

Sexuality and Religion 2020

Goals for the Next Decade



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Religious Institute

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Contents

Introduction	5
Religious Declaration on Sexual Morality, Justice, and Healing	7
Sexuality and Religion	8
Goals for the Next Decade	11
Goal 1: Religious Professionals	12
Goal 2: Seminaries	15
Goal 3: Congregations.....	18
Goal 4: Denominations.....	21
Goal 5: Multifaith Coalitions	24
Goal 6: Progressive Religious Leaders	26
Goal 7: Organizations.....	29
Goal 8: Media.....	32
Goal 9: Policy Makers.....	34
Goal 10: Faithful Voices Network.....	36
End Notes	38
Organizations.....	40
Participants	
2020 Colloquium Participants	42
Creators of the Religious Declaration	43
Acknowledgments	44
Publications	45
About the Religious Institute.....	48



Introduction

This is a *kairos* moment.

Kairos was the Greek god of the fleeting moment. In the Christian scriptures, *kairos* signals “the appointed time in the purpose of God,” the moment when God acts, and long-needed change at last is made possible. In broader faith terms, it is a time of opportunity, when the world opens itself to movement and transformation.

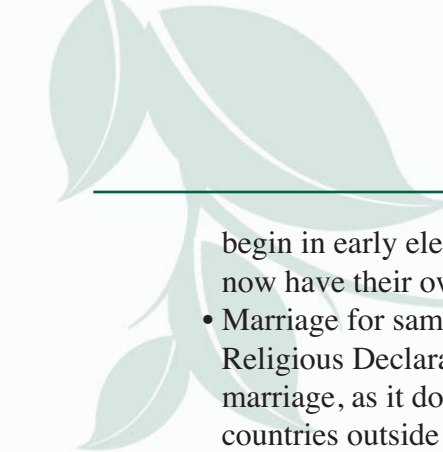
In this moment, we are witnessing a new willingness, in religious communities and society at large, toward transforming traditional understandings of sexuality and religion. Religious denominations have spent decades addressing sexuality and faith. Congregations and clergy around the country are increasingly recognizing their responsibilities to be sexually healthy, just and prophetic.

Ten years ago, a new vision of sexual health and wholeness for America’s faith communities was forged. In the spring of 1999, Debra W. Haffner and the Rev. Dr. Larry Greenfield convened a meeting of 20 prominent clergy, academicians, ethicists and theologians to develop a progressive vision of the relationship of sexuality and religion. (*See page 43 for a list of participants.*) The product of their work was the *Religious Declaration on Sexual Morality, Justice, and Healing*. Published on January 25, 2000, the Religious Declaration was a clarion call to the nation’s religious leaders for a new sexual ethic, focused on social justice and the integrity of personal relationships, rather than on particular sexual acts.

The Religious Declaration’s affirming vision of sexuality and spirituality, grounded in the core teachings of the historic faiths, emphasized breaking the silence around sexuality that persists in too many faith communities. It urged religious leaders and faith communities to promote comprehensive sexuality education, sexual and reproductive health, and the full inclusion of women and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons in religious communities and society at large.

The last decade has seen remarkable progress in furthering the vision of the Religious Declaration:

- Women’s ordination was nothing new in 2000, but over the past 10 years there has been notable progress in the rise of women to denominational leadership. Women currently lead the Episcopal Church, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches, and the Fellowship. Women also have been elected to serve as bishops in such diverse traditions as the African Methodist Episcopal Church, AME Zion, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Unity Fellowship and The United Methodist Church.
- In 2000, only a handful of denominations had welcoming organizations promoting the full inclusion of lesbian and gay persons in communities of faith. Today, welcoming organizations are working toward full inclusion in all of the mainline Protestant denominations, in several evangelical Christian denominations, in the Roman Catholic Church, and in Jewish and Muslim traditions as well. More than 3,300 congregations in the U.S. are official welcoming congregations, a nearly threefold increase since 2003.¹
- In 2000, the Unitarian Universalist Association and the United Church of Christ published the groundbreaking sexuality education program, *Our Whole Lives*, a series of six curricula that



begin in early elementary school and continue through adulthood. At least 12 denominations now have their own curricula addressing these issues.

- Marriage for same-sex couples was barely on the national agenda 10 years ago. In fact, the Religious Declaration originally called for the “blessing of same-sex unions,” rather than marriage, as it does today. As of January 2010, five states, the District of Columbia and seven countries outside the U.S. offer legal marriage to same-sex couples. In 1999, only clergy from the Unitarian Universalist Association were sanctioned to perform same-sex unions; today, at least a dozen Christian denominations and Jewish movements allow their clergy to perform marriage or union ceremonies for same-sex couples.
- Ten years ago, there was little recognition or understanding, in either the religious or secular world, of the transgender community. The Religious Declaration spoke of “sexual minorities,” but did not use the word “transgender.” That language has now been revised to reflect the greater visibility and participation of transgender persons in religion and society. *(The newly revised Religious Declaration appears on page 7.)*

Yet much remains to be done. A new *kairos* moment is at hand.

In the summer of 2009, the Religious Institute convened the 2020 Colloquium, calling together 23 clergy, theologians and religious leaders from Christian, Jewish, Muslim and Unitarian Universalist traditions. *(See page 42 for a list of participants.)* Their task was to consider updates to the Religious Declaration, assess progress to date, and determine priorities for sexuality and religion for the next 10 years. Colloquium participants established an overarching vision – that by the year 2020, all faith communities will be sexually healthy, just and prophetic.

This report grew out of the deliberations and discussions at the 2020 Colloquium. Although there was no attempt to achieve consensus on the recommendations presented here, the participants’ ideas and insights made an invaluable contribution to the Religious Institute’s development of this report.

This report is for clergy, congregations, denominations, faith-based organizations – indeed, for all religious leaders and people of faith who believe we must create a healthier, more positive and inclusive relationship between sexuality and religion. The Religious Institute invites people of faith from every tradition, and every part of the country, to join us in creating a world where all may celebrate our sexuality with holiness and integrity.

We must not let this moment pass.

Rev. Debra W. Haffner
Executive Director
Religious Institute

Religious Declaration on Sexual Morality, Justice, and Healing

Sexuality is God's life-giving and life-fulfilling gift. We come from diverse religious communities to recognize sexuality as central to our humanity and as integral to our spirituality. We are speaking out against the pain, brokenness, oppression and loss of meaning that many experience about their sexuality.

Our faith traditions celebrate the goodness of creation, including our bodies and our sexuality. We sin when this sacred gift is abused or exploited. However, the great promise of our traditions is love, healing and restored relationships.

Our culture needs a sexual ethic focused on personal relationships and social justice rather than particular sexual acts. All persons have the right and responsibility to lead sexual lives that express love, justice, mutuality, commitment, consent and pleasure. Grounded in respect for the body and for the vulnerability that intimacy brings, this ethic fosters physical, emotional and spiritual health. It accepts no double standards and applies to all persons, without regard to sex, gender, color, age, bodily condition, marital status or sexual orientation.

God hears the cries of those who suffer from the failure of religious communities to address sexuality. We are called today to see, hear and respond to the suffering caused by sexual abuse and violence against women and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) persons, the HIV pandemic, unsustainable population growth and over-consumption, and the commercial exploitation of sexuality.

Faith communities must therefore be truth-seeking, courageous and just. We call for:

- Theological reflection that integrates the wisdom of excluded, often silenced peoples, and insights about sexuality from medicine, social science, the arts and humanities.
- Full inclusion of women and LGBT persons in congregational life, including their ordination and marriage equality.
- Sexuality counseling and education throughout the lifespan from trained religious leaders.
- Support for those who challenge sexual oppression and who work for justice within their congregations and denominations.

Faith communities must also advocate for sexual and spiritual wholeness in society. We call for:

- Lifelong, age-appropriate sexuality education in schools, seminaries and community settings.
- A faith-based commitment to sexual and reproductive rights, including access to voluntary contraception, abortion, and HIV/STD prevention and treatment.
- Religious leadership in movements to end sexual and social injustice.

God rejoices when we celebrate our sexuality with holiness and integrity. We, the undersigned, invite our colleagues and faith communities to join us in promoting sexual morality, justice, and healing.

Updated January 2010

Sexuality and Religion

Virtually all of the world's religions understand sexuality as a divinely bestowed capacity for expressing love and generating life, for mutual companionship and pleasure. They teach that sexuality calls for responsibility, respect and self-discipline; they honor loving, ethical relationships. They understand that sexuality may be celebrated with joy, holiness and integrity, but that it is also vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

From these common understandings, however, religious teachings widely diverge. Some faith communities in the United States affirm sexuality as a blessing, and have a commitment to sexual health, education and justice. Others have a deep commitment to sexual health, particularly HIV and teen pregnancy prevention, but they remain conflicted over how to incorporate lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people into congregational life. Still others teach that sexuality is something to be tightly controlled and restricted to specific acts and relationships. However, the majority of faith communities remains mostly silent on sexuality issues.

Clearly, the relationship between sexuality and religion – historically and still today – is a conflicted one. This report is intended to foster a new understanding of the relationship between sexuality and religion, an understanding rooted in historical traditions, spirituality and justice.

Recovering Religious Affirmations of Sexuality

Whether through silence, condemnation or exclusion, religious leaders and institutions have contributed to the suffering that many people have experienced regarding their sexuality. Yet the world's religions also have rich histories and traditions celebrating sexuality and sexual diversity:

- In the Hebrew Bible, the Song of Songs stands out as an example of erotic poetry, and many of its other books embrace a positive view of sexuality, bodies, diverse relationships and mutuality. Other Jewish texts look beyond the male-female binary to embrace the *aylonit* (barren woman), *saris* (eunuch) and *tumtum/androgynus* (hermaphrodite) as equals in society.²
- In Christian scriptures, there is a consistent ethic of loving one's neighbor and embracing the stranger. In early Christianity, women were important messengers of the new faith, and an Ethiopian eunuch was among its first converts (Acts of the Apostles 8:29-36). In a message of inclusion to the community in Galatia, Paul erases social and gender distinctions as he declares, "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).
- Islam regards sexuality as integral to the human condition, affirms the union of body and soul, and recognizes the erotic dimension of spirituality. Certain texts in the Qur'an also uphold the equality of women and men.³
- Hinduism expresses diversity through its many names for the divine and through physical manifestations of deities that transcend sex and gender categories. Ancient texts reference the existence of three sexes in the Hindu tradition.⁴

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- Native American traditions honor “two-spirit” people and the coexistence of heterosexual and homosexual relationships.⁵

During the last three decades, several faith traditions have made progress in addressing the pastoral needs of congregants regarding sexuality, promoting gender equality and LGBT inclusion, and advocating for sexual justice in faith communities and society. Ethicists, clergy and scholars across a range of faiths have challenged longstanding conventions and championed new religious teachings on sexuality that recognize the scientific insights and sociological realities of the modern world. Feminist, queer and liberation theologians have used the tools of historical criticism to develop new ways of reading and interpreting religious texts, and derived richer understandings of sexuality from the Bible and other sacred sources.

Integration of Sexuality and Spirituality

In spiritual terms, sexuality may be regarded as an embodied desire for intimate connection – with oneself, with a lover, or with the divine. This connection may be experienced in sensual moments, from being cradled as an infant, to reveling in the beauty of nature, to being held in the arms of a lover. In seeking connection, human beings endeavor to achieve sexual wholeness, marked by physical and emotional well-being, and grounded in right relationship.

Spirituality, too, is marked by a deep desire for connection to self, to others and to the divine; spirituality finds expression through these relationships. When spiritual relationships are expressed through communal, collective practices, we may understand them to be religious. Just as there are a variety of religions, we also speak of diverse spiritualities that are individual and, at times, collective.

Consciously and unconsciously, sexuality and spirituality are part of everyday living. Both are creative, generative and productive. Both can bring joy and pleasure. When experienced and expressed in life-giving and affirming ways, they can lead to health and wholeness of individuals and communities. Often, they may reveal new insights about ourselves, our relationships and our perceptions of the divine.

The question is not so much whether sexuality and spirituality are connected, but in what ways? Are they expressed and experienced in relationships that are healthy, just and life-giving? Are our sexual and spiritual lives characterized by integrity and well-being? How can religious communities nurture the sexual well-being of all people, whether married or single?

“Wherever people live as sexual persons, there will be the longing for a ‘good word about sex,’” write theologians Marvin Ellison and Sylvia Thorson Smith. “A hopeful message is needed about how to realize justice as well as love in sexual relationship.”⁶



Justice-Love: The Pastoral and the Prophetic

Because our sexualities and spiritualities are nurtured in and through relationships, the quality of those relationships shapes the connection between our sexuality and spirituality. Often, in a world marred by brokenness, fear and distrust, sexuality can be experienced as abusive, abused and alienated. So, too, our spirituality can be damaged through negative encounters with religion or the wider world.

In 2000, the *Religious Declaration on Sexual Morality, Justice, and Healing* proposed a new sexual ethic – an ethic focused on personal relationships, integrity and justice, rather than on particular sexual acts. This ethic upholds the right and responsibility of all persons to lead sexual lives that express love, mutuality, commitment, consent and pleasure. Grounded in respect for the body and for the vulnerability that intimacy brings, it fosters physical, emotional and spiritual health. It accepts no double standards and applies to all persons, without regard to sex, gender, color, age, bodily condition, marital status or sexual orientation.

Sexual justice seeks to uphold the experience and expression of sexuality as life-giving and pleasurable, in a social context marked by mutual respect, equality and accountability. Religious leaders have a special role to play in being prophetic about the right of all adults to make responsible and ethical sexual decisions. As the theologian Daniel Maguire has written, “Religiously nourished illnesses require religious cures.”⁷

Religious leaders can also give voice to the understanding that sexual justice does not stand apart from other dimensions of social justice. Because all injustice is rooted in oppression, religious leaders must seek to eradicate not only sexism and homophobia, but all forms of oppression that undermine equality and right relationship, including racism, poverty and economic injustice.

In the goals that follow, this report sets forth a vision for a future when all faith communities will be sexually healthy, just and prophetic. We invite you to join us in creating this future.

Vision

By the year 2020, all faith communities will be sexually healthy, just and prophetic.

Goals for the Next Decade

Goal 1: By the year 2020, the nation's clergy and religious professionals will have the education, skills and commitment to be sexually healthy and responsible leaders.

Goal 2: By the year 2020, seminaries and other schools entrusted with preparing future religious leaders will integrate sexuality education and sexual justice in their curricula and institutional cultures.

Goal 3: By the year 2020, the nation's religious congregations will be sexually healthy faith communities.

Goal 4: By the year 2020, the nation's religious denominations will demonstrate a commitment to sexual health, education and justice.

Goal 5: By the year 2020, multifaith coalitions will be actively engaged in the sexual justice movement.

Goal 6: By the year 2020, sexual justice will be central to the social justice agenda of progressive religious leaders.

Goal 7: By the year 2020, sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and LGBT advocacy organizations will recognize collaboration with religious leaders and people of faith as essential to their success.

Goal 8: By the year 2020, progressive religious leaders will be the prominent voice in national and local media on issues of sexual justice.

Goal 9: By the year 2020, federal, state and local policy makers will recognize that there is an authentic, progressive religious voice on sexual justice.

Goal 10: The Religious Institute calls upon people of faith to join together as the Faithful Voices Network in support of sexual health, education and justice.



Goal 1

By the year 2020, the nation’s clergy and religious professionals will have the education, skills and commitment to be sexually healthy and responsible leaders.

Religious leaders have a unique potential to transform society’s understanding of sexuality and religion — through the power of the pulpit, pastoral care of individuals and families, and a vocal presence in the media, politics and civil society. Unfortunately, most clergy and religious professionals are insufficiently trained to address these issues, and many are uncomfortable talking about sexuality at all. For some, the discourse around sexuality never gets beyond “*Thou shalt not...*” For others, sexuality remains cloaked in silence.

Contemporary issues of sexuality require that clergy and religious professionals* be both *pastoral* and *prophetic*. Pastors must be prepared to address a range of sexuality issues in ministry, from marital crises and divorce to sexual abuse to individual struggles with sexual orientation and gender identity. At the same time, progressive religious voices are urgently needed to promote sexual justice issues such as marriage equality, LGBT inclusion, comprehensive sexuality education and reproductive justice. Religious leaders can also demonstrate how sexual justice intersects with economic justice, racial justice, gender equity and ecological stewardship.⁸

At a time when many denominations and faith communities are embroiled in sexuality debates, there is an urgent need for religious leaders who understand the connections among sexuality, faith and justice, and are willing to give voice to these issues in their congregations and in the public square.

The Need

Many congregants and others in the community perceive clergy and religious professionals as capable of dealing with a range of pastoral concerns. Unfortunately, when it comes to sexuality, these perceptions do not always square with the reality of seminary education and religious training (*see Goal 2*).

This lack of preparation reverberates throughout religious denominations and across untold numbers of congregations, where clergy and religious leaders confront an array of sexuality issues—healing sexual brokenness, preventing clergy misconduct and sexual abuse, providing sexuality education to young people, and taking positions on public policy issues such as abortion, stem cell research, marriage for same-sex couples and reproductive technologies.

Whether for lack of training, discomfort with sexuality or fear of controversy, too many religious leaders are not engaging these issues. A 2008 survey of mainline Protestant clergy found that solid

* The term “religious professional” refers broadly to those who serve in faith-based settings or in pastoral or other religious roles, including chaplains, religious educators, lay ministers, youth leaders, theologians and religious scholars, justice advocates, spiritual directors, congregational and denominational staff, and staff of religious or faith-based organizations.

majorities seldom or never speak out on LGBT issues (57%), abortion (74%) or sex education in public schools (87%).⁹

A Religious Institute survey of progressive Christian, Jewish and Unitarian Universalist clergy found that individual support for sexual justice does not always translate into preaching, teaching and ministries within congregations. Nearly 40% of the clergy surveyed had not preached on sexual orientation in at least two years. Seventy percent had not preached on reproductive justice, and three-quarters had not addressed sex education from the pulpit.¹⁰ The survey pointed to a persistent need, even among the most progressive religious professionals, to translate attitudes into action on sexuality education, reproductive rights, LGBT inclusion and related areas of sexual justice.

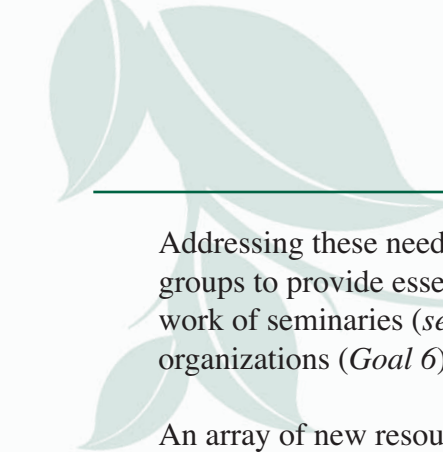
Becoming a sexually healthy and responsible religious leader begins with honest self-examination. Clergy and religious professionals must examine their sexual histories and attitudes, and confront their own limitations and biases around sexuality. They must determine how well they meet the criteria of a sexually healthy and responsible religious leader. Such leaders are:

- Knowledgeable about human sexuality;
- Familiar with their tradition's sacred texts on sexuality;
- Able to engage in theological reflection about how best to integrate sexuality and spirituality;
- Able to examine the impact of racism, sexism, heterosexism and homophobia in ministry;
- Culturally competent, understanding how to address sexuality in a manner that respects diverse historical and faith traditions, as well as different socioeconomic and ethnic contexts;
- Trained in pastoral counseling approaches that facilitate resolution of conflict, specifically when dealing with sexual matters, for individuals, families and groups;
- Able to serve as role models, discussing sexual issues with ease and comfort;
- Knowledgeable about their denomination's policies on sexuality;
- Able to speak out for sexual justice within their denomination and in the larger community;
- Skilled in preaching about sexuality-related issues;
- Able to recognize their personal limitations and boundaries when it comes to handling sexuality issues;
- Able to deal appropriately with sexual feelings that may arise for congregants, and vice-versa.¹¹

Recommendations

Participants in the 2020 Colloquium identified three overarching needs:

- Broader awareness and understanding among clergy and religious professionals about the pressing need for sexuality education and skills, as well as a commitment to sexual health and justice.
- Education in the full range of sexuality-related issues that clergy and religious professionals will address in their ministries.
- Breaking the silence around sexuality in congregations and other religious communities.



Addressing these needs will require broad coordination and collaboration among a number of groups to provide essential training, credentialing, continuing education and support. This is the work of seminaries (*see Goal 2*), denominations (*Goal 4*) and progressive religious leaders and organizations (*Goal 6*).

An array of new resources also will be required. Participants proposed the development of online courses and webinars for training in sexuality issues for ministers; an online referral network to enable clergy and religious leaders to refer congregants with specific sexuality concerns to experienced therapists, counselors and other resources in their local communities; and a directory of religious leaders with expertise in specific aspects of sexual health, education and justice.

Perhaps most important, clergy and religious professionals must hear from those whom they serve. An appeal from congregants will surely lead to a stronger commitment to sexual health, education and justice.

Goal 2

By the year 2020, seminaries and other schools entrusted with preparing future religious leaders will integrate sexuality education and sexual justice in their curricula and institutional cultures.

For decades, seminarians and clergy have reported that the ministerial training they received did not equip them to handle the sexuality issues they face in ministry. A series of studies, dating from the late 1980s, has pointed to gaps in seminary curricula, an absence of institutional commitment, and too little attention paid to helping seminarians explore their own sexual attitudes and values.¹²

The Religious Institute's 2009 report, *Sex and the Seminary: Preparing Ministers for Sexual Health and Justice*, found that little has changed. Seminaries are still not providing future religious leaders with sufficient opportunities for study, self-assessment and ministerial formation in sexuality.

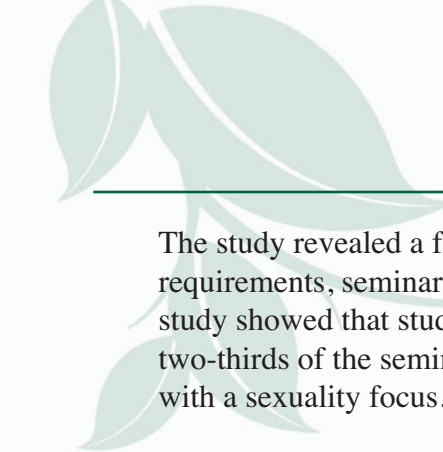
The problem is not that sexuality is not discussed. Feminist and queer theologies, coupled with social justice activism on behalf of women and sexual minorities in religious and secular life, have had a definite influence at many seminaries. Sexuality is often addressed within a framework of intersecting justice issues, such as economics, environmental concerns, racial/ethnic diversity and disability issues. But when it comes to preparing future clergy and religious professionals to deal with sexual abuse, infidelity, professional boundaries, sexual orientation and gender identity, sexual dysfunction and a host of other concerns, seminary education often is sorely lacking.

If clergy and religious professionals are to become sexually healthy and responsible leaders, the institutions that train them have a vital role to play.

The Need

The *Sex and the Seminary* report was based on a two-year study of how 36 theological schools address sexuality, both in the curriculum and in the institutional environment. The study involved an in-depth survey of a select group of institutions, primarily mainline Protestant, Jewish and Unitarian Universalist, believed to be providing some degree of sexuality education.

The study found that sexuality courses are largely absent from most seminary curricula and degree requirements. More than 90% of the seminaries surveyed did not require a full-semester sexuality course for graduation, and less than one-third addressed sexuality in core courses, including such major fields as theology, scripture, ethics and pastoral care. Only one of the seminaries required a skills-based course on sexuality issues; only six required sexual ethics. Three-quarters did not offer a course on LGBT studies. In all but one of the seminaries, ministerial candidates could graduate without taking a single sexuality-based course.



The study revealed a few promising trends. For example, in the absence of curricular requirements, seminarians are creating their own opportunities for sexuality-related learning. The study showed that students were able to participate in events on sexual and reproductive justice at two-thirds of the seminaries, and many of the seminaries had student advocacy or support groups with a sexuality focus.

There also has been a shift in the past two decades toward encouraging, and in some cases requiring, prevention training to eliminate clergy sexual misconduct. Twenty-nine of the institutions surveyed (81%) offered such training. Similarly, more than 90% of seminaries had anti-sexual harassment policies for faculty, staff and student relationships, and anti-discrimination policies on the basis of sex and sexual orientation.

Still, most institutions have room for improvement when it comes to inclusion policies, worship opportunities, and gender parity among the faculty, administration and boards of trustees. Most of the institutions lacked proactive policies on the full inclusion of women and LGBT persons. The study also revealed a “stained glass ceiling” in many seminaries. Two-thirds of the institutions surveyed had fewer than 40% women serving in faculty, senior administrative and trustee positions, in contrast to student populations that are frequently more than half women.

Diversity in leadership makes a difference. As the study noted, “When women represent at least 40% of the faculty, institutions are more likely to offer full-semester courses in women/feminist studies, sexual ethics, LGBT/queer studies, sexuality issues for religious professionals, and sexual abuse/domestic violence.”¹³

Recommendations

The Religious Institute has defined a “sexually healthy and responsible seminary” as an institution committed to fostering the spiritual, sexual and emotional health of its students, faculty and staff, and to providing a safe environment where sexuality issues are openly and respectfully addressed.

To achieve this vision by the year 2020, seminaries can:

Revise ministerial formation standards to include sexuality education. According to the Association of Theological Schools, the primary goals of a ministry degree program should take into account “knowledge of the religious heritage; understanding of the cultural context; growth in spiritual depth and moral integrity; and capacity for ministerial and public leadership.”¹⁴ Sexuality-related issues are present in each of these four areas and could be addressed explicitly to better prepare clergy and religious professionals for careers in ministry.

Strengthen curricular offerings and seminary environments. Institutions can consider revising degree requirements, providing additional courses, and ensuring that introductory and core courses address sexuality. Integrating sexuality issues into core curricula, so that they are well-covered in scripture, ethics, theology, counseling, worship, preaching and polity courses, would make a meaningful difference. At the same time, institutions must be proactive in instituting or strengthening sexuality-related policies, such as inclusive language, non-discrimination, and sexual harassment policies and boundaries. One 2020 Colloquium participant suggested that institutions adopt the congregational model of full inclusion for LGBT persons and take steps to become “welcoming and affirming seminaries.”

Invest in faculty development and continuing education. Supportive faculty and administrators require continued training and resource networks for course development. A seminary can provide this independently, but collaboration may be more cost-effective. Through distance learning, online courses, webinars and other vehicles, institutions with expertise in sexuality issues for ministers might broadly share their resources. The Religious Institute is convening regional meetings of faculty and administrators to discuss the *Sex and the Seminary* findings, evaluate best practices, begin development of an online course, and explore further opportunities for collaboration on training and curricula.

Collaborate with other seminaries, educational organizations and advocacy groups. Seminaries need the support of their denominational bodies, accrediting organizations, and each other to make significant strides in the sexual health of their institutions and of the professionals they graduate. Partnerships among institutions could enable shared course offerings, including winter/summer intensives and online training. Beginning in 2010, the Religious Institute is working with three seminaries as pilot sites to implement the recommendations of the *Sex and the Seminary* report to become sexually healthy and responsible seminaries. The Religious Institute also is working with a number of denominations to integrate healthy sexuality training in their ordination standards and in professional development requirements for clergy and staff (*see Goal 4*).

Implementing these recommendations will be difficult in a time when institutions are burdened with financial constraints and competing demands on the curriculum. But seminaries can start by building on what they have. Integrating sexuality issues into introductory and core courses would not require the addition of new faculty, but rather the training of existing ones. Revising ministerial formation standards, implementing full inclusion policies and pursuing collaborative ventures are less a matter of funding than institutional commitment.

Goal 3

By the year 2020, the nation’s religious congregations will be sexually healthy faith communities.

Despite growing numbers of people who claim no religious affiliation,¹⁵ the nation’s 335,000 religious congregations¹⁶ remain central to the lives of most Americans. More than 60% of Americans belong to a local church, synagogue or other religious community; more than half attend services once or twice a month; and nearly 40% attend weekly.¹⁷ Across the country, congregations are vital “communities within the community,” where the values of sexual health and justice can be fully and faithfully addressed.

At the denominational level, sexuality is the subject of policy and doctrinal debate (*see Goal 4*). But at the congregational level, sexuality is real life. Untold numbers of congregants harbor histories of sexual abuse, incest, rape, domestic violence, negative body image, anorexia, bulimia or divorce. Many are facing sexual and reproductive health issues, such as unplanned pregnancies, abortions, infertility, sexually transmitted infections and HIV. Others are struggling with extramarital affairs and divorce, or with questions about sexual identity and gender identity – their own, or those of their children or parents. Added to all of these concerns are issues undreamed of in previous generations – sexually explicit materials on the Internet, online affairs, gender transitions, assisted reproduction, and the effects of medication on sexual activity.

Congregations can be places of support and healing for all of these issues. Yet sexuality is more than a pastoral concern – it is among the blessings of the creation, an integral part of human life. By addressing sexuality openly and holistically, congregations have a unique and powerful opportunity to demonstrate the intimate connections between sexuality and spirituality.

The Need

In its publication *A Time to Build: Creating Sexually Healthy Faith Communities*, the Religious Institute defined a “sexually healthy faith community” as one promoting the integration of sexuality and spirituality in worship, preaching, pastoral care, youth and adult education, and social action programs in the community.¹⁸

Unfortunately, congregations provide very little in the way of sexuality-related programs and services. Among mainline Protestant congregations, only 31% offer marriage enrichment programs, only 26% offer youth sexuality education, 15% offer pregnancy counseling, and just 14% have ministries serving LGBT persons and families.¹⁹ Even among the most progressive clergy, only half report that they preach on sexuality issues.²⁰

Partially as a reaction to clergy sexual abuse scandals, many people of faith are demanding that religious communities take a more honest, direct approach to sexuality. The demand is particularly

urgent among youth. The Barna Group reported rising skepticism and disillusionment with Christianity among people under 30, who take issue with conservative Christian attitudes toward homosexuality in particular.²¹

Recommendations

Every congregation, whether conservative or progressive, Christian or Jewish, Muslim or Hindu, has a responsibility to address the sexuality needs of its congregants in the context of its own beliefs and teachings. The eight building blocks of a sexually healthy faith community²² call on congregations to:

1. Be staffed by sexually healthy religious professionals
2. Offer periodic worship and preaching on sexuality issues
3. Provide pastoral care on a broad range of sexuality issues by trained pastoral care providers
4. Offer sexuality education for children and youth in the context of religious education and the beliefs of the faith tradition
5. Offer a variety of education programs and support services to support the sexuality needs of adults in the congregation, including support for parents in providing sexuality education to their children
6. Have explicit policies and procedures for keeping children, youth and vulnerable adults safe from sexual abuse, exploitation and harassment
7. Fully include LGBT people and families in the faith community
8. Work for sexual justice as part of a social action program

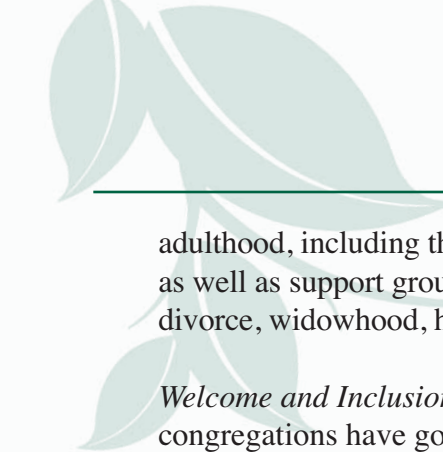
Of these eight building blocks, only the last two might be controversial among certain congregations. The other six are essential for all congregations, whether conservative or progressive in their theology and beliefs.

Among the top priorities for sexually healthy congregations are:

Sexuality Education for Youth: For more than four decades, denominations have understood that faith communities can be important partners to parents in helping children have the information and skills they need to become sexually healthy adults. At least 10 religious denominations and movements have policies supporting sexuality education, and more than a dozen have developed their own curricula (although many need updating). *Our Whole Lives*, jointly developed by the United Church of Christ and the Unitarian Universalist Association, is a model lifespan program.*

Sexuality Education and Support for Adults: There is a mistaken belief that the need for sexuality education ends in adolescence. The reality is that adults need reliable information at every stage of

* For more information about sexuality education in faith communities and how congregations can become involved, see *A Time to Speak: Faith Communities and Sexuality Education* (2006) and *Just Say Know: A Faith-Based Advocacy Guide for Sexuality Education* (2009) at www.religioustudies.org.



adulthood, including the senior years. Congregations can offer adult sexuality education programs, as well as support groups for congregants facing a wide range of sexuality issues—dealing with divorce, widowhood, histories of childhood sexual abuse, HIV, LGBT issues, and so on.

Welcome and Inclusion: Although more than 3,300 Christian and Unitarian Universalist congregations have gone through a welcoming process for LGBT persons, and a dozen or more denominations have a relationship with a welcoming group, more congregations need to undertake a formal welcoming process. Two recent studies demonstrated that welcoming congregations are more active in social justice, more comfortable addressing sexuality issues and less concerned than other congregations that LGBT advocacy will create divisions or reduce membership.²³ However, many congregations that have embraced lesbian and gay adults have not yet taken steps to break the silence around bisexuality or to learn how to fully include transgender persons.*

Safe Policies: Every congregation must have formal procedures to assure that all are safe from abuse and able to enjoy congregational life free from sexual harassment of any kind. This includes policies for screening all staff and volunteers who work with children and teens for histories of sexual offenses, as well as practical requirements, such as two adults in all classrooms. Anti-sexual harassment policies must exist between staff and congregants, adults and youth in the congregation, congregants with each other, and guidelines for romantic relationships in the youth group. Further, congregations need to develop policies and draft agreements for ministering to people with a history of sex offenses or those recently charged.**

Social Action: Social action committees can help educate congregants to organize around such issues as marriage equality, sexuality education, and reproductive rights. Social action committees are ideal resources for helping people of faith recognize how sexual justice is part of a broader justice framework, which includes racial and gender discrimination, poverty, environmental degradation and a host of other issues. Letter-writing campaigns, congregation participation in community coalitions and national demonstrations, and presentations at school board meetings, city councils, and state agency and legislative hearings are all ways that congregants can make their views known. Legislative advocacy at the national level is another way to bring a faith perspective to the public square.

Colloquium participants recommended the development of new resources for working with parents in congregations on a broad range of sexuality issues. They suggested that there is a need to help congregations reach out to youth and young adults, and to provide greater sexuality services to the surrounding communities. They urged that non-traditional communities of faith, outside of congregations, be targeted for outreach, especially as a way to reach young people and communities of color. In addition, there is a pressing need for training opportunities for lay leadership, religious educators, youth leaders and clergy on improving the sexual health of their communities.

* For more information about moving from welcome to full inclusion, see *Acting Out Loud* at www.religioustheology.org.

** For more information, see the Religious Institute's *A Time to Heal: Protecting Children & Ministering to Sex Offenders* (2005).

Goal 4

By the year 2020, the nation’s religious denominations will demonstrate a commitment to sexual health, education and justice.

The first decade of the 21st century has been a turbulent one for the nation’s religious denominations, with sexuality a frequent point of controversy. Clergy sexual misconduct has embroiled not only the Roman Catholic Church, but at least 16 other Christian denominations and Jewish movements as well.²⁴ The polarization of progressives and conservatives over abortion and marriage equality has persisted, if not intensified. And with the exception of those few denominations at the forefront of women’s equality and LGBT inclusion, most denominations continue to struggle with the ordination of lesbian and gay clergy, full inclusion of LGBT persons and families, and sacred rites honoring diverse families.

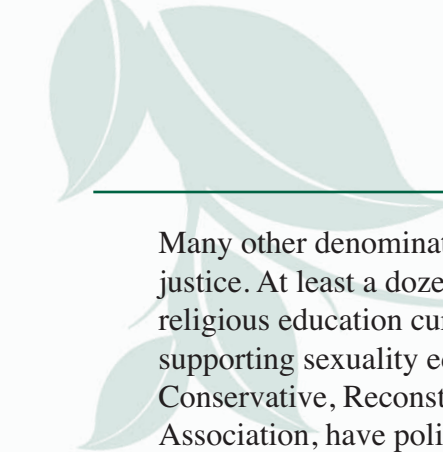
Meanwhile, although a majority of Americans still professes to be people of faith,²⁵ growing numbers are exploring their spirituality outside of denominational structures. Since 1990, membership in most denominations and movements has declined, with the largest gains in organized religion among nondenominational Christians.²⁶

Theories to explain denominational declines vary widely, but a number of surveys point to one general conclusion: For many Americans, organized religion has simply lost its *relevance*. Religion has “lost the courage to take prophetic stands for social justice,”²⁷ alienated young people with its homophobia²⁸ and cares more about its own institutions than it does about “loving God and loving people.”²⁹

Colloquium participants suggested that religious denominations could be poised for a new era of enlightened leadership regarding sexuality. A commitment to sexual health, education and justice is an opportunity for religious denominations to heal divisions, speak prophetically, and demonstrate a pastoral concern for individual struggles with sexuality.

The Need

Controversies over same-sex marriage and the ordination of lesbian and gay clergy have led a number of denominations to consider the broader context of sexuality and faith. Proposed policy changes and wide-ranging studies of sexuality have sparked discussion and debate, and brought sexuality issues out of the shadows in many religious communities. For example, in 2009 the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America produced a 20-page social statement titled *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust*, which captured public attention for its treatment of same-gender relationships. But the document also addressed protecting children and youth from sexual abuse, creating intimacy in adult relationships, sexuality in the workplace and other issues.



Many other denominations have shown a commitment to specific areas of sexual health and justice. At least a dozen Christian, Jewish and Unitarian Universalist traditions have published religious education curricula that address sexuality, and many have longstanding policies supporting sexuality education in schools. Many Protestant denominations, as well as the Jewish Conservative, Reconstructionist and Reform movements and the Unitarian Universalist Association, have policies supporting legal abortion. And growing numbers of denominations support LGBT inclusion, including the ordination of openly lesbian and gay clergy and the blessing of same-sex marriages and unions.

But there is opportunity for a good deal more. For example: Only one denomination currently requires clergy to demonstrate competencies in sexual health or education.³⁰ Not all require sexual harassment prevention training, either in seminary or during the first years of ministry. Many are still debating whether lesbian and gay candidates (whether married, partnered or single) can be ordained as clergy or serve in the congregation at all.

Stronger leadership in all areas of sexuality could strengthen denominations' existing commitments to such issues as the HIV pandemic, sexual violence against women and girls, and sex trafficking in many parts of the world. As one participant at the 2020 Colloquium said, "If the church does not become sexually relevant, it remains complicit in areas of sexual injustice that have not been fully resolved or healed."

Recommendations

Colloquium participants called on denominational leaders to begin the strategic work of identifying the next frontiers of sexual health, education and justice within their denominations and congregations. A vital step will be for denominations to expand requirements for sexual health competency for clergy, ordination candidates and staff. The Religious Institute is working with the Unitarian Universalist Association and the Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches on ordination requirements for their clergy, and with the Episcopal Church, Presbyterian Church USA and The United Methodist Church on training for seminarians and clergy.

Denominations can make sexuality issues vital to their mission. The United Church of Christ provides one model, with a full-time Minister of Sexuality Education and Justice on its headquarters staff. Most denominations also have well-established education programs and justice organizations. It is up to denominational leaders to mobilize and motivate these resources to include sexual health, education and justice as part of their commitments to wholeness.

Denominations can develop new liturgical resources to enable clergy and congregations to honor the spiritual dimensions of sexuality. For example, at its most recent general convention, the Episcopal Church authorized the development of pastoral resources for same-sex couples, including the

blessing of same-sex unions. Kolot, the Center for Jewish Women’s and Gender Studies at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, offers a range of liturgical resources on its website, Ritualwell.org. The site suggests ways to celebrate traditional rites of passage, such as *bar mitzvah* and marriage, as well as new rituals for such occasions as the onset of menstruation, menopause, coming out as LGBT, gender transition and in vitro fertilization.

Religious education departments in all denominations can do more to help congregations implement sexuality education programs. The *Our Whole Lives* sexuality education program, created by the United Church of Christ and Unitarian Universalist Association, is an excellent model of a standard curriculum that can be adapted, or “branded,” to a given faith tradition. *Our Whole Lives* is a lifespan program from kindergarten through adulthood. Young, middle-aged and senior adults all could benefit from sexuality education that addresses their distinct needs.

Although each denomination will create programs and policies that reflect its own theology and traditions, there is much to be gained from inter-denominational collaboration and partnership as well. Many denominations have been reaching across historical boundaries to enter into full communion with one another, creating shared pulpits and pursuing common missions. Sexual health, education and justice offer fertile ground for collaboration across denominations and faith traditions, in local communities, and on a national and global scale.



Goal 5

By the year 2020, multifaith coalitions will be actively engaged in the sexual justice movement.

More than ideology separates the “religious right” from the “religious left.” The right represents an overwhelmingly Christian, socially conservative constituency, largely based in the southern and western U.S. The left, by contrast, embraces moderate-to-progressive voices, from a range of Christian and non-Christian traditions, in virtually every part of the country.³¹

Across the national religious landscape, non-Christian religious groups (Jews, Muslims, Buddhists and other Eastern religions) have grown steadily, adding 3 million followers since 1990.³² Many of these groups – now representing 4% of the U.S. population – have not been actively involved in sexual justice. Like their counterparts in progressive Christian communities, these people of faith are typically less dogmatic than Christian conservatives³³ and take a more progressive view toward sexuality issues.

As the political scientist Robert Jones has noted, “This theological and demographic diversity presents unique challenges in coalition building and in speaking with a unified voice.”³⁴ It also presents unique opportunities for forging new alliances for sexual justice. By effectively engaging new allies, the sexual justice movement can speak in a richer, more powerful, and multifaith voice.

The Need

The 1960s were a seminal period for interfaith advocacy, as national religious leaders created alliances in support of civil rights and in opposition to the Vietnam War. The events of September 11, 2001, followed by terrorism and civil unrest in many parts of the world, have been met with renewed calls for interfaith dialogue as a pathway to peace.

Today, while certain sexual justice issues, such as marriage equality and legal access to abortion, have drawn support from people of faith, few multifaith organizations or alliances have engaged the full scope of sexual justice. Yet support for these issues runs wide and deep. Strong majorities of Jews, Buddhists, Hindus and mainline Protestants believe abortion should remain legal in some or all cases. (Muslims, like the U.S. population as a whole, are about evenly split.³⁵) On homosexuality, strong majorities of Buddhists (82%), Jews (79%), Roman Catholics (58%) and mainline Protestants (55%) agree that it “should be accepted by society,” compared with 50% of the population overall.³⁶

An excellent example of a multifaith approach to sexuality and religion is Christian Community’s Cleveland Project. This project aims to reduce the incidence of unwanted pregnancy, HIV and sexually transmitted infections among Cleveland-area teenagers by enlisting families, faith communities, and local sexual and reproductive health agencies in preparing adolescents for

dating and mature sexual decision-making. Christian Community staff have engaged religious leaders from more than half of Cleveland's 1,240 congregations, including Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist and other communities of faith.³⁷

From a multifaith perspective, the success of the Cleveland Project has relied upon a fundamental emphasis, common across all traditions, on reaching out to people in need. More specifically, project leaders have emphasized that – regardless of their religious tradition – teenagers will make sexual decisions in a religious framework if they are supported by caring adults. These dual emphases create a space for conversation about how congregations can provide for the sexual health and education of the youth and adults they serve.³⁸

Recommendations

Education is a vital aspect of multifaith advocacy. Sexual justice advocates and religious leaders must become culturally competent in a range of faith traditions in order to identify issues of common concern, explore existing vehicles of advocacy and communicate effectively to people of diverse religious backgrounds. Cultural competence begins with an awareness and understanding of sacred texts, dietary restrictions, rituals of feasts and fasting, holy day observances and other tenets of a given tradition. It also requires familiarity with a faith's historical teachings on sexuality, its official policy positions, and the thinking of its progressive clergy and scholars.

Sexual justice advocates can reach out to progressive leaders of non-Christian and non-Jewish faiths to begin a conversation on sexual health, education and justice. The Religious Institute is exploring convening a colloquium of progressive Muslims to discuss opportunities for collaboration and shared advocacy, for example. A Muslim participant at the 2020 Colloquium also suggested that current Jewish and Christian resources on sexuality be adapted for the language and traditions of Islam.

Developing relationships with leaders of other traditions will make it easier to identify shared concerns. Issues of gender-based violence, HIV prevention, and family and relationship concerns may be effective starting points for interfaith dialogue around sexuality, particularly among religious communities that do not have a history of openly addressing sexuality. Existing multifaith groups – such as women's coalitions, chaplaincy groups and college ministries – may be natural homes for sexuality-related projects, and can provide valuable guidance and resources for multifaith initiatives overall.

Religious leaders must remember that multifaith advocacy is an equal and broad-ranging partnership, not a single-issue campaign. In other words, advocates who enlist colleagues from other faith traditions to promote sexual health and justice must themselves be willing to support other justice issues, such as immigration, poverty and peacemaking, that reflect their colleagues' concerns and those of their congregations.

Goal 6

By the year 2020, sexual justice will be central to the social justice agenda of progressive religious leaders.

Even before President Obama issued a call to heal the divisions between red-state and blue-state America, progressive religious leaders were seeking common cause, and common ground, with evangelical Christians and religious moderates. Unfortunately, these efforts to work together on such vital issues as poverty, climate change and health care have largely excluded sexual justice.

All of these causes are vital and worthy. All are interconnected. Like sexual justice, these issues address the well-being of individuals, communities and the global society. Yet, in the interest of political expediency, many religious leaders are content to push sexual justice to the margins, ignoring its connections to broader justice issues regarding race, gender, class, poverty and ecology.

As the Religious Institute wrote in 2008, “Sexual justice issues are too important to the well-being of the nation to be buried under ‘common ground.’”³⁹ Rather than retreat from these issues, progressive religious leaders must come to recognize how sexual justice contributes to the common good. True social justice respects and honors all dimensions of creation, including the blessings of sexuality.

The Need

With regard to sexual justice, progressive religious leaders are encouraged to keep three considerations in mind:

Sexual justice is a mainstream movement reflecting mainstream values. Many religious leaders who privately support women’s moral agency and LGBT equality publicly distance themselves from what the media like to call “hot button” or “wedge issues,” such as abortion rights and marriage equality. When viewed through a narrow lens, these issues appear to divide the electorate down the middle, with half of Americans identifying as “pro-choice,” half as “pro-life,” and half in favor of same-sex marriage, half opposed.⁴⁰ Yet public opinion is more broadly favorable toward reproductive rights and LGBT equality than some polls suggest.

Three-quarters of Americans favor legal abortion in some or all circumstances, and 68% do not want *Roe v. Wade* overturned.⁴¹ Support for legal abortion is highest among Jews and Buddhists, with solid majorities among Hindus and most Christian groups as well. Similarly, 57% of Americans favor either civil unions or full marriage equality for same-sex couples, including majorities of mainline Protestants, Roman Catholics and Jews. Even among evangelical Christians, four in 10 support some legal rights for same-sex couples.⁴² Public support is even higher for comprehensive sexuality education in schools, LGBT civil rights and reducing

unwanted pregnancies. A number of religious denominations and organizations are on record in support of these issues as well.

Demographic trends favor sexual justice. Several surveys have demonstrated that younger Americans, including young people of faith, take a progressive position on sexual justice. For example, a majority of 18- to 29-year-olds (59%) favor legal marriage for same-sex couples, the highest support of any age group.⁴³ Although their views on abortion are consistent with the population overall, young people are strongly intolerant of the persistent culture wars, with 64% agreeing that “religious faith should focus more on promoting tolerance, social justice, and peace and less on opposing abortion or gay rights.”⁴⁴

In his report, *The Coming End of the Culture Wars*, Ruy Teixeira of the Center for American Progress summarizes the demographic trends this way:

Millennials [the generation born after 1977] are so much more favorable to legalizing gay marriage than older generations that, by sometime in the next decade, there will be majority public support for legalizing gay marriage as Millennials fully enter the electorate and take the place of much older, far more conservative voters. Other areas where big demographic effects can be observed are on gender roles and family values, and on race, where rising demographic groups’ proclivities will tilt the country even further toward tolerance, nontraditionalism, and respect for diversity.⁴⁵

Sexual justice is integral to economic justice. Sexual justice is a vital concern for those whom progressive religious leaders believe they are most called to serve – the oppressed and the marginalized. For example, poor women and their families are disproportionately affected when reproductive health services are denied or inaccessible. The rate of unintended births is five times greater among poor women than higher-income women in the U.S.⁴⁶ As a result, more than half of the unwanted children in this country are born into poverty. The trends are particularly stark among teenagers. Rates of sexual activity among lower- and higher-income adolescents are virtually identical, but the outcomes are not. Poor and low-income adolescents account for nearly three-quarters of women aged 15-19 who become pregnant.⁴⁷

Consider, too, the unjust burden placed on same-sex couples and their families. There are anywhere from 1 to 10 million children living in same-sex households.⁴⁸ Denied the benefits conferred by federal law, these families must negotiate a legal obstacle course to ensure joint-parenting rights, secure family health benefits, and provide the level of stability that married, heterosexual couples take for granted. The burden of legalized discrimination falls heaviest on lower-income families, who cannot afford the lawyers to help them.



Recommendations

Progressive religious leaders must first recognize the connection between sexual and social justice. By mobilizing existing networks that address racism, poverty, immigration and other concerns, advocates can effectively challenge the idea that sexual justice can be segregated from other justice issues.

Participants at the 2020 Colloquium called on national religious leaders to engage their colleagues in direct dialogue, challenging those who would publicly denigrate sexual justice and encouraging supporters who have remained silent. Champions of sexual justice must speak out every time these issues are dismissed or ignored. Advocates of sexual justice also must be included at national religious gatherings, in speakers' bureaus and religious media, and in research and scholarship.

Through collaboration, new partnerships can be forged to address such shared concerns as sexual abuse and violence against women, preventing the need for abortion by reducing unintended pregnancies, and advocating for the full civil rights of LGBT persons. The Religious Institute's Congo Sabbath Initiative, created to raise awareness about violence against women in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the Rachel Sabbath Initiative, designed to address maternal mortality worldwide, effectively demonstrated how to engage organizations and leaders who have heretofore been silent on sexual justice.

A more meaningful – and faithful – public conversation may arise when sexual justice is regarded not as a political issue, but as a *pastoral* one. By focusing on individuals and families in need, progressive religious leaders may foster a climate of open engagement, respectful dialogue, and greater openness and trust where sexual health and justice are concerned.

Goal 7

By the year 2020, sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and LGBT advocacy organizations will recognize collaboration with religious leaders and people of faith as essential to their success.

Whether they are personally religious or not, advocates who work for sexual and reproductive health, gender equity and LGBT civil rights are motivated by the same values that inspire people of faith: a passion for justice, a desire to heal, and a call to protect individual dignity and self-worth.

In theological terms, these advocates are called to *tikkun olam*, to heal the world — to repair the brokenness that so many suffer because of unintended pregnancies, coerced and exploitive sexual experiences, denial of an individual’s sexual or gender identity, violence against women and sexual minorities, and children who are not loved or wanted.

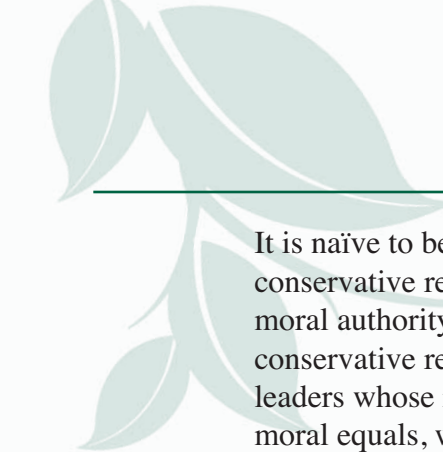
Although religious and secular advocates often share common values, they are only beginning to work together toward common goals. Too many secular organizations are characterized by what the Religious Institute has labeled ‘religiophobia’: a fear of religion, which translates into a reluctance to engage faith communities in their work or to directly address moral values.⁴⁹

There is no question that some parts of organized religion *have* contributed to profound cultural and personal confusion about sexuality. Organizations on the right have so effectively used religious leaders to carry their message that the widespread misperception is that there is only one religious voice when it comes to sexuality, and it is a negative one. Too many secular advocates of sexual justice have not recognized that theirs, too, is a moral cause.

The Need

Ignoring faith voices in public debates over sexual justice can be costly. Many observers believe that a failure to effectively engage moderate and progressive people of faith in California may have contributed to the passage of Proposition 8 in 2008, which eliminated marriage rights for same-sex couples.⁵⁰ While some progress has been made in secular and faith-based partnerships, there is a persistent need for SRH and LGBT advocates to recognize and mobilize people of faith in their efforts.

Rather than engage the morality of sexual justice, secular advocates tend to focus on civil rights. But a conservative religious argument requires a progressive religious response, one that is grounded in scripture and the historical tradition. A post-Proposition 8 analysis by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force framed an argument for faith-based LGBT advocacy that is pertinent to all sexual justice issues:



It is naïve to believe that rights-based arguments can trump the value-based arguments of conservative religious leaders. It is also naïve to ignore the power and influence of the moral authority given to religious leaders within communities of faith. The voices of conservative religious leaders must be responded to by the voices of progressive faith leaders whose religious beliefs and traditions allow them to speak to people of faith as moral equals, within the context of their faith traditions and racial/ethnic cultures.⁵¹

Progressive clergy and theologians can articulate a message of sexual justice grounded in scripture and religious values. Exercising the power of the pulpit, religious leaders can speak with moral authority to the values of justice and human dignity.

Secular advocates of sexual justice also might consider the vital resources that faith communities can provide. Religious activists have honed valuable skills in organizing, communications and networking through their work with faith-based justice organizations and through denominational battles over LGBT inclusion and other issues. Congregations can also provide meeting space, volunteers, grassroots support and high-profile venues for public action.

Recommendations

Some of the most visible and effective partnerships between secular and faith-based organizations working for sexual justice are the clergy networks of Planned Parenthood and People for the American Way, and the religion and faith programs of the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, and GLAAD. But most of these efforts are under-funded and under-staffed; a commitment of additional resources would enable them to be even more effective. These partnerships could address not only reproductive justice and LGBT equality, but also HIV/AIDS, domestic violence, human trafficking and a host of other issues as well.

Secular advocates who have not engaged faith-based allies can begin by developing relationships with key religious leaders nationally and in local communities. (Despite their heavy workloads, most clergy say they want to be more active in social and political issues.⁵²) These relationships can be fruitful in identifying shared concerns, creating collaborative projects and leading to long-term partnerships.*

Advocates must be willing to start at the faith community's current level of commitment, rather than pushing too quickly for a congregation or its leaders to take a bold stand on a controversial issue. For example, sexuality education in a congregation could begin with a workshop for parents led by an educator from a local SRH organization.

* For more information, see *Reaching Out to Faith Communities: A Guide for Sexual and Reproductive Health Organizations* (2006) at www.religiousinstitute.org.

Through collaborative relationships, secular and faith-based organizations can educate one another about justice issues and strategies. Following the example of GLAAD and HRC, among others, SRH and LGBT organizations can provide valuable training to progressive clergy and lay leaders to be more effective advocates for sexual justice. These religious leaders, in turn, can assist SRH and LGBT organizations to more effectively reach out to faith communities. Organizations may find untapped potential for this work among “closeted” people of faith within their ranks. (As one activist for an SRH organization described it, “It’s easier for me to come out as gay in my office than to come out as Christian.”)

Secular organizations must ensure that these are true partnerships – not superficial attempts to engage new volunteers or to put a religious face on a public issue. Effective faith-secular partnerships require real investments in personnel and resources, and a sustained commitment by organizational leaders. These partnerships succeed when secular organizations view religion and faith as a cultural competency and make it part of the professional development of their staffs.

Goal 8

By the year 2020, progressive religious leaders will be the prominent voice in national and local media on issues of sexual justice.

Who speaks for sexuality and religion in America? Judging from the news media, it is typically a white, heterosexual, male, Christian conservative. Who provides the counterpoint to this spokesman's point of view? Typically a white, male secular leader. Left out of the conversation? Mainstream and progressive religious voices, and the perspective of women of faith.

As a result, the American media – local and national, print, broadcast and online – reinforce the false notion that there is only one religious voice, and it is a traditional, conservative one. “Religion is often depicted in the news media as a politically divisive force,” said a 2007 report by Media Matters for America. “On one side are cultural conservatives who ground their political values in religious beliefs; and on the other side are secular liberals, who have opted out of debates that center on religion-based values.”⁵³

This secular/religious divide is exacerbated when it comes to issues of sexuality, such as abortion, marriage equality and adolescent sexuality. Although recent denominational debates have raised the profile of LGBT-affirming people of faith, religious voices favoring reproductive justice and comprehensive sexuality education are only rarely heard in the media. Religious progressives must take every opportunity to elevate their profile across the media spectrum – and to speak out for sexual justice as they do.

The Need

A number of studies have measured the imbalance in media coverage of religion. The Media Matters report, *Left Behind: The Skewed Representation of Religion in Major News Media*, revealed that:

- On television news — the major television networks, cable news channels and the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) — conservative religious leaders were quoted, mentioned or interviewed almost four times more often than progressive leaders.
- In major newspapers, conservative religious leaders were quoted, mentioned or interviewed close to three times more often than progressive leaders.⁵⁴

An analysis by the media consulting firm Douglas Gould and Company also noted that, in a one-year period, men were three times more likely to be quoted in the media than women on matters of religion and culture.⁵⁵

Compounding the imbalance is the preponderance of media programming generated by conservative religion itself. The Christian Broadcast Network (CBN), for example, is a global enterprise with annual revenues of nearly \$300 million. Focus on the Family broadcasts reach 238 million people in 155 countries.⁵⁶ Relatively fewer (and considerably smaller) outlets offer a more

progressive perspective, notably Americans United's Rev. Barry Lynn's "Culture Shock" and the Interfaith Alliance's Rev. Dr. Weldon Gaddy's "State of Belief" radio programs.

Of course, the Internet and the recent explosion of "new media" (such as weblogs, Twitter, Facebook and other forms of social networking) have democratized the media landscape considerably. This represents a valuable new opportunity for religious progressives.

Recommendations

Some of the work required to advance a new religious perspective on sexuality is simply more focus on the fundamentals:

- More religious leaders, particularly at the local level, need training as spokespersons on sexual health and justice in order to develop their own voice on these issues in the context of their faith traditions.
- Religious leaders and organizations must continue to create and build relationships with influential journalists and editors across a range of local, denominational and national media.
- Clergy and religious leaders can be more assertive in speaking out through diverse channels – in letters to the editor and op-ed columns, on web sites and blogs, and through social networking media.

At the same time, religious leaders and organizations can devise creative new approaches to media relations, such as:

- Seeking innovative collaborations with influential religious media such as BeliefNet, Religion News Service, and Christian and Jewish news services, and with organizations that focus on influencing the media, such as Auburn Seminary, the Women's Media Center and GLAAD.
- Building a network and directory of skilled speakers and spokespersons in key media markets who can address religion and sexuality.
- Creating a media roundtable among like-minded faith-based organizations and denominational groups to collaborate on media strategy and share media relationships.
- Educating journalists, from secular, religious and denominational media, on matters of sexual health, education and justice *from a faith perspective*.

Religious advocates of sexual justice have an obligation to educate the media – and the public – that theirs is an informed, distinct and credible point of view that contributes something new and vital to the national conversation. Rather than merely respond to issues raised in public debates, progressive religious leaders can redefine the debates themselves. Religious progressives must commit themselves to study, reflection, research and writing. The blogosphere offers a home for many voices, but religious progressives must also find their way into more influential venues. It is time for religious progressives to contribute the next bestseller, the next groundbreaking research study, and the next provocative essay in the *New Yorker* or *The Atlantic* that transforms the national conversation on sexuality and religion.

Goal 9

By the year 2020, federal, state and local policy makers will recognize that there is an authentic, progressive religious voice on sexual justice.

For too long, the most prominent religious voice on public policies related to sexuality issues has come from the conservative (and predominantly Christian) right. Although they claimed to represent a “moral majority,” these religious spokespersons never represented a majority of Christians, much less a majority of Americans. An assessment following the 2004 Presidential election estimated the “religious right” to be no more than 15 percent of the electorate.⁵⁷

Following the 2008 elections, the impact of religious conservatives on public policy was thought to be waning, as progressives asserted a stronger voice on a range of issues, from health care to the environment. However, the recent role of the U.S. Catholic bishops and evangelical leaders (inserting abortion restrictions into health care reform legislation) amply demonstrates their continued influence. This is the moment for policy makers to recognize an authentic, progressive religious voice on issues of sexual justice.

The Need

In recent years, progressive religious leaders have publicly demonstrated their support for addressing domestic violence, enacting federal hate crimes legislation that includes sexual orientation and gender identity protections, and achieving health care reform. But the support of progressive people of faith is urgently needed to help deliver policy changes on a range of other issues at the local, state and national levels.

Among the priorities for sexual justice are:

Employment non-discrimination for LGBT persons. More than half of the states in the U.S., as well as the federal government, still do not provide basic civil rights protections on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.

Marriage equality. In the U.S., same-sex couples can legally marry in only five states and the District of Columbia. People of faith must continue to organize for marriage equality in every state. For these marriages to be recognized by federal law, the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act must be repealed.

Comprehensive sexuality education. Religious leaders must speak out to ensure the elimination of federal funding for ineffective abstinence-only-until-marriage programs and advocate for a federal commitment to comprehensive sexuality education.

Access to family planning and reproductive health care. Religious leaders can advocate on moral grounds for increased funding for family planning and reproductive health care services

domestically and internationally. Religious leaders must be active advocates to ensure that abortion services are safe, legal and accessible.

A number of secular and faith-based organizations, as well as denominational leaders, are advocates for these issues. But one of the lessons of conservative activism has been its ability to speak with a unified voice – something progressive advocates too often fail to achieve. For public policy efforts on sexual justice to succeed, broader coalitions and better coordination will be required.

Recommendations

With a more progressive administration in Washington, and generally positive trends in public opinion on sexual justice issues, a window of opportunity has opened for long-awaited progress on a range of public policy issues. It is time for religious progressives to think big. The traditional tools of public advocacy are still important – letter-writing campaigns to public officials, presentations at marches and rallies, letters to the editor, petitions, and so forth. But religious progressives also can step up to be more collaborative and effective advocates.

Broad-based coalitions, across denominational lines and in partnership with secular organizations, can strengthen the impact of policy initiatives. The National March for Equality in October 2009 was an effective demonstration of religious and secular support for LGBT equality. At least two dozen religious congregations and organizations were among the more than 200 organizations that officially endorsed the March.

Collaborative efforts are particularly effective when policy issues are in the news. The Religious Institute collected more than 2,250 clergy endorsements to its *Open Letter to Religious Leaders on Marriage Equality* in advance of the Proposition 8 vote in 2008, and more than 1,100 clergy signatures to the *Open Letter on Abortion as a Moral Decision* as Congress debated health care reform in 2009. The organization then partnered with the Center for Reproductive Rights and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force to ensure that lawmakers heard a progressive religious voice on reproductive justice and marriage equality. The Religious Institute has also collaborated with the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS) in hosting Congressional briefings on comprehensive sexuality education.

Religious denominations can integrate sexual justice within the fabric of their advocacy. Nearly every major denomination has a Washington-based policy office, but only a few address sexual justice. An innovative new program is the Unitarian Universalist Association's Standing on the Side of Love, which combines community activism, social networking and media outreach in an integrated, public advocacy campaign for LGBT equality, immigration reform and other justice issues. Other denominations need to make sexual justice a priority of their national offices, galvanizing congregational action and local advocacy even as they appeal to public policy makers at the national level.

Goal 10

The Religious Institute calls upon people of faith to join together as the Faithful Voices Network in support of sexual health, education and justice.

If the goals of this report are to be achieved – if clergy, congregations, seminaries and denominations are to advance sexual health, education and justice; if progressive religious leaders are to embrace sexual justice and become prominent advocates in the public square; if leaders and organizations representing diverse religious and secular constituencies are to join together in promoting sexual justice – people of faith at the grassroots must become a national movement.

The Opportunity

Since its founding in 2001, the Religious Institute has built a national network of more than 5,000 clergy and religious leaders representing more than 50 different faith traditions. The organization has contributed to laying a vital foundation for the faith-based leadership, strategic organizing, communications, advocacy and education that an effective social justice movement requires.

None of this would be possible without the support of thousands of people of faith who support the Religious Institute's vision of a society that celebrates sexuality as a sacred part of creation. Untold numbers of people embrace a faith-based commitment to comprehensive sexuality education, sexual health and reproductive justice, and full inclusion of women and LGBT persons in congregational life and society. Many are active in their own congregations, denominations and communities, working to create a new understanding of the relationship between sexuality and faith.

When the yearning for change arises from within the congregation, clergy and religious leaders respond. It is time to amass the energy of the grassroots, to create a popular movement of people of faith who believe in a creating a world of sexual health, sexual justice and sexual wholeness.

The Future

In 2010, the Religious Institute will launch the Faithful Voices Network, a grassroots movement of people of faith from diverse traditions who support sexual health and justice in faith communities and society.

The Faithful Voices Network will:

- Advocate for increased commitment to sexual health, education and justice in congregations, denominations and communities.
- Motivate clergy and religious leaders to speak out and take action on issues of sexual health and justice.
- Amplify the voice of progressive religion in the media and the public square.
- Reinforce the commitment of lawmakers, policy makers and denominational leaders to sexual health, education and justice.

-
- Extend the progressive religious movement to become multifaith and economically, racially, geographically and generationally diverse.
 - Forge alliances with other social justice movements.

The Religious Institute calls on national faith-based organizations, denominations, congregations and people of faith throughout the country to help create the Faithful Voices Network. This network will strive in the coming decade to fundamentally change how America understands sexuality and religion.

Working together, thousands of faithful voices will enable us to achieve a new vision – that by the year 2020, all faith communities will be sexually healthy, just and prophetic.

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Organizations

Carpenter Program in Religion, Gender and Sexuality

Vanderbilt University Divinity School
411 21st Avenue South
Nashville, TN 37240
615-936-8453
www.vanderbilt.edu/divinity/carpenter.php

Catholics for Choice

1436 U Street NW, Suite 301
Washington, DC 20009
202-986-6093
www.catholicsforchoice.org

Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies in Religion and Ministry

Pacific School of Religion
1798 Scenic Avenue
Berkeley, CA 94709
510-849-8206, 800-999-0528
www.clgs.org

Center for Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence

Search Institute
615 First Avenue NE, Suite 125
Minneapolis, MN 55413
612-399-0235
www.spiritualdevelopmentcenter.org

Christian Community

6404 South Calhoun Street
Fort Wayne, IN 46807
260-456-5010
www.churchstuff.com

FaithTrust Institute

2400 North 45th Street, Suite 101
Seattle, WA 98103
206-634-1903 ext. 10
www.faitrustinstitute.org

Human Rights Campaign Religion and Faith Program

1640 Rhode Island Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20036
202-628-4160, 800-777-4723
www.hrc.org/issues/religion

Institute for Judaism and Sexual Orientation

Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion
3077 University Avenue
Los Angeles, CA 90007
213-749-3424
<http://huc.edu/ijso>

Institute for Welcoming Resources

National Gay and Lesbian Task Force
122 Franklin Avenue West, Suite 210
Minneapolis, MN 55404
612-821-4397
www.welcomingresources.org
For a list of welcoming organizations working within individual traditions, denominations and movements, see www.religiousinstitute.org/issue/lgbt-inclusion.

Jewish Mosaic

The National Jewish Center for Sexual and Gender Diversity
P.O. Box 18743
Denver, CO 80218
303-691-3562
www.jewishmosaic.org

Kolot: The Center for Jewish Women's and Gender Studies

Reconstructionist Rabbinical College
1299 Church Road
Wyncote, PA 19095
215-576-0800
www.kolot.org

LGBTQ Religious Studies Center

Chicago Theological Seminary
5757 South University Avenue
Chicago, IL 60637
773-752-5757
<http://www.ctschicago.edu/>

Muslims for Progressive Values

P.O. Box 434
Los Angeles, CA 90078
323-842-2869
www.mpvusa.org

National Black Justice Coalition Religious Affairs Program

1638 R Street NW, Suite 300
Washington, DC 20009
202-319-1552
www.nbjc.org

National Council of Churches USA

475 Riverside Drive, 8th floor
New York, NY 10115
212-870-2025
www.ncccusa.org

National Council of Jewish Women

475 Riverside Drive, Suite 520
New York, NY 10115
212-645-4048
www.ncjw.org

National Study of Youth & Religion

Carolina Population Center
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
123 West Franklin Street
Chapel Hill, NC 27516
800-434-8441
www.youthandreligion.org

Our Whole Lives (OWL)

*Sexuality education program of the Unitarian
Universalist Association and the United Church of Christ*

Unitarian Universalist Association

25 Beacon Street
Boston, MA 02108
617-742-2100
www.uua.org/religiouseducation/curricula/our-whole

United Church of Christ

700 Prospect Avenue
Cleveland, Ohio 44115
216-736-2100
www.ucc.org/justice/sexuality-education/our-whole-lives.html

Personal Responsibility, Religion, and Public Values Program

The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy
1776 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Suite 200
Washington, DC 20036
202-478-8500
www.thenationalcampaign.org/religion/default.aspx

Pro-Choice Religious Network

Planned Parenthood Federation of America
434 West 33rd Street
New York, NY 10001
212-541-7800
www.plannedparenthood.org/

Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice

1025 Vermont Avenue NW, Suite 1130
Washington, DC 20005
202-628-7700
www.rcrc.org

Religious Institute

21 Charles Street, Suite 104
Westport, CT 06880
203-222-0055
www.religiousinstitute.org

Participants

The Religious Institute convened the 2020 Colloquium in July 2009 to develop goals for sexuality and religion for the next decade. Participants at the colloquium were:

Daayiee Abdullah
Al-Fatiha Foundation/MuslimGayMen
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Rev. Dr. Ignacio Castuera
Planned Parenthood Federation of America
Pomona, CA

Rev. Steve Clapp
Christian Community, Inc.
Fort Wayne, IN

Rev. Harlon Dalton
Episcopal Church of St. Paul and St. James
New Haven, CT

Rev. Dr. Marvin M. Ellison
Bangor Theological Seminary
Portland, ME

Emily P. Goodstein
Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice
Washington, DC

Rev. Dr. Larry Greenfield
American Baptist Churches of Metro Chicago
Chicago, IL

Rev. Debra W. Haffner
Religious Institute
Westport, CT

Harry Knox
Human Rights Campaign
Washington, DC

Dr. Lori Lefkovitz
Reconstructionist Rabbinical College
Wyncote, PA

Dr. Khaleel Mohammed
San Diego State University
San Diego, CA

Rev. Dr. Aleese Moore-Orbih
FaithTrust Institute
Durham, NC

Jon O'Brien
Catholics for Choice
Washington, DC

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Religious Institute
Westport, CT

Timothy Palmer
Religious Institute
Westport, CT

Rev. Dr. Tracey Robinson-Harris
Unitarian Universalist Association
Boston, MA

Rabbi Dennis S. Ross
Family Planning Advocates of New York State
Albany, NY

Rev. Michael Schuenemeyer
United Church of Christ
Cleveland, OH

Bishop John L. Selders, Jr.
Amistad United Church of Christ
Inter-Denominational Conference of Liberation
Congregations and Ministries
West Hartford, CT

Rev. Erin K. Swenson
Southern Association for Gender Education
Atlanta, GA

Rev. Ann Tiemeyer
National Council of Churches USA
New York, NY

Linda Bales Todd
General Board of Church and Society
The United Methodist Church
Washington, DC

Rev. Dr. Mona West
Metropolitan Community Churches
Austin, TX

Organizations listed for identification purposes only.

The *Religious Declaration on Sexual Morality, Justice, and Healing* was developed at a 1999 colloquium of theologians and released publicly on January 25, 2000. Participants at the colloquium were:

Rev. Dr. John Buehrens
Unitarian Universalist Association

Rev. Dr. Kelly Brown Douglas
Howard University

Rev. Dr. Marvin Ellison
Bangor Theological Seminary

Rev. Dr. Marie Fortune
Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic
Violence

Rev. Dr. Larry Greenfield
American Baptist Churches of Metro Chicago

Dr. Christine Gudorf
Florida International University

Rev. Debra W. Haffner
Religious Institute on Sexual Morality, Justice, and
Healing

Rev. Dr. Beverly Harrison
Union Theological Seminary

Rev. Faith Adams Johnson
United Church of Christ Board of Homeland
Ministries

Frances Kissling
Catholics for a Free Choice

Rabbi Dr. Peter Knobel
Beth Emet The Free Synagogue

Rev. Dr. Joe Leonard
National Council of Churches of Christ

Dr. Daniel Maguire
Religious Consultation on Population, Reproductive
Health, and Ethics

Rev. Dr. James Nelson
United Theological Seminary

Daniel Perreten
Park Ridge Center for Health, Faith, and Ethics

Rev. Dr. George Regas
The Regas Institute

The Right Rev. David Richards
Center for Sexuality and Religion

Rev. Dr. Rosetta Ross
United Theological Seminary

Rev. Dr. William Stayton
Widener University

Rev. Carlton Veazey
Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice

Organizations listed for identification purposes only.

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This work stands on the foundation established a decade ago by the creators of the *Religious Declaration on Sexual Morality, Justice, and Healing*. We are deeply grateful and respectful of their historic work, and we dedicate this vision of new directions to them.

Finally, we acknowledge with great appreciation the individual donors and foundations who provide the financial support that makes the Religious Institute's work possible.

Publications

Religious Institute Resources

A Time to Be Born: A Guide to Assisted Reproductive Technologies for Faith Communities provides a multifaith perspective for clergy on the ethical and spiritual issues raised by the use of assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs). This guidebook addresses the current medical and theological issues related to ARTs. It also covers practical issues, including pastoral counseling and congregation-based education.

A Time to Build: Creating Sexually Healthy Faith Communities outlines the characteristics of sexually healthy faith communities and religious professionals. It provides guidance on “safe congregation” policies, including the prevention of sexual abuse and sexual harassment, as well as ideas for worship services and sermons on sexuality issues.


A Time to Every Purpose: The Language of Sexual Morality, Justice, and Healing is a compendium of progressive theological statements that enable religious leaders and faith communities to preach, teach and advocate for sexual justice. It includes historical information and statistical data to establish the social and economic contexts for each of the sexuality issues addressed. It also provides responsive readings for use in congregational worship, as well as study group questions and lists of resources.

A Time to Seek: Study Guide on Sexual and Gender Diversity is the first multifaith guide to address sexual orientation and gender identity issues. The study guide offers a concise review of current sociological, public health and scientific data, and considers key scriptural passages in light of contemporary understandings of sexual and gender diversity.

A Time to Speak: Faith Communities and Sexuality Education affirms the unique role of congregations in providing sexuality education. This publication explains why religious institutions must be involved in sexuality education and how congregations can provide sexuality education to youth and adults.

Acting Out Loud is an online resource for faith communities that want to move beyond welcome toward a wider embrace of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people and their families. This resource offers ideas and approaches to full inclusion recommended by leading clergy, theologians and advocates across the country. Available at: www.actingoutloudguide.org.

The Age of AIDS: A Guide for Faith Based Communities helps congregations better understand and address the HIV/AIDS pandemic. The guide includes suggestions for engaging the faith community in HIV/AIDS prevention, and extensive resource lists with references to denominational statements, faith-based curricula, theological writings, and online resources.



Just Say Know: A Faith-Based Advocacy Guide for Sexuality Education is an online guide that provides background on comprehensive sexuality education, theological and spiritual grounding for advocacy, suggestions for involvement on the congregational, local, state and national levels, worship ideas, fact sheets, bibliographies and more. Available at: www.religiousthought.org/resources/online-guides.

Reaching Out to Faith Communities is a resource for sexual and reproductive health organizations. This booklet provides instruction on how to engage faith communities in the work for sexual health, education, and justice.

Sex and the Seminary: Preparing Ministers for Sexual Health and Justice reports the results of a survey of 36 leading seminaries and rabbinical schools of diverse size and geographic location, representing a range of Christian, Jewish and Unitarian Universalist traditions. The survey measured sexuality content in the curriculum; institutional commitment to sexuality and gender equity (e.g., the existence of anti-discrimination, sexual harassment and full inclusion policies); and advocacy and support for sexuality-related issues.

Christian Community Resources

Faith Matters: Teenagers, Religion, and Sexuality. How do religious faith and congregational involvement influence the sexual values and behaviors of teenagers? This book reveals the results of Christian Community's national study of 5,819 teenagers representing a broad range of religious traditions, ethnic backgrounds, economic levels, and geographic locations.

The Gift of Sexuality: Empowerment for Religious Teens. Based on Christian Community's extensive research on teenage sexuality, this book contains factual information and clear guidance to help empower teenagers for the decisions they face about the care of their bodies, dating, sexuality, marriage and parenting.

LGBT Rights: A Strategy Manual for People of Faith. This book provides a wide range of strategies for working on greater LGBT acceptance in congregations and in other settings. Topics include: why congregations need to involve LGBT persons; making a decision to act; a factual primer on human sexuality; the Biblical basis for action; how to work with teens and their parents; worship suggestions; and how to advocate within denominations and the broader society.

Silent and Undecided Friends: Motivating Greater LGBT Rights Advocacy Among Clergy and Congregations. This ground-breaking report is based on surveys of 1,511 clergy from 32 denominations; telephone interviews with 268 clergy; focus group meetings; and work with 61 pilot congregations. The report looks at the attitudes of clergy toward lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people; the work of advocacy groups within denominations; and the issues that block full acceptance of LGBT people in congregations.

Taking a New Look: Why Congregations Need LGBT Members. Clergy and other congregational leaders are aware of the risks involved in becoming fully welcoming of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people. Much less attention has been focused on what congregations lose by *not* being welcoming and affirming. The reality is that a loving and accepting attitude toward LGBT people brings many blessings to a congregation.

To order any of these publications, call 1-800-774-3360 or email orders@churchstuff.com.

About the Religious Institute

Founded in 2001, the Religious Institute is a national, multifaith organization dedicated to promoting sexual health, education and justice in faith communities and society. The Religious Institute partners with clergy and congregations, denominations, seminaries, national advocacy organizations, and sexual and reproductive health communities to promote:

- Sexually healthy faith communities
- Full equality of women and of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons in congregations and communities
- Comprehensive sexuality education
- Reproductive justice
- Sexual abuse prevention
- HIV/AIDS education and prevention

The mission of the Religious Institute is to develop a new understanding of the relationship between sexuality and religion. This mission involves:

- Developing and supporting a network of clergy, religious educators, theologians, ethicists and other religious leaders committed to sexual justice.
- Building the capacity of religious institutions and clergy to provide sexuality education within the context of their faith traditions.
- Helping congregations, seminaries and denominations to become sexually healthy faith communities.
- Educating the public and policy makers about a progressive religious vision of sexual health, education and justice.

More than 5,000 clergy, professional religious educators and counselors, denominational and interfaith leaders, seminary presidents, deans and faculty members, representing more than 50 faith traditions, are members of the Religious Institute's national network.



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