that I and every person experienced were repugnant and the cause of enormous guilt. These attitudes are not nearly so easy to correct.

We see the results of this unhealthy attitude in the childish snickering of television sitcoms, in violence against women and gays, and in the exploitation of people in many ways for the sexual gratification of others.

We at First Congregational United Church of Christ believe we can do better and we certainly owe it to our children to do so. About six years ago, we began to teach a comprehensive sexuality program call "Our Owl Lives". It offers a healthy, wholesome faith-based approach to sexuality.

At the core of this program is the belief that sexuality is a gift of God. God has created us as sexual beings and that is good. Our sexuality is not something of which we should be

ashamed. There is no inherent guilt in being sexual beings. It is how God has created us and it is to be celebrated.

Our Whole Lives understand that our sexuality is a part of life from the moment of birth to the day of our death. Thus age appropriate education is provided for small children and all ages. It teaches respect for others and their sexuality.

It is also based on an important assumption. That is that sound moral choices are not made on the basis on ignorance. Sound moral choices are not well made when based on guilt or fear. Rather, moral choices are best made with accurate information.

We believe our OWL program will help our children and youth to grow physically, socially, emotionally and spiritually. We believe it will help them grow into the wonderful and beautiful people that God intends them to be.

Thank you for your support of information over ignorance and of knowledge over fear. Thank you for your support of a healthy approach to sexuality and thank you for your support of laws and policies that allow this to happen.