



SACReD

Spiritual Alliance of Communities
for Reproductive Dignity

The SACReD Story

Why SACReD and Why People of Faith?

SACReD exists because, as people of faith, we cannot abide the suffering and oppression caused by reproductive in-justice:

- The stripping of people's bodily autonomy and moral agency
- The inaccessibility of birth control, abortion, and maternal healthcare for so many people
- The meager wages and employment practices that don't support parenting
- The poverty, ill-health, racial/gender inequalities, and domestic violence stemming from lack of reproductive autonomy
- The over-policing and polluting of children's neighborhoods, especially in communities of color
- The soul-injuring indignity and shame heaped by religious institutions upon those choosing not, or unable, to procreate

These conditions are morally reprehensible, and we are spiritually stirred to end them.

We also reject a narrow, hollow theology of "life" that attempts to justify neglect of the moral concerns named above. A pre-nate, a developing life, is not yet a human person, but women and others capable of gestation are full human beings whose fundamental human rights should never be degraded by religion. We are crystal clear in our moral conviction, therefore, that Reproductive Justice must prevail throughout our nation and in a more thorough way than it ever has before. But this requires major collective action.

Social movements need both people and moral power, and our alliance and coalition partnerships bring exactly that. This starts with the recognition that certain religious groups and hijackers of religion have done a disproportionate amount of the damage to healthy sexuality and reproductive dignity in this country. Therefore, **religious people are uniquely positioned and have a disproportionate role to play in healing and justice creation.**

In this context, SACReD works with partners to create a religious movement that breaks the silence and stigma, holds courageous conversations, critically examines the intersection of religion and Reproductive Justice, and equips leaders to facilitate the work that is specifically ours as people of faith. **The SACReD alliance plays an essential role in the broader, long-term struggle for culture change and social transformation that will bring reproductive liberation for everybody and every body.**

[Our Origins](#)

Texas Freedom Network

SACReD was born out of the work of the Texas Freedom Network (TFN) and their faith project Just Texas: Faith Voices for Justice. In 2013, Texas saw the introduction of a bill called HB2, an omnibus anti-abortion bill filled with frivolous abortion restrictions. Despite the valiant thirteen-hour filibuster held by State Senator Wendy Davis to block it, the bill eventually passed into law, and over half of the abortion clinics in the state closed because they could not afford to meet the new, unnecessary standards.

Texas Freedom Network organized clergy from many denominations and religious traditions to testify during legislative sessions, but the clergy pushed to do more. They asked what would make the most impact? How can faith leaders move the needle?

Learning by Example

History is instructive. In the years before *Roe*, there was growing awareness that many of those seeking to end pregnancies, especially the less privileged, were being harmed and sometimes killed by unsafe abortions. Numerous leaders from several faiths formed the **Clergy Consultation Service (CCS) in 1967, which mobilized to help people access safe abortions.** So reproductive activism by religious people is not new, and efforts to once again provide faith-based direct support are growing. But the scale of the need must be addressed systemically. How to approach activism today?

The marriage equality movement provides a strategic lesson. Leading up to the 2015 watershed Supreme Court case *Obergefell v. Hodges*, legalizing marriage equality as the law of the land, we saw how the culture seemed to suddenly shift in support of LGBTQ+ dignity and human rights. But there was a long-term effort behind this change, in which people of faith organized and spoke out for inclusion, affirmation, and celebration of those in the LGBTQ+ community at the state level. Bold leaders built a **strong movement over 5 decades** to transform faith communities to take such a stance. And much of this work

happened through congregational education and designation programs that supported thoughtful consideration of core faith convictions alongside new understandings of sexuality and gender. When we recognize the full humanity and experiences of the people we already know and love in our communities, it's harder to hold onto a belief or political posture that oppresses them.

Reproductive Freedom Congregations Program

Inspired by both the CCS and by the faith-based, LGBTQ activists who developed congregational designations, such as Open and Affirming, Sonja Miller, Outreach and Faith Director, the Just Texas advisory board, and TFN staff developed the Reproductive Freedom Congregations designation. **Designations involve a process of education, critical reflection, and discernment, through which congregations usually eventually commit to take a public stance on an issue and join a broader network of like-minded faith communities. Resulting cultural and practical shifts benefit broader movements.** Miller, therefore, traveled around the state to over 100 congregations, opening the conversation to weave together faith stories and reproductive stories, free from shame, judgment, and stigma. Rev. Erika Ferguson and Rev. Angela Tyler-Williams joined the team a few years in, and together the team designated 25 congregations in Texas as Reproductive Freedom Congregations and started the process with over 100 more.

We should note here that **some congregations do not feel ready for or comfortable with a public "designation,"** but it is the learning and spiritual growth through the process that matter most. All who engage the process are valuable members of and can benefit a bigger alliance and movement in various ways.

A Beautiful, Intersectional, Multi-Faith Collaboration

As TFN did this work, friends and partners in other states noticed and recognized the educational, advocacy, and alliance-building benefits of a designation program. They started spreading the word and expressing interest in creating a congregational designation in their context. This idea and the building energy around it were engaged by **scholars and activists who gathered to strategize at Auburn Seminary in the summer of 2019.** From there, the congregation designation concept took root as a crucial institutional pathway for building a powerful movement for faith-based support of reproductive dignity and justice.

And... COVID derailed initial plans for an in-person workshop to further contemplate a large-scale designation program... Creatively resilient, **TFN proceeded to virtually convene a diverse group of academics, religious leaders, and representatives from numerous**

LGBTQ+ and reproductive health, rights, and justice organizations. The new plan was to go ahead and fully create a scaled-up designation program. Over many, many months, that's exactly what we did.

Teams formed. A 7-session curriculum for congregations was written. A nascent national movement gathering was planned. We figured out what the designation process would be and how communities could join in. We struggled as we experienced the pandemics of racism and COVID, viscerally in our bodies and in our communities. **We wrestled with each other through highly collaborative processes, made decisions as a group, and built strong bonds of trust as whole people.** We gathered wisdom and best practices from across movement spaces and our religious traditions. We met hour after hour after hour after hour on Zoom and worked on countless shared Google docs. We word-smithed so much writing, and we deliberated on our name (a lot). We've prayed and cried and sung and screamed and grieved and celebrated together through it all.

Our First SACReD Gathering and Organizational Launch

[We then held, on January \(25-26\) 2022, the first-of-its-kind national gathering of faith-based leaders focused on reproductive dignity and justice, attended by over 450 people from 40 states, 4 countries, and 30 different religious traditions and denominations.](#) At that gathering, we officially launched our designation program and set to

work finalizing our curriculum, scheduling leader trainings, and instituting ourselves as our own organization, housed within NEO Philanthropy, Inc. In the latter, we have been very intentional about coalition building, leadership representation, and novel modes of governance and operations structure.

As fate would have it, we launched as an organization and began our education, media advocacy, and alliance-building programs in the same month - June 2022 - that the U.S. Supreme Court handed down its *Dobbs* decision, which nullified the right of a pregnant person to decide whether to continue or terminate a pregnancy. Our lamentations were immense, but we knew we were strong and ready to forge ahead for a liberation far more extensive than that created by the earlier *Roe* decision.

[What We Do and Where](#)

While we are well aware that the need for material, political policy change is urgent, we also know that the forces of reproductive oppression are powerful and fierce. They must be met with collective depth and strength. **Religious and cultural depth, though, is currently underdeveloped, which undermines the strength of our movement.** At present, a majority

of people of faith support reproductive freedom, but many do so without a clear foundation in their faith tradition. A focus on reproductive dignity and the moral, human rights imperatives of Reproductive Justice is, therefore, a crucial dimension of political organizing around the reproductive justice policy agenda.

Knowing that a substantial majority of religious and spiritual people in the U.S. believe in reproductive freedom and social justice, we aim to nurture the depths of their belief and rouse them to faith-based affirmation of reproductive dignity and collective advocacy/action for Reproductive Justice. Yet, **true honor of reproductive agency and righteous calls for comprehensive reproductive justice requires people to engage with challenging, sometimes unfamiliar, theological and moral issues.** These issues have been, heretofore, largely ignored by theologians, absent in higher education for clergy, taboo to discuss in religious institutions, and profoundly warped in public discussion.

No more! **Our education and culture change programs ensure good faith engagement with reproduction as a social justice concern in congregations, institutions of higher education, and the public square.** In addition, our direct service program links those in our alliance with a broader network of community partners to provide support for people who need reproductive healthcare in low and no access areas.

SACReD pursues culture change and movement mobilization via:

- Congregational Education and Designation
- Media, Public Forum, and Social Media Advocacy
- Alliance Building
- Gathering of Movement Leadership
- Direct Service Support Network

SACReD and members of its alliance, in deep partnership with many others, will absolutely tell this bigger liberation story to its beautiful conclusion, writing it day by day through our work, for as long as it takes.