In 2015, the Religious Institute gathered a group of religious leaders from across the Southern states to form its Southern Advisory Committee. We held an in-person meeting at SisterSong’s MotherHouse and strategized about how to help clergy and congregations network, advocate, preach, and teach about sexual justice. In partnership with Texas Freedom Network, the Religious Institute held focus groups of clergy in the summer of 2015. Planned Parenthood was attacked by the Center for Medical Progress, using heavily edited videos to re-ignite a debate over federal funding for Planned Parenthood’s much-needed services. The Religious Institute mobilized clergy and people of faith to respond. Forty-five national religious leaders and more than 2,000 clergy released a national statement which said, in part, “As religious leaders, we support family planning as a means of saving lives, improving reproductive and public health, enhancing sexuality, and encouraging intentional parenthood. We stand with people of faith who have supported Planned Parenthood for nearly one hundred years.” More than 5000 people of faith added their names to a petition to Congress, asking lawmakers to put an end to politically motivated attacks on women’s reproductive autonomy and committing to removing stigma around abortion and lifting up the morality of women’s reproductive decisions.

Working with Faith Leaders in the South to Strengthen the Movement for Reproductive Health & Justice

In 2015, the Religious Institute gathered a group of religious leaders from across the Southern states to form its Southern Advisory Committee. We held an in-person meeting at SisterSong’s MotherHouse and strategized about how to help clergy and congregations network, advocate, preach, and teach about sexual justice. In partnership with Texas Freedom Network, the Religious Institute held focus groups of clergy committed to sexual and reproductive justice in San Antonio, Austin, and Dallas, Texas. In March the Religious Institute partnered with Texas Freedom Network and other faith groups to sponsor a worship service that gathered faith leaders from across Texas to renew their commitment to reproductive justice. Abortion provider Dr. Willie Parker and religious leaders from around the state spoke at the worship service.
Gilead Sabbath Galvanizes Faith Communities Around LGBTQ Justice

Throughout the world and across the United States, LGBTQ people face violence, discrimination, and persecution because of their sexual orientation and gender identity. In response to this reality, the Religious Institute created the Gilead Sabbath Initiative, inviting religious leaders and people of faith across the U.S. to educate their faith communities about LGBTQ discrimination, to unite in prayer for LGBTQ justice, and to take responsible action. In 2015, more than 200 Gilead Sabbath services were held. Members of the Religious Institute staff also traveled to the National LGBTQ Task Force’s Faith and Family LGBTQ Power Summit in Salt Lake City, UT, where they presented a workshop on the Gilead Sabbath Initiative and held a Gilead Sabbath service with local, national, and global faith leaders and LGBTQ activists.

Lifting the Voices of People of Faith In Support of the Freedom to Marry

As the Supreme Court made its historic decision in June 2015 to legalize same-sex marriage, the Religious Institute took the lead in demonstrating faith support for the freedom to same-sex couple to get married. This included helping to prepare an amicus brief on behalf of faith leaders and obtaining more than 1,900 religious leaders as amici. The Religious Institute also developed and coordinated the National Weekend of Prayer for the Freedom to Marry, observed on the weekend before the Supreme Court heard oral arguments. Over 300 congregations in 46 states participated in the weekend of prayer. The Religious Institute also co-sponsored a multifaith prayer service in held in Washington, D.C.
In 2015, the Religious Institute conducted a major publicity, education, and awareness campaign based on its 2014 publication *Bisexuality: Making the Invisible Visible in Faith Communities*. We presented 10 workshops all around the country, conducted 3 webinars and published pieces in various media outlets such as *The Advocate*, WBUR’s *Cognoscenti*, and the *Huffington Post*. We also gave away 250 free copies of the publication to faith communities and religious leaders.

**Continuing to Create Bisexually Healthy Faith Communities**

In 2015, the Religious Institute conducted a major publicity, education, and awareness campaign based on its 2014 publication *Bisexuality: Making the Invisible Visible in Faith Communities*. We presented 10 workshops all around the country, conducted 3 webinars and published pieces in various media outlets such as *The Advocate*, WBUR’s *Cognoscenti*, and the *Huffington Post*. We also gave away 250 free copies of the publication to faith communities and religious leaders.

**Launching the Sexually Safer Best Practice Initiative**

A sexually healthy and responsible congregation is free from sexual abuse, sexual harassment, and sexual misconduct. In order to keep children, youth, and vulnerable adults safe from abuse and harassment, congregations need explicit policies and procedures, strong codes of conduct for religious professionals, and safeguards for congregants who have been accused or convicted of sexual offenses. To help realize this vision, the Religious Institute developed the Sexually Safer Best Practice Initiative in 2014, and launched it in 2015. The resources developed as part of this initiative provide faith communities with a turnkey program for putting the necessary safety policies in place, and includes templates and examples.
Rev. Debra Haffner Announces Retirement as Religious Institute President and CEO

In September of 2015, Rev. Debra W. Haffner announced that she would step down as president of the Religious Institute at the end of April 2016. Rev. Haffner co-founded the Religious Institute in 2001, and has been its chief executive officer during its first fifteen years. Rev. Haffner said, “Our work is not done—my work is not done—but it is time for the Religious Institute to move from its founder to new leadership. I am grateful beyond words to have partnered with thousands of religious leaders across the country during these fifteen years to create sexually healthy congregations and religious institutions.”

Religious Institute in 2015 by the Numbers

70
The number of speeches, sermons, workshops, or trainings given by our staff.

131
The number of times we offered technical assistance to people of faith.

76
The number of times our work was covered in the news.

Celebrating 15 Years Since the Publication of the Religious Declaration

In January of 2001, the Religious Declaration on Sexual Morality, Justice, and Healing was published as a full page in *The New York Times*, surrounded by the names of more than 800 religious leaders. That document, which called for a new sexual ethic, became the founding document of the Religious Institute. This year, we celebrate 15 years since its publication. In 2015 more than 4,600 religious leaders from every state in the country have endorsed the Religious Declaration. Its call for prophetic religious leadership on sexual justice is as relevant as when it was first published.
Thank you to the following foundations for their support in 2015

- American Institute of Bisexuality
- Arcus Foundation
- The Brush Foundation
- William C. Bullitt Foundation
- E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation
- Embrey Family Foundation
- Ford Foundation
- Lisa & Douglas Goldman Foundation
- The Moriah Fund
- Stewart R. Mott Foundation
- The David and Lucile Packard Foundation
- Unitarian Universalist Funding Program

Thank you to the many donors and volunteers who make the work of the Religious Institute possible.

Religious Institute Staff

(Left to Right) Drew Konow, Scholar in Residence, Emily Langowitz, Rabbinical Intern, Marie Alford-Harkey, Deputy Director, Blanca Godoi, Office Manager, Rev. Debra W. Haffner, President and CEO

Board of Directors

(Left to Right) Lynda Shannon, MPH, Dr. William Finger, Rev. Dr. Larry Greenfield, Calvin Mew, M.Div., Ms. Katherine Hanley, Ms. Carol McDonald, Rev. Debra W. Haffner, Dr. Miguel A. De La Torre, Rev. Dr. Marvin M. Ellison