Ministers of a Higher Law:
The Story of the Clergy Consultation Service on Abortion

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For Lydia Joy Wolff, my Belle of Amherst
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Preface

When I began work on this project in July 1997, I was a total stranger to the history of the abortion rights movement. I was not, however, a stranger to Judson Memorial Church, the home of the Clergy Consultation Service as well as Howard Moody and the late Arlene Carmen, the Service’s two most important figures. I have been a member of the Judson Church community since my dedication—by Moody—shortly after my birth. Like most children at Judson, I grew up awed by Moody and cuddled by Carmen. In short, I can in no way claim to be an impartial judge of either person or the church itself.

Despite my intimate relationship with two of its principal characters, however, I was almost completely unaware of the Clergy Consultation Service until I began sniffing around Judson for a thesis topic. The Service is just one chapter in a long history of activism at Judson, not to mention the remarkable lives of Moody and Carmen. We Judson children received few lectures on Judson’s history, and to us Moody and Carmen were always just “Howard” and “Arlene.” Thus, I can honestly say that I came to this project with no preconceived notions about the accomplishments of the Service, its ideology, or any of the participants in the story other than Carmen and Moody. In this thesis I have made a genuine effort to be as objective as possible about matters relating to Judson, and where Carmen and Moody receive high praise it is usually in the words of an observer other than myself. I emphasize this disclaimer because I have done Moody and Carmen a tremendous disservice if their role is in anyway down-played as a result of a challenge to my objectivity. If anything, my association with these two leaders of the Service has improved this work. Not only did it allow me unparalleled access to Moody and
his papers, but there were more than a few times when I was piecing together the story that I
was glad to have a wealth of personal insight about Carmen and Moody on which I could draw.
Most importantly, except for providing information and answering questions, neither Moody
nor any other member of Judson has been involved in the preparation of this work or any review
of its drafts.

In closing, I would like to say a word or two about writing on abortion. The literature on
abortion is almost entirely tainted by partisanship, and I cannot claim to be immune to this
problem. While I am not an activist for abortion rights, I am “pro-choice,” though I’m not
exactly sure what that nebulous term entails. In any case, if at any point in this work my choice
of wording (“abortion provider” instead of “abortionist,” or “patient” instead of “mother”)
offends readers at either end of the abortion spectrum, I apologize. I have found in my research
that there is no such thing as neutral language when writing about abortion. Thus, I have done
my best to stay in sync with the language and terminology of the books, articles, and interviews
that I have quoted.