

The Faith Aloud Story 2011

Faith Aloud is working to create shifts in the engagement of young women and LGBTQ persons in the fight for reproductive justice.

Faith Aloud is becoming more well known for its support for LGBT issues. Young lesbians constitute at least half of our volunteers and activists. We have added about 60 new women under 30 to our constituency in the past 6 months. They find us through Facebook, through their women's studies programs, and through their friends. Young women are gaining skills in organization, team building, non-profit management, and advocacy.

34 clergy and 6 lay leaders attended a breakfast to learn ways to be more supportive of LGBTQ families. The breakfast was co-sponsored by Faith Aloud, PROMO, and ACLU-Eastern Missouri. The discussion included legal, legislative, personal, and liturgical information and action steps, and ended with signing a petition in support of a current ACLU lawsuit against the state of Missouri. Over 20 clergy signed the petition and some took petitions to gather signatures from their colleagues. The breakfast was held in a Baptist church in the St. Louis suburbs and attracted a wide range of clergy. Some are in congregations that are just beginning to have difficult conversations about fully welcoming LGBTQ families; others were able to share from many years' experience. Additional meetings are planned in other Missouri cities in August and September. The petition can also be signed online. <http://bit.ly/iHx1bl>

Faith Aloud is working to create shifts in Missouri public policy for the betterment of women.

Faith Aloud worked for hearings and passage of the CARE Act in the 2011 Missouri legislature and to defeat (again) all pharmacy refusal bills. We also worked hand-in-hand with our ally organizations to present legislators with accurate information about reproductive health and the disproportionate negative impact of current legislation upon young women, low-income women, and women of color. We co-sponsored a total of four Lobby Days and held one breakfast meeting for legislators during the 2011 legislative session.

We saw a huge improvement in attitude about emergency contraception from conservative legislators. Public opinion polls show support for access to emergency contraception and more Missouri hospitals (including Catholic hospitals) are offering EC in the ER. Women are better able to access EC and maintain personal autonomy over their reproductive lives.

We organized people of faith to attend hearings, sign petitions, participate in lobby days, and write letters to the editors of papers around the state.

Two clergy testified in legislative committee hearings. The star witness who testified in favor of the CARE Act, our focus legislation this year, was the Rev. Patricia Vollertsen, a decades-long friend of Faith Aloud. The CARE Act (Compassionate Assistance for Rape Emergencies) would require emergency contraception to be offered to women treated for rape in all hospital emergency rooms. After four years of hard work, this was the first time the bill was heard in committee. Rev. Vollertsen told the story of her disabled daughter, Amanda, who was raped, became pregnant, suffered life-threatening health problems, and had a late-term abortion. She convinced some very conservative politicians that the emergency room should have treated Amanda with emergency contraception. No vote was taken by the committee. Members

admitted they wanted to vote for it, but would face cuts in campaign contributions by Missouri Right to Life if they did. They worked with us to find some agreeable language, but ultimately, MO RTL blocked it. We still felt we had a victory, because we had a successful hearing that did change some minds. We will be working with legislators to try to get some of the anti-choice groups to “stand down” on this piece of legislation.

Although we are not directly involved in getting hospitals to implement EC in the ER policies, we believe our statewide media campaigns have helped to increase the number of hospitals in the state who have implemented such policies. The majority of Missouri hospitals now have EC policies, a dramatic increase from 2 years ago.

Faith Aloud worked directly with clergy in educating about emergency contraception and in mobilizing support for reproductive health and LGBTQ rights. Nine congregations posted information in their church bulletins or on their bulletin boards about emergency contraception. Three clergy gave pro-choice sermons close to the anniversary of Roe v. Wade. Five clergy attended a Lobby Day.

Faith Aloud is continually fighting to shift the public definition of progressive values to include people of faith.

Faith Aloud has engaged in a multi-media marketing plan that reached more than 200,000 Missouri women with information about emergency contraception and other reproductive justice concerns. The media included radio stories, LTEs, newsletters and letters, mass emails, [YouTube](#), [blogspot](#), [Facebook](#), and [Twitter](#). Media highlights are available here: <http://www.faithaloud.org/faith/faith-news.php>

Four distinct radio stories sent through the Missouri News Service between December 31, 2010-June 30, 2011 reached an estimated audience of 756,390. Our board members had four LTEs about emergency contraception in three newspapers: the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, the Joplin Independent, and the Kansas City Star.

Newspaper and online stories about Faith Aloud reached a peak of 89 articles in one 48-hour period when Faith Aloud clergy responded to Rep. Todd Akin's bigoted remark that "liberalism is hatred for God". Stories were posted from Seattle to Boston, in the Huffington Post and in small town papers in South Carolina. Every major newspaper and television station in Missouri ran the story. Several of our clergy were quoted in the stories. Our board president, the Rev. Krista Taves, was quoted in the Huffington Post and most frequently in other news sources. For the first time, Faith Aloud printed both a “Missouri” and a “National” version of our newsletter. 4000 copies were distributed in Missouri and 1200 went to supporters in other states. The newsletters can be accessed online:

Nine clergy attended the protest at Rep. Akin’s office. 30 clergy and over 300 people of faith signed the petition to Rep. Akin.

We currently have 1364 Facebook friends, an increase of 190 in 6 months, and we add new friends every week. Our Facebook community reaches people all over the world. A few active members post items regularly from Australia and England. Nearly half of our Facebook friends identify as LGBTQ.

We have a new volunteer who is helping us become more regular on our blog and Twitter. Her goal is to post something to Twitter 3 times a day, and to the blog 3 times a week. We have 189 Twitter followers and 8 Faith Aloud blog followers

Our YouTube channel continues to attract attention and we continue to add new videos. Current number of viewings is over 15,000, which is an astounding 50% increase in six months. Exhale promotes our video “For women who have had an abortion” to their callers, and the NAF hotline and independent abortion clinics promote the clergy counseling videos. We have 36 subscribers to our channel.

The three latest videos are media interviews with three of our clergy (the Rev. Kevin Cameron, the Rev. Jeffrey Whitman, and the Rev. Krista Taves) outside of Rep. Todd Akin’s office. A volunteer didn’t complete a new video on emergency contraception as planned, but we’re working with some new people to get it done.

Counseling

Thirty-two specially trained clergy volunteer their time to accept calls from women seeking spiritual counseling before or after an abortion. We receive about 10 calls per week for referrals and about 6 calls per weeks for counseling. The counseling calls in the past months have come from Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Tennessee, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Missouri, Iowa, North Dakota, Utah, Washington, Oregon, California, New Mexico, and Texas. Most of these are referred to us by clinics; some find us first on the web.

Our counselors and counselees have begun reporting their experiences in an anonymous online survey. We hope to use this information to continue to improve our training programs for clergy counselors. Training events are generally held in the fall months. We are currently speaking with people in Tulsa, Oklahoma and Cleveland, Ohio about providing trainings this fall. We are also turning our unique counseling training into an online course that anyone will be able to complete, wherever they live. This course will be live by the end of the summer.

Resources

In May we moved into a new office in downtown St. Louis. It provides us with plenty of storage and room to grow.

195 individuals have donated to Faith Aloud in 2011. The result of the greater funding enables us to pay for full-time staff. With more consistent staffing, we are able to do more messaging, recruiting of volunteers, tabling, and responding to callers. More women hear a friendly voice when they call us for counseling, and more activists receive prompt replies to their questions and requests. As a result, women are more confident in their decisions and networking between organizations happens more efficiently. We added two new major donors, with one giving a \$50,000 matching gift for our summer campaign. Grassroots fundraising was given a huge boost this year with this match. By the end of July we expect to raise \$100,000.

We have recently created a Faith Aloud ebay store to sell exclusive posters, t-shirts, and jewelry.