



SACReD

Spiritual Alliance of Communities
for Reproductive Dignity

A Progressive Faithful Response to the Loss of *Roe*—and More

May 3, 2022

Dear Colleagues,

The letter below is intended to guide and engage more people of faith in working for reproductive health, rights, and justice. Portions of it are directed especially to those who are part of predominantly white traditions and congregations, in the hope of better supporting the exhausted BIPOC+ leaders in our communities. Nearly everything in this letter was drafted weeks ago, and realistically could have been written months or possibly even years ago. We say this to point out that the work we are called to do has not changed since the leak of the draft Supreme Court opinion—we've known for years that the right-wing has sought to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, and that there were enough conservative justices to do it.

What has changed is that this likelihood is now less than two months away, and more people than ever are paying attention. This is a good thing, because we definitely need more people involved in this work! However, there can also be some downsides to a massive influx of energy. It is especially common for organizations that have been doing the work—especially those representing frontline communities (ie, individuals and groups with non-dominant identities)—to be overlooked or trampled on amidst the rush of new attention. So, while it is important for more people to get involved, it is also critically important that the involvement happens in ways that are accountable and sustainable as well as effective.

To put it bluntly, we need to manage the white savior complex. There are many helpful essays and resources on-line that can help people understand and avoid it, but here is a brief definition:

The white savior complex is an ideology that is acted upon when a white person, from a position of superiority, attempts to help or rescue a BIPOC person or community. Whether this is done consciously or unconsciously, people with this complex have the underlying belief that they know best or that they have skills that BIPOC people don't have, according to Savala Nolan, author of *Don't Let It Get You Down: Essays on Race, Gender, and the Body* and the director of the Thelton E. Henderson Center for Social Justice at UC Berkeley School of Law.¹

¹ Quoted in [What Is White Savior Complex, and Why Is It Harmful? Here's What Experts Say](#) By Colleen Murphy, published on Health.com September 21, 2021.

Understanding the Context

A key part of creating sustainable solidarity is understanding the larger context of a given situation. So, first, it is critical to understand that the *Roe v. Wade* decision does not guarantee access to abortion—it simply places limits on the restrictions that states can impose. Many Black, Brown, and Indigenous people, and people with low incomes, have always lacked sufficient access to abortion care. A rollback of *Roe* will make that worse, of course, but we need to acknowledge that there is a significant difference between having a legal right to something and actually being able to access it. Many frontline organizations have been calling attention to the lack of real access for years, with little support.

Second, it is important to recognize that the opposition to abortion access has always been about a lot more than abortion. It is about enforcing racism and white supremacy, patriarchy, and ruling class power. Some of the people working against access to abortion are, undoubtedly, doing so out of deeply held religious beliefs. But we also need to be mindful that there are others who are simply using abortion, and religion, as a political tool to win elections and wield political power.

The Larger Vision

Although much short-term work is needed to facilitate access to safe abortion care, it is critical to situate these efforts in a larger vision: the overall goal of this work is to change culture and policy so that all individuals and communities experience reproductive justice. As defined by [SisterSong, the Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective](#), this includes the human right and ability:

- To maintain personal bodily autonomy
- To have children
- To not to have children
- To parent children in safe and sustainable communities

This recognizes that what many individuals and communities need—especially those with BIPOC identities and people with low-incomes—is about so much more than just access to abortion. It is access to healthcare generally, living wages, education, food, transportation, and more. And reproductive justice is not just about the end goals of the work—it’s about how we approach the work. Again, according to SisterSong, to achieve reproductive justice we must:

- Analyze power systems
- Address intersecting oppressions
- Center the most marginalized
- Join together across issues and identities

Our work is about much more than abortion. It is about building a larger, stronger movement of people of faith dedicated to reproductive health, rights, and justice—and doing so in accountable, intersectional ways.

Taking Action

Of course, action is needed. Reaching out to local organizations and health centers that have been doing the work is an appropriate and logical first step. However, if these places have to field dozens and dozens of inquiries, that means they're focused on educating us rather than doing their work. So we suggest these as initial steps: (1) organize people in your own congregation, and (2) connect with other faith activists in your community and get yourselves organized as a group. Then one or two representatives from that group can reach out to local health clinics and organizations.

Ideally, you can connect with existing local and state faith-based organizations that are already doing this work so you do not need to build entirely new infrastructure. Unfortunately, the reality is that there has not been significant investment in this work in the last few decades, so many states do not currently have a faith organization with the capacity to lead this work. We believe that funding is likely to come, but also want to make sure that we are not taking resources from frontline groups. So please consider partnerships and collective efforts that allow different organizations to specialize for maximum benefit.

Support Teams in Access States

In states with safe and legal abortion access, support teams can be created in cities that have an abortion care provider, especially those near borders or transit centers. Their job is to provide hospitality and support before and/or after individuals visit a provider, such as:

1. Meeting people at travel centers (airports, bus, and/or train stations) and offering local transit.
2. Offering a secure and comfortable place to prepare and recover. Our sense is that people would prefer to be hosted by an organization (like a congregation) rather than a private home, but with sufficient vetting (and of course consent from the patient) a private home could work as well.

Ideally this would be in explicit partnership with the abortion care provider, but for various reasons some providers might not want to be directly involved.

Possible Actions for All Faith Communities

- **Self-Education**

- About reproductive health, rights, and especially reproductive justice generally.
- Spiritual/theological reflection about values and how to do the work in accountable ways
- About needed or potentially needed actions, including about self-managed medication abortion. [Faith Choice Ohio](#) offers excellent trainings.
- About legal and security considerations, including digital security.
- For anyone having direct contact with patients, training on trauma, racial justice, cultural sensitivity, and abortion positivity (ie, spiritual care free from judgment and shame) is required or at least strongly recommended. See <https://abortionswelcome.org/>

- **Fundraising**

- For woman of color-led reproductive justice groups like [SisterSong](#) and [SisterReach](#)
- For abortion access (directly and/or as donations to [abortion funds](#))

- **Organizing**

- Recruiting volunteers within and beyond the congregation
- Get involved with SACReD, the Spiritual Alliance of Communities for Reproductive Dignity, which is building a multi-racial, multi-faith movement of congregations across the country that publicly proclaim their support for reproductive dignity. It's so new that it doesn't have a full website, but you can sign up for future communications at <http://www.sacreddignity.org/>.

- **Advocacy**

- In the media and/or with elected officials