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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: October 30, 2017

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## **Nearly 1,300 Faith Leaders Representing 500,000 Congregants Oppose Anti-LGBTQ Religious Exemptions in Supreme Court Case** *Clergy Agree Religious Beliefs Should Not Give Business Owners a License to Discriminate*

WASHINGTON – Nearly 1,300 clergy and faith leaders representing half a million congregants from approximately 50 unique faith traditions across the U.S. joined together today to send a clear message that businesses open to the public must serve all. The clergy filed a friend-of-the-court brief to the Supreme Court in the *Masterpiece Cakeshop vs. Colorado Civil Rights Commission* case.

At the heart of the *Masterpiece* case is the question of whether non-discrimination laws can continue to be enforced without sweeping and dangerous exemptions. The case involves a Colorado bakery that refused to sell a cake to a same-sex couple celebrating their civil marriage. This action was in direct violation of Colorado’s non-discrimination law, and both the Colorado Civil Rights Commission and the state appellate court ruled in favor of the couple.

The brief filed today highlights the dangers of the exemptions being sought in this case and makes the argument that there should not be a license to discriminate based on faith. The brief states, in part:

“It is both morally wrong and not constitutionally required to permit blanket discrimination in the public marketplace for goods and services based on the personal religious beliefs of merchants with respect to same-sex couples’ rights and relationships. Amici believe that, to the contrary, public accommodation laws should be applied on the basis of religiously neutral principles of equal protection under the law.”

“It has been said that this case is about religious freedom or protecting religious beliefs, but as you can see from the broad range of religious leaders on this brief, that is not true,” said Rev. Marie Alford-Harkey, president and CEO of the Religious Institute. “Our faiths affirm the inherent worth and dignity of LGBTQ people and our relationships. We believe LGBTQ people should be treated equally under civic law, and we are the growing majority. For us, this case is about seeking justice for LGBTQ people, being present with those on the margins, and loving our neighbors as ourselves, without exception. Our faith traditions require nothing less.”

More than 85 national religious leaders signed the brief including the leaders of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the Unitarian Universalist Association, the Metropolitan Community

Church, the Alliance of Baptists, Muslims for Progressive Values, and Reconstructionist Judaism. The presidents of ten seminaries and the leaders of 40 religious organizations also signed the brief.

"I am not a lawyer, so I do not know the fine legal arguments of the case; I know only that my faith tells me that discrimination against persons, even those with whom I disagree, is wrong," said Sister Jeannine Gramick, SL, Co-Executive Director of the National Coalition of American Nuns. "If someone, whose political, social, or religious views I did not share, came to my house, I would surely offer them a cake and a comfortable cup of tea, as Jesus would do. So why would I not sell them the same?"

The brief also acknowledges that a wide variety of faiths recognize the inherent dignity and worth of LGBTQ people and their relationships and that religious leaders oppose the misuse of religious freedom and the undermining of LGBTQ non-discrimination protections because of—not in spite of their—faith.

"This case is about equal protection for all people under our Constitution, not a spurious notion of 'religious freedom'," said Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray, President of the Unitarian Universalist Association. "Religious freedom means that people have the right to gather into religious communities of their choice, according to their conscience, without fear of persecution. It means the government cannot impose religious beliefs or practices on the people nor show preference for any particular religion. Religious freedom does not mean that faith can be used as an excuse to discriminate, and as a faith leader I strongly condemn any attempt to do so."

"As a Muslim, Arab, and American, I believe this case extends far beyond a gross violation of civil liberties," said Iman M. Jodeh, Director and Co-Founder of Meet the Middle East. "This opens the door for blatant bigotry and fear mongering toward already marginalized communities. We choose to fight back using the power of love and compassion, two values we can all endorse."

The Supreme Court will hear oral argument in *Masterpiece* on December 5. In the weekend leading up to oral arguments, clergy and congregations around the country are expected to participate in a National Weekend of Prayer for LGBTQ Justice, dedicating their services to support LGBTQ non-discrimination protections and reflecting on the importance of the Supreme Court case. More information is available at [www.religiousinstitute.org/nwop](http://www.religiousinstitute.org/nwop).

"As a faith leader, I believe in a moral vision that affirms equality and justice for all," said Rev. Teresa Hord Owens, General Minister and President of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). "I believe that all people have inherent dignity and worth and that LGBTQ people deserve access to the same rights and privileges as everyone else. Non-discrimination laws are essential to protecting the rights of LGBTQ people and ensuring that the law does not privilege one set of religious beliefs. As a Christian leader, I believe that love is at the heart of the message of Jesus Christ. Love therefore compels us to honor the human dignity of all persons. Love cannot

support discrimination and harm to other human beings. I joined this brief because I cannot be silent when religion is used to support discrimination and harm to others. As a religious leader and a Christian, I am charged to be with and care for those on the margins. We must safeguard their rights."

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*The Religious Institute is a nonprofit, multifaith organization dedicated to advocating for sexual health, education, and justice in faith communities and society. More than 8,500 clergy, seminary presidents and deans, religious scholars, and other religious leaders representing more than 50 faith traditions are part of the Religious Institute's national religious leaders network.*