

Conversations with Clergy

Wisdom in the Bible, Wisdom in the Clinic

By Reverend Dr. Beverly Dale



Reverend Dale is General Minister and President of the Christian Association at the University of Pennsylvania, where her sex-positive ministry is well-known. Her sexuality ministry, *Passion Works*, is at <http://passionworks.upennca.org/>. You can also watch her on YouTube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DKtTUVNRwtY&eurl> and hear podcasts at *Hot Bod Podcasts* <http://passionworks.upennca.org/index.php?id=448>.

In this essay, she speaks about the biblical understanding of wisdom and the wisdom she saw in the women she worked with as a Planned Parenthood volunteer chaplain.

The author of a letter to Philippi prays that we might “discern what is best” and, in that process, be “blameless before God.” (Philippians 1:10) But blameless does not mean finding the “right” answer. We stand blameless after we have struggled, grappled and discerned and

come to a resolution to the best of our abilities. God’s love doesn’t come with any strings attached. It is not the outcome of our grappling so much as the fact that we do the best that we can.

One day my 40-year-old mother announced to her two teenagers and two preteens that she was pregnant; we were stunned! No one had expected our family to change nor, frankly, did we want it to. Although abortions were legal by this time, my mother’s ancestry was filled with stories of women giving birth to large numbers of children throughout their reproductive years. She considered her surprise pregnancy at this age simply part of being a married woman. She accepted this reality. We would just have to adjust.

That is how I ended up having a sister and a brother (he came along two years later) near the age of my children. My mother and I were each changing diapers at the same time on our own children. Now, do I love my siblings from this second family? Of course. Do I wish they had never been born? Of course not. Does my mother regret having her children spaced into two families? Or regret having six children instead of four? Not at all. She chose to readjust her life to accommodate these changing realities.

One afternoon while I was serving as a volunteer chaplain at Planned Parenthood I was surprised to meet two grandmothers, both in their 40s, who had thought they were perimenopausal. To their great surprise and chagrin, they were not. After the abortion procedures I asked each one if she had made the right decision. The first one quickly said, “Absolutely! I have several grandchildren I want to play with, I’m the babysitter for one of them.” The second grandmother responded, “Oh, my! Yes! I am in the midst of planning for my daughter’s big wedding. I am making her dress. This is the biggest day of her life. It should

We stand blameless after we have struggled, grappled and discerned and come to a resolution to the best of our abilities. God’s love doesn’t come with any strings attached. It is not the outcome of our grappling so much as the fact that we do the best that we can.

be all about her. I couldn’t be pregnant at this time for her. Yes, it was the right choice for me ...even if it’s not one I thought I would ever have to make.” It was clear each woman had assessed what she felt was best for her and her other children, and, in each case, her grandchildren. With no regrets, each had chosen to have an abortion.

The stereotype of women who seek to terminate a pregnancy is that of self-absorbed, irresponsible yet sexually active young, single women unwilling to assume the responsibilities of adulthood. But according to the Guttmacher Institute over one third of the women who seek abortions are married women who, for a variety of reasons, believe that adding to the size of their family at this time would be detrimental for themselves, their children, or the family as a whole. Patients at the clinic have told me they feared another child would place too large of a burden on an already fragile marriage. Several have indicated

their husbands had lost their jobs and though they did want children, they simply didn't have the resources for a newborn at the time.

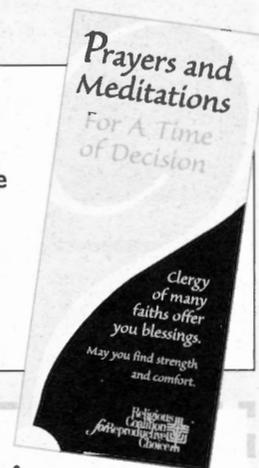
Which of these grandmothers made a morally defensible decision? The one who chose to adapt to the unexpected changes of life's circumstances and start over with her second family? Or those who chose not to return to a life of diapers and baby food

so they could devote themselves exclusively to being grandmothers? We are inclined to believe that as we age we may make wiser choices. So, is it possible that having already experienced child rearing and child loving, each of these three women was being wise, one to embrace motherhood again and the other two to refuse?

Each of these grappled with their decisions and yet each came to different solu-

tions. Those of us who are not in that same struggle do not grapple with their "why?" questions nor do we have insights into the limits of their family, resources, or their own capabilities. Those of us on the outside of the struggle are not privy to the wisdom that comes to those grappling with the questions. And since God gives generously without finding fault, why do we?

Many women have told RCRC that the prayers and blessings of clergy provided strength and comfort when they faced an unintended pregnancy. Now, RCRC has collected prayers and meditations from Christian, Jewish, Unitarian Universalist, Islamic and Earth-Centered traditions in a brochure that will be available to clinics, medical offices, and counselors. **"Prayers and Meditations for a Time of Decision"** was developed by clergy who have provided pastoral counseling for women and couples. Contact info@rcrc.org for information about our newest brochure and our other brochures for counselors and clinics.



Support RCRC with Pro-Choice, Pro-Faith Resources!

Show Your Support!

- Pro-Faith, Pro-Family, Pro-Choice buttons (2" round)
 - Pro-Faith, Pro-Family, Pro-Choice bumpersticker
- Both of the above: Suggested \$2 donation each

Educational Resources

- Words of Choice—a 24-page glossary of pro-choice language (\$5)
- Education Series Kit (\$10)
- Speak Out for Choice Activist Kit (\$5)

Contributions

- I'm enclosing a special contribution of \$_____.
- Send me information about supporting the Religious Coalition through my will or other planned giving strategy.
- Contact me with more information about becoming a monthly donor.

You can also contribute on our convenient, secure online service at www.rcrc.org.

Resources

- Send me *My Sisters' Keeper* advocacy toolkit, including a free poster
- Send me your list of publications and resources.
- Sign me up for action alerts. *
- Send me the RCRC email newsletter. *
* My email address is: _____
- Tell me about Spiritual Youth for Reproductive Freedom (SYRF).
- I'd like information about "Keeping It Real!" the Christian sexuality education curriculum for African-American youth ages 13 to 17.
- I'm interested in joining the Clergy for Choice Network.
- I'm interested in joining Seminarians for Choice.

Please mail this form, along with payment, in the enclosed envelope. Thank you for your support of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice!

For more RCRC resources, or to order online, visit our online store at www.rcrc.org/issues/resources.cfm or email info@rcrc.org