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Illegal Information Why Birth Control Isn't Being Taught in Genesee County

By Michael Moore and Bill Hammond

The Pill.
Condoms.
Foam.
Diaphragm.
Withdrawal.
Abstinence.

These words are illegal— forbidden by law to never be spoken—in the public schools of Genesee County. If a student asks a teacher, "What can I do to keep from getting pregnant?" the teacher must respond, "I can't tell you that."

Each year, 12,366 teenagers and pre-teenagers in Genesee County become pregnant. Of those, 11,060 have an abortion. It is the second highest county in the state for teenage pregnancies.

Until 1977, Michigan was the only state in the country to forbid the teaching of birth control in the public schools. In June of that year the state legislature passed Public Act 226 which allowed local school districts, if they wanted, to set up community advisory committees to decide whether or not birth control should be taught in their schools.

Since the Act was passed, over 50% of Michigan's schools have decided that birth control should be taught to their students.

But, in Genesee County, 15 out of 16 school districts surveyed by the *Flint Voice* have either decided *not* to teach birth control or have put their decisions off until later.

The failure of school districts to implement the teaching of birth control in the public schools is a direct result of an aggressive campaign by Flint's small, right-wing community to keep family planning out of the classroom.

The *Voice* has been following the efforts of legalizing birth control education for the past three years. One of our staff members applied for, and was appointed to, one of the local school's advisory committees.

What we have found are a number of groups and individuals who seemingly have succeeded in imposing their religious views on the rest of the community.

They include:

Rev. Lee Vandenberg, pastor of First Baptist Church of Flushing and a member of the Flushing Schools Sex Education Advisory Committee. Vandenberg is the leader of S.T.O.P. (Stop the Tide of Pornography) and was instrumental in 1977 in the passage of Proposal B, a county-wide referendum against "obscene" literature and *businesses*. He has also spoken publicly at local forums against rights for homosexuals.

Flint Area Right to Life, and its leaders, **Gerald and Amy Throop**. Not only are these people against a woman's choice to an abortion, they're against the teaching of what could **prevent** abortion—birth control. Periodic abstinence (rhythm and natural family planning) is acceptable to them.

Dee Pendleton, Bentley school board member and her friend, **Delores Allen**, Bentley parent. These two are most noted for their unsuccessful opposition to the Hotline Center in Burton. They worked closely with a number of Burton residents to harass and intimidate the Hotline when it bought a house in Burton. They lobbied to have the city council order a five foot high concrete wall built around the house. They also tried to get other agencies involved in their harassment campaign: the prosecutor's office, CETA, the county commissioners, IRS, and the county Substance Abuse Commission (the Throops also helped with this effort). Pendleton and Allen now sit on Bentley's birth control advisory committee.

Rev. Edmond Dinant, pastor, Twin Cities Baptist Church. Dinant led the unsuccessful effort to ban the book "Of Mice and Men" by John Steinbeck from the Grand Blanc Schools last year.

Janice Rinks, former leader of "Save Our Schools (S.O.S.)," an anti-busing group popular in the early 70's. She was involved in the effort to ban a number of books from the Mt. Morris schools, including "Soul on Ice," "Flowers for Algernon," "Black Man's Burden," and "The New Black Poetry." She is known to listeners of WTRX's "Flint Feedback" as "J.R." where she regularly calls up to speak her mind about



The Rev. Lee Vandenberg speaking at a local "America for Jesus" rally

Photo by Michael Moore

"Sex is an expression of rebellion among young people . . . and the teaching of birth control will only increase the number of pregnancies."

—Rev. Lee Vandenberg

the threat of "values clarification" and the dangers of "humanism." She has been a perennial candidate for the Mt. Morris School board and presently sits on its birth control study committee.

F.A.C.T.S., or "Family Action Concerning Today's Society," a small group based in Flushing working to fight "the forces in our society that are trying to undermine the family unit." Their main purpose is to "promote, protect, and preserve parental rights and to seek emphasis in the schools on developing intellectual capabilities." They see some kind of plot being orchestrated by Planned Parenthood.

In addition to these people, a number of other fundamentalist and Catholic Churches, the local John Birch Society and other "concerned parents" have been involved in the efforts to prohibit the teaching of birth control.

How successful have they been? Although they don't represent a very large constituency and have no formal structure, these groups have been able to slow down or stop every single school in the county, with the exception of the city school district in Flint, from

providing any family planning courses. Many districts haven't even formed the birth control advisory committee as allowed by law to study the issue.

Here's where each of the county school districts stand:

Grand Blanc: The birth control advisory committee recommended that family planning be taught. A poll of parents in the Grand Blanc School district found 82% of them in favor of birth control education. But when it came time for the school board to vote, the followers of Rev. Dinant and other pressure groups packed the meeting. The board voted for "no birth control" education in Grand Blanc schools.

Mt. Morris: The advisory committee said "no birth control education in our schools."

Davison: The committee voted "no."
Carman: School board tabled the issue "indefinitely." No birth control taught.

Beecher: Committee meets "irregularly." No birth control taught.

Flushing: Committee is "still studying it." No birth control taught.

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