



To Offer Compassion: A History of the Clergy Consultation Service on Abortion

Doris Andrea Dirks, Patricia A. Relf

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In 1967, when abortion was either illegal or highly restricted in every U.S. state, a group of ministers and rabbis formed to counsel women with unwanted pregnancies—including referral to licensed physicians willing to perform the procedure. By 1973, when the *Roe v. Wade* court decision made abortion legal nationwide, the Clergy Consultation Service on Abortion (CCS) had spread from coast to coast, referred hundreds of thousands of women for safe abortions without a single fatality, become a medical consumer advocacy group, and opened its own clinic in New York City.

As religious leaders spoke out on issues of civil rights, peace, or poverty, CCS members were also called to action by the suffering of women who had approached them for help. Overwhelmingly male, white, affluent, and middle-aged, these mainline Protestant and Jewish clergy were nonetheless outspoken advocates for the rights of women, particularly poor women. *To Offer Compassion* is a detailed history of this unique and largely forgotten movement, drawing on extensive interviews with original participants and on primary documents from the CCS's operations.

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