

# A youth sex-ed program that gets results

It's been nearly a year since members of Gilt Edge Baptist Church's Youth Ministry, along with youths from the surrounding community, attended a comprehensive sex education seminar sponsored by the church. Out of the 50 or so 11- to 18-year olds who attended, none is pregnant or has contracted a sexually transmitted disease or infection.

At least, not to the knowledge of Shajuana Motley, the Jeffersonville church's youth director. It is likely she would know if the results were not as favorable. She said the program "has opened a door of communication" between the youths and their ministers. "They know they can talk to the youth ministry team or the youth workers about anything."

Gilt Edge has had a comprehensive sex education program for

youths since before Motley arrived there 16 years ago.

She describes Gilt Edge's pastor (and her husband), the Rev. Douglass Motley, as a realist.

"Although we need to teach 'though shalt not,' there are those who aren't listening to the 'thou shalt not,' and they're dying from sexually transmitted diseases, or they're becoming teen parents," said Motley.

While the church

"definitely pushes abstinence," the ministry team wanted to educate the youths about the consequences of unprotected sex as well.

"We're open to everything that will help keep our children safe," said Motley, who recalled only one family in the congregation declining to send its children to the program. (The Motleys' own teenage daughter attended the seminar last year.)

Motley has been youth director since July 2009. The program she now oversees brings in sex education experts from Planned Parenthood to talk to the youths about anything they could want to know. Motley said she asked the instructors to give "the real, raw truth," and to go as far as instructing the kids on how to put on condoms.

The program addresses date rape, unhealthy relationships, sex abuse and the ways young people can be pressured into having sex. In a healthy

relationship, the youths are taught, there's no coercion or pressure to do anything you may be uncomfortable doing, that a loving partner respects the words "no" and "wait."

Teen moms and people living with HIV or with AIDS have also talked to the youths about their experiences. People ages 13 to 29 account for 38 percent of the nearly 25,000 infections estimated to occur each year among African Americans. "Getting tested (for HIV) has been hammered down," Motley said.

She expressed admiration for Pastor Motley's willingness to accept expertise outside of the church. His philosophy, she explained, is "to do what the Word says, but sometimes you have to use other resources to help you understand the Bible."

"I think it's the church's place to educate on everything that affects its members," Motley said. "We often limit ourselves to spirituality. When

the Word talks about our body being a temple of God, the first thing we think about is sex. ... Our bodies are temples of God, and we should treat them as such."

She is referring to 1 Corinthians 6:19: "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?"

"But we shouldn't stay stuck on sex," Motley said.

"We should also focus on education, educating members on ... healthy eating, exercising, financial planning, retirement. ... If we talk about the spirituality, we should talk about all the other (things) that affect us as individuals so we can be the best, whole person in Christ" ♣

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