

**Testimony of F. Allan Debelak, pastor
In support of HB 293, The Ohio Prevention First Act
Presented to the House Health Committee
November 18, 2009**

Within the many facets of our human sexuality,
there is something invaluable
about being vulnerable and available
as we take on the responsibility
of raising up children and young adults
who will use critical thinking skills
to make decisions about being sexual.

In our congregation, when I am teaching about the Ten
Commandments, I lead the students through Pastor Al's
human sexuality 101. It begins with the basics.

We are sexual being – male and female.

Quite biblical.

We are sexual beings – we procreate.

Quite biblical.

We are sexual beings who honor one another.

Quite biblical.

To a student, I'm told that parents tell their children
not to have sex until they are married.

When I ask what that means, one of them will eventually
be able to say it means *no sexual intercourse*.

Year after year, my response is:

“So, anything else goes!?!”

This is the beginning of our conversation about
Responsible Choice.

Within the life of the Church,
we do not teach people to be robots
programmed for only certain actions within life.
Rather, we are concerned about how we will act within
the everyday dynamics of being human and sexual.

Our discussions become quite direct.

Our conversations deal with consequences.

Our sharing faces the awkward moments of “what if?”

In the context of teaching the Ten Commandments,
 I remind them that in our tradition
 these are not merely a list of thou shall not.
 We press on with the questions of responsible realism:
Who shall we be?

When a glance shows interest – who shall we be?
 When on a first date – who shall we be?
 When dating for some time – who shall we be?
 When a kiss turns to a deep kiss – who shall we be?
 When light petting gets heavy – who shall we be?

We are being sexual all along the ways of our lives.
 We promote life and we honestly face how life may go
 even when it does not go as we had anticipated.

The Ohio Prevention First Act attempts to grab hold of
 the reality of our sexuality and the fullness of life that
 demands that our society never let itself be led by laws
 that merely say a “thou shall not” that is given voice by
 one group over another. Being human demands that we
 are dialogical – that is the great blessing of creation.

Within the honest conversation about our sexuality we
 are given ways to face the truth of how things may go
 among us. Such truthfulness combined with compassion
 means we are willing to stretch beyond consideration of
 may be my own views and my own life situation. This
 also means that I will have to face questions I would
 rather not face or have to address.

We are a society that honors questions.
 We never surrender to ideological dictums meant to
 overrule the freedom within a responsible republic that
 encourages us to serve our neighbor even as such service
 may mean that we come to a creative compromise for the
 welfare of the common good of all.

When asked, I identify myself as someone who insists on
 responsible choice.

I find that it causes me to never be afraid to wrestle
 with the life and nuances around such topics as:

- Prescription drugs and their accessibility by all Ohioans
- Sex Education that offers students and families truthful statistics and objective data
- Contraception and its availability to those who need it and those who step forward to receive it
- Research and Development by drug companies whose scientists take seriously all the implications of being sexual in our society
- Insurance coverage that does not limit approved prescription to anyone
- Protocol within pharmacies that will facilitate access to authorized prescriptions in a timely fashion

As a member of the clergy, please note that all religious people do not hold the same views in regard to human sexuality, contraceptive equity, sexuality education, or access to prescriptions.

In our congregation I always say that we are “followers of Jesus on an adventure *for life*.”

People take that in many different ways.

To be on such an adventure means that all voices must be heard. Too often, many voices are not present at the table and we act upon the opinions of those who have the loudest voices among us. That is never helpful.

When that happens, the creativity that has been handed to us as God’s people is diminished and the gracefulness that comes with the beautiful complexity of our humanity is abandoned for what some believe are rigid rules that will save us from ourselves.

Ohio Prevention First Act is filled with creative, life-giving recommendations.

Ohio Prevention First Act is not afraid to press us to be responsible and thoughtful and informed and to act based on such qualities.

Ohio Prevention First Act presses for responsible choice.

I would ask you to support this bill.