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## Reproductive health part of emerging political landscape

Posted by [the readers' page](#) April 09, 2009 5:00AM

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By Tomi Jacobs

As a pastor, I am encouraged that the political events since the beginning of the year -- dramatic and in some cases unprecedented -- are the first steps toward a world where women's reproductive health and rights, and their families' well-being, will once again be a priority locally, nationally and internationally.

Like many clergy across the country, I was pleased to witness the inauguration of the first African-American president and a new majority in the New York state Senate for the first time in nearly half-a-century. Many members of our faith communities tell us how excited they are at these promising developments.

As a member of the clergy, I am deeply troubled by the recent increase in teen pregnancy in 26 states, and high rates of sexually transmitted infections, particularly among young women, as reported by the Centers for Disease Control. This renewed focus on policies in support of women's reproductive health care comes none too soon.

Clergy have a particular interest in expanded access to reproductive health care services and information. We offer counsel and support to people confronted by medical needs and in need of access to care. In New York state, the governor and lawmakers have again made access to family planning a statewide priority.

Reproductive health care is primary health care. By providing community-based family planning now, we can prevent the burden of more expensive care in the future. Our communities are seeing increased demand for these basic medical services because of the economic downturn.

In Washington, D.C., President Obama lifted the global gag rule, ending harmful restrictions on U.S. financial support to international family planning programs. Not only does our new president support a women's right to reproductive health care and choice, he understands the need for real and expanded access to those services, especially in times of financial crisis.

When women have access to reproductive health care, including cancer screenings, testing and treatment for sexually transmitted infections, and contraception, families are healthier. Even families with health insurance find it difficult to access primary and reproductive health care. The growing number of unemployed and uninsured face even greater challenges.

Many clergy also applauded the state's stem-cell research initiatives, and are excited at the Obama administration's intentions to expand federal support for this promising field of medicine.

Clergy provide pastoral care to people confronted by juvenile diabetes, Parkinson's disease, serious burns, spinal cord injury and other serious conditions that stem-cell research may one day cure. We are excited by invigorated research that, we pray, will one day bring healing for afflictions that have thus far eluded treatment.

I urge New Yorkers to support leaders who are so supportive of the health care needs of families here at home, throughout the nation and the world.

*The Rev. Tomi Jacobs is the interim Protestant chaplain at Syracuse University and a member of Concerned Clergy for Choice, a statewide network of more than 1,000 religious leaders dedicated to protecting and expanding access to a full range of reproductive health services.*

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