Sally Steenland Headshot

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**It's Time to Talk**

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All too often, abortion debates focus almost exclusively on the potential life growing inside a pregnant woman, rather than on the woman herself. It sometimes seems that a woman, upon becoming pregnant, ceases to be a full and complex human being. Instead, the fertilized egg, zygote or embryo in her uterus is valued more highly than her actual life.

This happened recently in Texas, where a brain-dead pregnant woman was put on life support for weeks against her own [wishes](http://www.nbcnews.com/id/54187680/ns/us_news/#.UvEg7LRSCzY) and those of her husband and parents. [Marlise Muñoz](http://thinkprogress.org/health/2014/01/24/3205351/marlise-munoz-off-life-support/) was 14 weeks pregnant when she collapsed on the kitchen floor and suffered [oxygen deprivation to](http://abcnews.go.com/Health/husband-pregnant-wife-off-life-support/story?id=21291086) the brain. Because she was pregnant, machines kept her heart and lungs working in order to keep her fetus alive. Only after tests revealed severe fetal "abnormalities" did a judge overrule the hospital's directive and order Muñoz to be disconnected from the machines.

Such a tragic incident spotlights the horrible impact of [intrusive laws](http://www.prochoice.org/about_abortion/facts/trap_laws.html) that claim to be pro-life but actually trample on the lives of women and their families. Unfortunately, [many people](http://www.frc.org/) who promote these laws often claim religion as their justification.

Given this connection, one might assume that to be religious is to be anti-choice -- and conversely, that one cannot be both a person of faith and a supporter of abortion care. But in reality, [people of faith](http://thinkprogress.org/health/2013/01/17/1461611/religious-support-roe-v-wade/) have long supported a woman's right to make the complex decision about whether to have a child, trusting that she will discern what is best for her. Many Christian [religions](http://rcrc.org/homepage/perspectives/), as well as Judaism and other faiths, consider reproductive health care to be a justice issue. And [7 out of 10](http://www.guttmacher.org/in-the-know/characteristics.html) women who get abortions are religious.

Even so, the well-financed muscle and organized might of the [anti-choice movement](http://prolifeaction.org/links.php) has over the years overpowered supportive faith voices. Anti-choice voices have tried to [monopolize morality](http://www.focusonthefamily.com/radio.aspx?ID=%7bC812EA32-3F99-4630-AC8A-0116231D8C5B%7d) and God, even as they increasingly jeopardize a woman's health by making it very [difficult](http://reproductiverights.org/en/project/targeted-regulation-of-abortion-providers-trap) for her to get the health care she needs.

But last week marked a change in the public debate. The [Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice](http://rcrc.org/homepage/perspectives/), or RCRC, launched the [It's Time](http://rcrc.org/homepage/its-time/) Campaign, which aims to promote respectful, thoughtful conversations around the country about religion and abortion, religion and sexuality and religion and justice. RCRC's [website](http://rcrc.org/homepage/its-time/) includes tips on how to have conversations that will promote long-lasting change; tools on how a woman can tell her own abortion story, anonymously if she so chooses; and action steps for advocates.

At the press conference that launched the campaign, Rabbi Jessica Kirschner [said](http://rcrc.org/homepage/its-time/campaign-launch/rabbi-jessica-kirschner-its-time-to-talk-about-religion/):

**It's time to tell the truth: that most people of faith in this country, like the majority of Americans overall, want families and individuals to have access to contraception, sexuality education, and reproductive health care, including abortion. There is no monolithic religious opinion about contraception, abortion, or sex education. There are many religious opinions and many religious people, and for far too long the many have been shouted down by strident voices who leave no space for nuance, difference, or conversation.**

RCRC's board chair, Rev. Dr. Alethea Smith-Withers, also spoke at the press conference, describing the organization's 41-year history of faithful advocacy and heralding its increasingly prominent presence in debates on contraception, abortion, religious liberty and more. She [said](http://rcrc.org/homepage/its-time/campaign-launch/rev-dr-alethea-smith-withers-intro-its-time-to-change-the-conversation/):

**We've worn robes, yarmulkes, collars, shawls, held prayer cloths and rosaries as we have prayed in private and prayed in the public square for reproductive justice. We have spoken with our elected leaders, we've voted and helped others to register and vote, we've rallied and marched, held summits, taught classes, provided all-options counseling, provided peaceful presence at abortion clinics and shared our personal and cultural stories. ... RCRC's weapons of choice have always been the time-honored virtues of faith, respect, peace, compassion, and love.**

Let us hope that these weapons prove mightier than those of shaming, divisiveness, simplistic theology, violence and judgment. People of faith are strong, valuable allies in the fight for women's reproductive health and rights. Working together, we can stop the blaming and punishment of women and create a society that truly respects women and the profoundly moral decisions they make regarding when and whether to become a parent.

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