



## Preach On: Teens Ask Evangelical Leaders to Talk Sex Ed

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Hispanic evangelical leaders across the country hope to begin a frank dialogue about sex and pregnancy among Latino teenagers, teaming up with The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy to create a new curriculum for use in youth groups that will help foster a conversation about teen pregnancy prevention, all by the request of teenagers across the country.

“Time and time again, we have seen both teens and adults say they think religious leaders should be doing more to address teen pregnancy,” says Ann Marie Benitez, the senior manager of the Latino Initiative at the National Campaign to Prevent Teen & Unplanned Pregnancy. “Many churches and religious communities don’t know how to begin the conversation about teen pregnancy prevention, and we hope this tool kit helps provide faith leaders guidance. This is what youth are asking for.”

The National Campaign and Esperanza — a network of more than 12,000 Hispanic evangelical churches and community organizations — have teamed up to produce a “toolkit” that includes a Bible study curriculum, activities, talking points and data on teen pregnancy and prevention for use in youth groups. Citing a recent survey which found that 57 percent of Latino teens and 54 percent of Latino parents nationwide think that religious leaders should be doing more regarding teen pregnancy prevention, Benitez says Esperanza will train 20 faith leaders on the use of the toolkit. Eventually these 20 leaders will train 100 additional leaders in urban hubs across the country, explains Benitez.

“The material seemed easy to use and it helped guide the conversation in a simple, honest and clear way,” said Esperanza Martinez, the Associate Pastor at the Family Life Center in Miami, Florida of the new material, which she used during an early pilot program. “My class understood the difference between ‘saying no to sex’ vs. ‘God’s plan for sexual relations,’ which was fruitful because the issue of having sex became less of a ‘rule’ the teens wanted to break.”

According to a May 2012 report by the Centers for Disease Control, the birth rate among Latina teens has steadily declined from 75 to 49 per 1,000. However, Hispanic rates of teen pregnancy remains higher than those for black and white youth in most of the country, including states with high Hispanic populations including California, Texas, New York, New Jersey, Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico and Georgia.

“We’ve heard teens say that they look up to their pastors and youth ministers for guidance on life and love,” says Benitez. “With so many stories in the Bible that address these topics, it’s natural for faith leaders to speak to teens about teen pregnancy.”

“It’s our hope that churches use this tool kit to literally end the silence that surrounds the topic of teen pregnancy prevention.”

