



A TIME TO BUILD

CREATING SEXUALLY HEALTHY
FAITH COMMUNITIES

Second Edition

by Rev. Debra W. Haffner

Religious Institute

© 2012, The Religious Institute, Inc.

ISBN 978-0-9855949-0-9

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

© 2012 Religious Institute, Inc.
ISBN 978-0-9855949-0-9

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|------------------------------------------------|----|
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | 4 |
| INTRODUCTION | 5 |
| RELIGION AND SEXUALITY | 6 |
| HOW TO USE THIS GUIDEBOOK | 11 |
| THE BUILDING BLOCKS | 13 |
| SEXUALLY HEALTHY RELIGIOUS PROFESSIONALS | 13 |
| WORSHIP AND PREACHING | 17 |
| PASTORAL CARE | 24 |
| EDUCATION FOR YOUTH | 30 |
| ADULT EDUCATION | 44 |
| WELCOMING AND AFFIRMING CONGREGATIONS | 49 |
| SAFE CONGREGATIONS | 56 |
| SOCIAL ACTION | 62 |
| RESOURCES FOR MORE INFORMATION | 70 |
| REFERENCES | 74 |

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people provided guidance and input on the development of this guide.

The first edition of *A Time to Build: Creating Sexually Healthy Faith Communities* was published in 2002 as the first publication of the then newly formed Religious Institute. Its publication was funded by the W.T. Grant Foundation, one of the first foundations to support the Religious Institute.

The first edition was written as my master's thesis at Union Theological Seminary with the encouragement of my faculty advisors Rev. Barbara Lundblad and Professor Kathy Talvacchia. In the ten years since, I have had the privilege of working with hundreds of congregations, thousands of clergy and seminarians, and lay leaders from more than twenty-five denominations in every state in the country. I have also had the opportunity to work with denomination leaders and the leaders of organizations that advocate sexual health and rights in faith communities. I've also had the good fortune to work as the endorsed community minister at the Unitarian Church in Westport for the past decade.

I have learned a great deal about congregational life and leadership in these intervening ten years, and the landscape of how congregations are engaging sexuality issues has expanded considerably. Thus, it was time to develop this completely updated edition of *A Time to Build*.

I am grateful to Amanda Winters for updating the statistics and resources for this new edition and to Blanca Godoi for her research and careful preparation of the manuscript through its many drafts and revisions. I am indebted to Marie Alford-Harkey, Michael Cobb, the Rev. Carla Dietz, the Rev. Cedric Harmon, the Rev. Carolyn Patierno, and the Rev. Alida Ward for their careful review and suggestions. I am so appreciative of the magical editing of Holly Sprunger and the design work of Alan Barnett.

This update is dedicated to the co-founder of the Religious Institute, the Reverend Dr. Larry Greenfield. Without his support and encouragement, the Religious Institute would not have come into being in 2001. He was an early mentor as I began my path to ministry and encouraged and supported me as the first edition was created. I am pleased that he continues as a the Chair of the Board of Directors of the Religious Institute, as my colleague, and as my friend.

— Rev. Debra W. Haffner

INTRODUCTION

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.



The Religious Declaration on Sexual Morality, Justice, and Healing, first published in 2000 and updated in 2010, is a clarion call to the nation's religious denominations, congregations, and clergy. It calls for a sexual ethic focused on personal relationships and social justice rather than particular sexual acts.

The *Religious Declaration* is a positive vision of the relationship between sexuality and spirituality, grounded in the core teachings of the historic faiths. It urges religious leaders and faith communities to provide comprehensive sexuality education and to advocate for sexual and reproductive rights, and full inclusion of women and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons (LGBT) in congregational life, seminaries, denominations, and society at large.

More than 3,600 clergy and theologians from more than 70 faith traditions have endorsed the *Religious Declaration*.

The *Religious Declaration* challenges congregations to be sexually healthy faith communities. A sexually healthy faith community promotes the integration of sexuality and spirituality in worship, preaching, pastoral care, youth and adult religious education, and social action programs in the community. It makes a commitment to a sexual ethic that is not based

on double standards and understands that dealing with sexuality is an issue of spiritual wholeness. A congregation that addresses sexuality openly and holistically models that sexuality and spirituality are intimately connected.

A Time to Build was developed to help clergy and congregations create sexually healthy faith communities.

A sexually healthy faith community is committed to fostering spiritual, sexual, and emotional health among the congregation and providing a safe environment where sexuality issues are addressed with respect, mutuality, and openness. The eight building blocks are:

- Sexually healthy religious professionals with training and experience in sexuality issues.
- Worship and preaching periodically on sexuality issues.
- Sexuality education for children and youth.
- Sexuality education and support for adults.
- Welcome and full inclusion for LGBT individuals and families.
- A commitment to being a Safe Congregation, against sexual exploitation of all kinds, including sexual abuse, sexual harassment, and sexual misconduct by staff and clergy.
- Social action efforts for sexual justice in society.

“Sexuality Resource Persons” or the “Sexuality Task Force.” This could be a new committee with the goal of fostering sexual health in the congregation or to begin by completing the assessments in this guidebook. It could also have a specific function such as to offer programs on religion and sexuality within the congregation or survey congregation members on their interest and commitment to becoming a sexually healthy faith community. It could also lead a worship service or an adult education program. Other congregations may want to divide the guidebook into sections based on their committee structure: e.g., the religious educator might take the sexuality education section; the lay leadership might take the section on policies and procedures.

Once the assessments are completed by the whole committee or the subgroups, leaders will want to meet together to discuss the congregation’s existing strengths addressing sexuality issues, areas that

could be improved and addressed, which areas are not going to be pursued at this time, and ideas for plans for improvement. An annual plan including any budget implications can be developed by the lay and ministerial leadership for a one, two, or three-year period.

Ultimately, a commitment to developing a sexually health faith community needs to be shared by every part of the community. The clergy, religious educators, the lay leadership, key committee members, the parents, the youth, indeed every member of the community, must share the commitment to sexual and spiritual wholeness. Sexual health is not limited to the adult or youth education program or the clergy’s willingness and ability to discuss sexuality issues. These are important, but not enough. We are called in community to promote sexual morality, justice, and healing. This guidebook is offered to assist congregations in that process.

ABOUT THE RELIGIOUS INSTITUTE, INC.

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
- Marriage equality
- Comprehensive sexuality education
- Reproductive justice
- A responsible approach to adolescent sexuality
- Sexual abuse prevention
- HIV/AIDS education and prevention
- Global maternal health

The mission of the Religious Institute is to develop a new understanding of the relationship between religion and sexuality. 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 policymakers about a progressive religious vision of sexual morality, justice, and healing.

More than 5,400 clergy, professional religious educators and counselors, denominational and interfaith leaders, seminary presidents, deans and faculty members, representing more than 70 faith traditions, are endorsers in the Religious Institute's national network.

In 2010, the Religious Institute launched 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 advocates for increased commitment to sexual health, education and justice in congregations, denominations and communities. People of faith can join the Faithful Voices Network at religiousinstitute.org/faithfulvoices.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Debra W. Haffner is the Co-founder and President of the Religious Institute. An AASECT certified sexuality educator, she graduated from Union Theological Seminary and is an ordained Unitarian Universalist minister. She is the co-creator of the

Religious Declaration on Sexual Morality, Justice, and Healing. She is the author of six books and many monographs for congregations on sexual health. In 2011, Widener University awarded her a Doctor of Public Service, h.c.