



May 2024 Clearinghouse on Women's Issues (CWI)  
Newsletter and Meeting Invitation  
<https://womensclearinghouse.org>

**Celebrating Sex Ed for All Month: Getting the Facts of Life**

**Tuesday, May 28, 2024**

**Zoom Meeting Registration Link (12:00-1:00 pm)**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/join/zoom/register/tZcscuusqTMuHNep2K7Sy4bVHIYHW7T8k7IS>

May is dedicated as Sex Ed for All Month, so we plan to focus on this important topic. This month is designated as an opportunity to voice shared commitment to a world where all young people get equitable access to the education and care they deserve. Looking at the process in terms of what should be taught, what are the challenges that arise when dealing with intimate topics and how to press on to be sure that sex education is reaching all youth who need and deserve “the facts of life”. This topic will be covered by two leading youth education organizations.

We continue to be concerned that comprehensive, fact-based sex education taught in public schools has long been opposed by certain elements – many in conservative states. Because sex education laws and policies are made by state and local leaders, sex education is frequently under attack. Politicians in many states have deployed various efforts to limit access to sex education, promote conservative agendas, and keep sex educators out of schools. Their efforts have meant that no comprehensive sex education programs are provided in those communities and instead students are exposed to non-factual, abstinence-only information. This opposition continues in many parts of the country, but notable progress is being made. See your state's sex education Profile, [State Profiles - SIECUS](#) .

**SIECUS: Sex Ed for Social Change (SIECUS)**, an organization that worked with partners to reframe May as Sex Ed for All month, monitors whether states provide comprehensive, fact-based education. The organization envisions an equitable nation where all people receive sex education, are affirmed in their identities, and have power to make decisions about their own health, pleasure, and wholeness. They work to enhance educator, advocate, parent, youth, clinician, partner, and public understanding of the current state of sexuality education in the United States and opportunities for improvement in both policy and practice. We will have the President of SIECUS, **Christine Soyong Harley** (she/her/hers) speak about progress and the need for further improvements in sex education across the nation.

Since 2019, Christine Soyong Harley has led SIECUS to focus on sex education as a vehicle for social change, focusing on the broad benefits of comprehensive sex education to prevent child abuse and sexual violence, and to advance education on consent, gender justice, and affirmation of LGBTQ communities. Chris brings extensive executive leadership experience to SIECUS, including having previously run her own consulting business and was the Director of Intergovernmental Affairs for the White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders under the Obama Administration. Christine also brings experience working in state-level agencies and community organizing to SIECUS.

**Advocates for Youth (AFY)** also works to make sure that sex education is factual and non-discriminating. Founded in 1980, Advocates for Youth envisions a society in which all young people are valued, respected and treated with dignity; sexuality is accepted as a healthy part of being human; and youth sexual development is normalized and embraced. Advocates for Youth champions efforts to help young people make informed and responsible decisions about their reproductive and sexual health. AFY believes it can best serve the field by boldly advocating a more positive and realistic approach to adolescent sexual health. We are fortunate that **Nora Gelperin, AFY's Director, Sexuality Education and Training** will continue the discussion of who, what and how

sexuality education can best be carried out and the obstacles that these educators must face in delivering comprehensive sensitive and factual information.

Nora has more than twenty years of experience providing sexuality education to youth and professional development to education professionals. Prior to joining AFY, she was the Director of Training at Answer where she founded the Training Institute in Sexual Health Education (TISHE) and Answer's online professional development workshops. She was a community educator with Planned Parenthood of the Great Northwest and Planned Parenthood of Greater Northern New Jersey. Nora holds a Masters in School Health Education from Temple University, was awarded a Mary Lee Tatum Award from Planned Parenthood Leaders in Education, and was named a 2014 Fellow of the American School Health Association.

In addition to their 20–25-minute presentations, our speakers will participate in a Q and A session.

The June 25, 2024 virtual CWI noon meeting will be on “Defending the April 2024 Title IX Regulations”.

## Summary of April 23, 2024 CWI meeting on “Why Feminists Should Fight Christian Nationalism”

For complete information on this important video presentation by Andrew Seidel and Katherine Stewart go to YouTube <https://youtu.be/bx1Se-ijEc>. **Andrew L. Seidel** is an attorney and Vice President of Strategic Communications, Americans United for Separation of Church and State. He is the author of two books: *The Founding Myth: Why Christian Nationalism Is Un-American* (2019) and *American Crusade: How the Supreme Court is Weaponizing Religious Freedom* (2022) and many articles. **Katherine Stewart's** latest book, *The Power Worshipers: Inside the Dangerous Rise of Religious Nationalism*, was awarded first place for Excellence in Nonfiction Books by the Religion News Association as well as a Morris D. Forkosch award. She writes for *The New York Times* opinion, *New Republic* and others, and has appeared: on CNN, MSNBC, and NPR. The documentary *God & Country*, produced by Rob Reiner and Michele Reiner, is based on her book. This video recording of the 4-23-24 CWI meeting is also available on CWI's website: [womensclearinghouse.org](http://womensclearinghouse.org)

Sue Klein, Co-President of CWI explained the process for the meeting such as that Katherine and Andrew are going to take turns being the first respondent to the four questions in the meeting invitation.

- 1. Define Christian Nationalism and help us understand its history and how it relates to other forms of Christianity such as Evangelicalism and fundamentalism and how it differs from other religious adherence to Christianity or other religions that don't advocate religious nationalism.**



**Katherine Stewart** said Christian Nationalism (CN) is basically the idea that America was founded as a Christian Nation and our laws should be based on a reactionary reading of the Bible. This involves a mythologized reading of American history and distortions of constitutional law. It carries with it other elements, such as the idea that the country is under threat by liberals and secularists. We're on the edge of an apocalypse, and radical actions are justified in order to “save” the country. The rank and file of the Christian Nationalist movement have also been led to believe that conservative Christians are the most persecuted group in America. Many of them are inclined to give their support to an authoritarian strongman who promises to defeat the enemy by any means necessary. So

Christian Nationalism involves a mindset that can be easily exploited.

It is important to be clear that Christian Nationalism isn't a religion. It's about politics and power. The movement consists of a dense organizational ecosystem made of various groups that we can group into categories. There are right-wing think tanks, policy groups, networking organizations that get movement funders and members of the leadership on the same page, a vast messaging and propaganda-sphere, and data organizations. A vast legal ecosystem grows and promotes far-

right justices and pushes cases intended to destroy separation of church and state, which Andrew is going to talk about later.

This is a leadership-driven movement, and the leadership sets the agenda, not the rank and file. A cadre of donors funnel huge amounts of money into the movement's organizational infrastructure. Critical to this infrastructure are the networks that draw in tens of thousands of pastors, who are given sophisticated messaging and even data tools and who then turn out their congregations to vote for the hard-right candidates that the movement favors.

Christian Nationalism in its present form can be traced to a movement in the late 1970s and early 1980s called the New Right, which was led by conservatives like Paul Weyrich and Phyllis Schlafly. They felt the Republican Party had become too liberal, too soft on communism. They were also concerned that the IRS was threatening to revoke the tax privileged status of segregated private schools. They saw in the abortion issue, the potential to unite their movement, and they purged prochoice voices from the Republican party. They recognized that if you can get people to vote on a single issue, you can essentially control their vote.

**Andrew Seidel** added people need to understand that Christian Nationalism is an existential threat to our democracy. They believe that the U.S. is a Christian nation based on Christian principles and that we've strayed from our Godly roots. They use the language of return—of getting back to the way America was and making America great again—to justify exclusionary public policies and even insurrections.

- 2. Discuss the importance of the separation of church and state in acting as a bulwark against Christian Nationalism. In contrast, note that secular nationalism/patriotism is a key reason to make sure the secular Equal Rights Amendment is in the U.S. Constitution to counter legislation such as a Christian national ban on abortions.**

**Andrew Seidel** said the wall of separation between church and state is an “American original” that was first implemented



in the American experiment. Until then no other nation in the history of humanity had sought to protect the ability of its citizens to think freely by separating religion and government. We should be proud of this. We shouldn't let people undermine it. If you look at our Constitution many of the truly unique and original elements of the Constitution are secular. Our Constitution was the first to declare that power comes from people not gods. Our Constitution was the first not mention a god at all. It was godless by choice, which upset some in the founding generation. Our Constitution was the first to ban religious tests for public office in Article 6. Then after all of that, you have the First Amendment which separates church and state and guarantees religious freedom. Andrew noted that there is

lot that is wrong with our Constitution, but those secular foundations are what made it unique, and they are genuine contributions. The separation of church and state is a cure for white Christian Nationalism, that's why it's also the first target. The wall of separation between church and state is not a wall that divides us. It's a wall that protects us. It's a wall that allows us to flourish. It protects full funding for public schools instead of vouchers for private religious schools, accurate science about evolution and sex education, full civil and political rights for LGBTQI individuals, and for reproductive justice and choice to be fully realized. End Christian Nationalism and separate church and state and you're going to see progress. Recently Americans United for the Separation of Church and State and the National Women's Law Center challenged Missouri's abortion bans as a violation of church state separation.

- 3. Describe the many ways that CN hurts women and feminists including reproductive rights, public education, and many other aspects of equality.**

**Katherine Stewart** said the founders were clear on the question of taxation. They agreed, along with the Baptists, that taxing the people to fund churches was a form of tyranny. There has absolutely been backward movement in this regard. In addition to receiving tax exemptions and subsidies, religious organizations are receiving direct funding from taxpayers in a number of ways, including vouchers for religious schools that are free to discriminate and teach contempt for people of other faiths. Crisis pregnancy centers now take in nearly \$100 million or more every single year in direct taxpayer

funding. They claim to offer medical care but instead they often evangelize women, seek to control their reproductive behavior, and provide incredibly misleading health information.

Authoritarian movements often come to power by exploiting gender inequality and gender anxieties. They remain in power, in part, by imposing those hierarchies; the attack on women's rights is an intrinsic part of the attack on Democracy. Depriving women of reproductive rights, including birth control medication that they choose to characterize as abortion, isn't just a consequence of anti-abortion politics. After all, they're not going after men who impregnate women against their will (most women who seek abortions did not want the man to impregnate them), or outlawing prescriptions of Viagra for unmarried men, which could also be used for "sin." Abortion bans deny us the most fundamental conditions for our physical and psychological integrity, the options we need to ensure best-practices maternal care, the ability to decide our relationships and our futures.

Many supporters of abortion rights frame the anti-abortion movement in narrow terms. We think it's just an issue of fetal development or think that the only people whose rights are at stake are women who are seeking to terminate their pregnancy. But abortion has never just been an isolated policy preference among some people with certain religious convictions. It is really one piece of a radical movement working toward a transformation and indeed destruction of our democracy. You can't take away the rights of those who are seeking abortions without taking away the rights of all women, whether they're seeking abortion or not. Because you are identifying one gender as a subordinate class, whose most fundamental and private choices may be controlled by the state.

**Katherine Stewart** also discussed the CN movement's public school agenda. It is twofold: on the one hand, they wish to force their programming into public schools. On the other, they wish to diminish faith in public education in order to soften the ground for privatization, and even wholesale public funding of religious schools. There are enormous sums of money involved in public education, and movement activists know that if they can capture a portion of that, the money will flow without end, enriching "right-thinking" people and bolstering religious organizations some of which are otherwise losing membership and struggling financially. The movement denounces public schools by saying they are "woke," but they make no bones about the fact that their goal is to indoctrinate children in their preferred ideologies. There's nothing conservative about this agenda. It is radical, and gutting public education is at the heart of it.

**Andrew Seidel** added information about the Supreme Court Arguments on 4-24-24 about EMTALA, the Federal law which should allow doctors to provide abortions when the health/life of the pregnant women is threatened instead of following state law which doesn't allow abortions. He also reminded us of June 1st, 2020, when Trump had peaceful protesters gassed and beaten and brutalized with rubber bullets so that he could walk to a church to pose for a photo with a Bible. He was trying to show that this nation was a Christian Nation and that anyone who disagrees should be beaten. The goal of Christian Nationalism is to rewrite or redefine the Constitution so that it creates two classes of people, the "right" kind of Conservative Christian and everyone else. Christian Nationalists in this country will not stop until we stop them. They are coming for contraception. They are coming for a wide abortion ban. They're coming for marriage equality. They want an unfettered right to discriminate. They are openly talking about repealing the 19th Amendment as Katherine mentioned, like they want to be a special favored class and everyone else to be second class citizens. Christian Nationalists in this country will not stop until we stop them. They're coming for marriage equality. They want an unfettered right to discriminate.

#### **4. Describe the scope and ways people are influenced to support Christian Nationalism and how it relates to partisan politics and the upcoming U.S. elections.**

**Andrew Seidel** started by saying that he is not speaking for Americans United for Separation of Church and State, a 501c3 organization that does not endorse candidates. He said my great fear for this election and the way that Christian Nationalism is going to influence this election is political violence. The popular vote margin in the last election was 7 million votes but the election was decided by 40,000 votes in three states. That's like half a Taylor Swift concert. So, every single vote matters and that gives the violence that is inherent in white Christian Nationalist movement an outsize impact and if you remember back to the midterms, we did see some dry runs for voter intimidation. We saw armed militia at the polls

in Arizona. We've since seen Christian Nationalist leaders calling on the mob to head into cities in swing states and to "police the polls," so I am deeply worried about the prospect for political violence this cycle and that was what January 6th was all about. Katherine and I both contributed to a report [Christian Nationalism and the January 6, 2021, Insurrection](#) that explored the role of Christian Nationalism in the January 6th Insurrection. It was produced by the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty and the Freedom from Religion Foundation (2-9-2022). The goal of the violence of January 6<sup>th</sup>, at least from the inner circle, was not actually to stop the count or to necessarily overthrow the government. It was to create enough chaos to throw the election to the House of Representatives where each state delegation--each state--gets one vote for president. That was the real goal. In that scenario, in 2020 and likely in 2024, Trump comes out as president no matter what the popular vote says, no matter what the Electoral College says. If there's enough chaos, the vote goes to the House of Representatives. That is the big way that this election could be influenced by Christian Nationalists so let me temper that with a little bit of good news.

There were quite a few Christian Nationalists that lost early on. They lost in the primaries and that turned out to be a signal of things to come. Idaho lieutenant governor Janice McGeachin tried to primary her governor and lost. You may remember her ad where she was posing with a Bible in one hand and a gun in the other. She hosted mask burnings and said that "God calls us to pick up the sword and fight and Christ will reign in the state of Idaho," if she is elected. She lost. Arkansas state senator Jason Rapert ran for lieutenant governor and was the driving force behind the Ten Commandments monument at the Arkansas Capital. He also created the National Association of Christian lawmakers, which pushes Christian Nationalist bills in all 50 states. He lost, but unfortunately Sarah Sanders put him on the library board so he's wreaking havoc there. There were many other CN's at the Jan. 6 rally, and most who ran for election, lost.

Christian Nationalists are not just wrong about what America is and how it was founded. Their beliefs and identity run counter to the ideals on which this nation was founded. They really are unamerican. And they're also unpopular. I think this goes to the question here, the politics of Christian Nationalism. Their beliefs are wildly unpopular. They oppose marriage equality - 71% of Americans support it. They want to outlaw abortion and 85% of Americans think it should be LEGAL in some way shape or form. They want a nation of Christians like them and 73% of Americans are more welcoming of religious pluralism. They almost certainly want to ban contraception too, but something like 91% of Americans are in favor. And those numbers verify that they are scared because the non-religious Americans are on the rise and because Americans are leaving religion behind and because we elected our first black president and black female vice president. Because every day we are closer to racial and gender and LGBTQI equality. So conservative white Christian American status as the dominant group is threatened. They're losing the culture wars which I think is a silly phrase meant to mask attacks on human rights. They're losing the power and the privilege and the deference which they believe they are due, and we know that when a dominant group in a society FEELS its status threatened that it reacts or overreacts by trying to retain that status to holding on to that power and privilege. That's why they're turning to Christian Nationalism. That's why they turn to the violent Insurrection that we saw on January 6.

How can we better defend the Equal Rights Amendment in contrast to Christian Nationalism? The ERA is a national policy, not a religion. Andrew often associates Nationalism with a jingoistic fervent belief that one's country can do no wrong, that whatever it does is right. It's blind unthinking loyalty. Patriotism is different. It is best summed up by James Baldwin who said, "I love America more than any other country in the world and exactly for this reason I insist on the right to criticize her perpetually." Patriots believe in an America where the separation of church and state is an absolute. They are the true heroes of the American experiment, the true Patriots, not the Christian Nationalists. So those two things are very distinct. I think you must separate nationalism from National policy and certainly Christian Nationalism is against our national/Constitutional policy of the separation of church and state.

**Katherine** added information about authoritarian political leaders outside the U.S. They often bind themselves tightly to ultraconservative religious leaders in their own countries in order to consolidate corrupt and dictatorial forms of political power, and to guard against any abuses they may be perpetrating against their own people. She shows how the movement is intensely focused on voter turnout, because in a country where 40 to 50 per cent of people don't bother to vote, they recognize that they don't need a majority to win elections, all they need is a disproportionately mobilized

minority. They strategically focus on the counties they need, often on swing districts in swing states. She points out that it is important to vote not just for the top of the ticket but also down ballot, and to engage in politics at the local level.

Q 1. Are there any rays of hope? **Andrew** responded, yes. I have been fighting CN for 15 years and there is a ground swell of opposition happening that I've never seen before. CNs are going to rage against the dying of their privilege but in the end, we are going to win because they fight only for themselves. Where they are selfish, we are selfless. They want supremacy, we want equality. We are the majority.

Q2. How to have hard conversations with CN's or others you want to persuade? Temper your expectations. You are never going to change somebody's mind in one conversation. Your goal should be to plant seeds of doubt and seeds of cognitive dissonance that will allow them to change their own minds in their own time.

CWI co-President, Jan Erickson ended handling questions by urging all to see the two documentaries on CN: *They are God and Country* and *Bad Faith: CN's Unholy War on Democracy*.

## Preparing for CWI Elections: Call for Volunteers

CWI elections for board members and officers will be held at the CWI June 25, 2024 meeting. We are looking for candidates for 2 year terms for Treasurer, Secretary, and Board members to assume Board/Vice President positions in their areas of expertise. Please Contact Co-President Sue Klein if you want to join the CWI Board/Officers. [susikdc@gmail.com](mailto:susikdc@gmail.com) or home tel. 202-488-7430 or Co-President Jan Erickson [ericksonjan7@gmail.com](mailto:ericksonjan7@gmail.com) , mobile 240-481-5579.

*CWI's newsletter is endowed in loving memory of our previous longtime editor, Roslyn Kaiser*

*Newsletter edited by Sue Klein*

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