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More Than 1000 Diverse Religious Leaders Support Birth Control— Religious Institute Applauds Proposed Rule on Family Planning Access for All Women

February 6, 2013—More than 1000 religious leaders from across the theological spectrum have joined together to support safe, affordable, accessible, and comprehensive family planning services.

They demonstrated their support by endorsing the new *Open Letter to Religious Leaders on Family Planning*, which recognizes that all women must have equal access to contraception, and states that “the denial of [coverage for] family planning services effectively translates into coercive childbearing and is an insult to human dignity.” The release of this statement coincides with the recent Obama Administration release of proposed regulations, which affirmed its commitment to assure all women have birth control access without cost or administrative hurdles.

The *Open Letter* was published by the Religious Institute, a multi-faith organization dedicated to sexual health, education and justice. The Rev. Debra W. Haffner, President of the Religious Institute, said today, “It is a critical misunderstanding to equate the minority of those religious leaders who have fought the coverage of birth control during the past year with threats and lawsuits, with the majority of people of faith in the United States who support access to contraception. Let us be clear that support for religious freedom means that women must have the right to accept or reject the principles of their *own* faith without restrictions, regardless of their place of employment or geographical location. It is unethical for any single religious voice to claim to speak for all religious people in this debate.”

More than a dozen major religious denominations have policies that support contraception. In addition, more than 8 in ten women at risk of unintended pregnancy use modern contraceptive methods, regardless of religious affiliation.

The 1000 endorsers of the new *Open Letter* come from 45 states and more than 35 religious traditions, including each of the major mainline Protestant denominations, Southern Baptist, Roman Catholic, and Muslim traditions. Participating faith leaders include 8 current and former presidents of national denominations including the Rev. Geoffrey A. Black (United Church of Christ), the Rev. Wes Granberg-Michaelson (Reformed Church in America), the Rev. Peter Morales (Unitarian Universalist Association), the Rev. Dr. Sharon E. Watkins (Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)), and the Reverend Nancy Wilson, (Metropolitan Community Churches); seminary presidents including Dr. Philip A. Amerson (Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary), the Rev. Dr. Serene Jones (Union Theological Seminary), and The Very Rev.

Katherine Ragsdale (Episcopal Divinity School) and faculty from sixteen seminaries; heads of more than twenty national religious organizations, including the New Evangelical Partnership for the Common Good (Dr. Richard Cizik), Women of Reform Judaism (Rabbi Marla Feldman), the Beatitudes Society (Rev. Anne Howard), Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (Rev. Harry Knox), Catholics for Choice (Jon O'Brien), the Methodist Federation for Social Action (Jill A. Warren) and Muslims for Progressive Values (Ms. Ani Zonneveld); and prominent theologians from diverse perspectives including the Rev. Dr. Tony Campolo, the Rev. Dr. Larry Greenfield, Dr. Mary Hunt, the Right Reverend Gene Robinson, and Dr. Elizabeth Schussler. The Reverends Jones, Watkins, and Wilson all recently were worship leaders at the National Prayer Service.

The Open Letter was developed in 2012 as a direct response to increasing attempts to deny or restrict family planning access. The *Open Letter to Religious Leaders on Family Planning* was developed at a colloquium of a dozen renowned faith leaders and theologians sponsored by the Religious Institute. Participants included nationally prominent theologians and ordained clergy from Jewish, Roman Catholic, Protestant (evangelical and mainline denominations), Muslim and Unitarian Universalist traditions.

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The Religious Institute (www.religioustheology.org), based in Westport, CT, is a nonprofit, multifaith organization dedicated to advocating for sexual health, education and justice in faith communities and society. More than 6,300 clergy, seminary presidents and deans, religious scholars and other religious leaders representing more than 70 faith traditions are part of the Religious Institute's national network.

Links to read the full text, endorse the *Open Letter to Religious Leaders on Family Planning*, or read the full list of endorsers are at **www.religioustheology.org/olfp**