

Evangelical coalition rallies behind family planning

by [Adelle M. Banks](#)

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WASHINGTON (RNS) A coalition of evangelicals is calling on fellow Christians to support access to family planning across the world, saying it does not conflict with evangelical opposition to abortion.

The centrist New Evangelical Partnership for the Common Good released a 15-page document Monday (Oct. 16) calling for "common ground" support of family planning and the health of mothers and children.

"We affirm that the use of contraceptives is a responsible and morally acceptable means to greater control over the number and timing of births, and to improve the overall developing and flourishing of women and children," said the Rev. Jennifer Crumpton, one of the advisers to the evangelical group.

The NEP document does not include abortion in its definition of "family planning." It emphasized that access to contraception prevents unintended pregnancies and reduces abortion, and stressed the need to avoid "confusion of family planning with abortion" that has led some religious groups to oppose both.

"It is urgent, urgent and imperative, that this issue be discussed and cleared up," said Crumpton, a Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) minister who was raised Southern Baptist.

The Rev. Richard Cizik, president of the two-year-old organization, said family planning used to be considered a "third rail" topic of discussion but his organization is now calling on churches to address it. He said NEP leaders intend to circulate the document to gain signatories.

The National Association of Evangelicals, where Cizik worked for years as vice president, has urged frank talk about the vast majority of young evangelicals engaged in premarital sex and briefly mentions family planning in its online "Theology of Sex" document. Among discussion items for church leaders is a question about whether they should advise their congregants on "informed choices about family planning."

An NAE representative could not be immediately reached for comment about the New Evangelical Partnership document.