

From Rev. Debra W. Haffner



On July 19, 2007, I was on [The O'Reilly Factor](#) to discuss sex education in the primary grades. Mr. O'Reilly actually seemed to agree with me on most of the content for age-appropriate sexuality education - however, he objected when I said that a kindergarten teacher, in the context of an approved program, might tell children that "Babies grow in a special place inside a woman called a uterus." He said the word "uterus" would take away children's innocence and would be too complicated for them to understand. [Newshounds](#) captured the moment perfectly when they posted the clip on

[YouTube](#). They titled it: **O'Reilly panics at mention of "uterus" from sex-ed minister.**

I was on O'Reilly because Senator Obama had made comments supporting comprehensive sexuality education beginning in the primary grades at a [Planned Parenthood Action](#) forum earlier in the week. On July 23, 2007 the candidates joined in another presidential campaign debate. One YouTube questioner asked about sex education and a lesbian couple asked about their rights to marriage. I was disappointed that Senator Obama now couched his support only in the context of sex abuse prevention, and none of the leading Democratic candidates spoke for marriage equality.

But what is remarkable is that sexual justice issues are now a mainstay of these discussions, and that at least the Democratic candidates are discussing them with serious consideration for people's sexual rights. Later this week, seven of the candidates are joining [HRC](#) for a discussion of GLBT issues. And at least one Republican candidate is holding strong on reproductive rights and gay issues.

In This Issue

From Rev. Debra W. Haffner
Denominational News
Religious Institute News
New Resources
Upcoming Events and Presentations
Tribute

Quick Links

[Endorse Religious Declaration on Sexual Morality, Justice, and Healing](#)

[Endorse Open Letter to Religious Leaders on Abortion as a Moral Decision](#)

[Endorse Open Letter on Marriage Equality](#)

[Publications](#)

[Email Rev. Debra W. Haffner](#)

We need to talk about sex education and sexual justice issues accurately, honestly and with integrity - whether that means teaching our children the correct biological terms or speaking about marriage equality, reproductive rights, and comprehensive sexuality education in policy debates and candidate forums. As I told Mr. O'Reilly, breaking the silence is a start.

Denominational News

Many mainline **Protestant denominations** debated sexual justice issues at their General Assemblies or regional gatherings this summer. We have covered many of these important decisions and encourage you to inform us of denominations decisions and deliberations. The Religious Institute will report on the upcoming ELCA meeting in our September Newsletter. Please send corrections or further updates to [Dr. Kate Ott](#).

The [Unitarian Universalist Association](#) at its annual conference, June 19-24, 2007, in Portland, Oregon passed a resolution calling on Congress to repeal the "**Don't Ask, Don't Tell**" ban on gays serving openly in the military. It was approved by a large majority of the 6000 delegates to the conference.

At its **General Synod** in June 2007, the [United Church of Christ](#) (UCC) voted against discussing proposed resolutions questioning the denominational stance on same-sex marriage. In 2005, the denomination declared equal marriage rights for all people. The two resolutions, entitled "A Reaffirmation of the Historic and Ecumenical Christian Perspective on Marriage" and "A Reaffirmation of Marriage Based on the Word of God," urged for an overturning of the 2005 endorsement. The delegates voted to take no action and therefore not to discuss the resolutions. David Kaden, a delegate from the New York Conference, expressed concern about the lack of conversation: "I hoped for these resolutions to come before the Synod and get soundly defeated."

On July 2, 2007, the [Evangelical Lutheran Church of American](#) (ELCA) Committee on Appeals denied the appeal of **Rev. Bradley Schmeling**. The pastor, who serves at St. John's Lutheran Church in Atlanta, was charged with violating the current policy that mandates gay and lesbian clergy practice celibacy. The Committee on Appeals stated that the Discipline Hearing Committee (DHC) had no authority in its ruling to delay Schmeling's removal from the clergy roster until August and ordered that he be defrocked immediately. Earlier in the month of June the ordination of [Rev. Dawn Roginski](#), an openly partnered lesbian clergywoman of the ELCA, marked the third ordination of the Extraordinary Candidacy Project (ECP) this year. With increasing pressure to reform its celibacy policy, the ELCA will address the issue later in

[Read our blog](#)

[Donate to the Religious Institute](#)

[Join Our Mailing List!](#)

**Religious Institute on
Sexual Morality,
Justice, and Healing**

304 Main Street, #335

Norwalk, CT 06851

August at its biennial meeting.

In preparation for the [United Methodist Church](#) General Conference in 2008, twenty-two local conferences formally discussed their support of or opposition to **Judicial Decision 1032**, the 2005 ruling that allows local pastors to determine if an individual is suitable for membership. This decision followed the controversy raised when a Virginia pastor denied membership to an openly gay man. At the [Pacific-Northwest annual conference](#), delegates petitioned against the appointment of United Methodist elder Dr. James W. Holsinger as U.S. Surgeon General.

The [Christian Church \(Disciples of Christ\)](#) held its **2007 General Assembly** July 21-25 in Ft. Worth, Texas. They adopted Resolution No. 0725, entitled "Proactive Prevention: Seeking Common Ground on the Issue of Abortion." The resolution addresses the prevention of unintended pregnancies and the health of women rather than emphasizing "the divisive and polarizing debates between pro-choice and pro-life advocates." As part of its proactive strategy, the resolution calls for the church to provide age-appropriate health and sexuality education and to advocate for increased health and spiritual resources for pregnant women and mothers.

Religious Institute News



The Religious Institute is seeking a **Special Assistant to the Director** to assist in all aspects of its operation.

[Email for a job description . . .](#)

The Religious Institute is pleased to announce the redesign of **our new website**. We extend a warm thank you to our web designer Grace Lewis of [designbygrace](#). As we move through the process of updating information for the new site, we encourage readers [to send us](#) links to other sexual and reproductive justice organizations as well as provide references to updated denominational statements and web-based resources.

[Check out our new look!](#)

The Religious Institute is pleased to share that, since June, we have received major grants from the:

- § The **Richard and Rhoda Goldman Fund** for the expansion of the Religious Institute's work to develop and support religious leaders, to advocate for sexuality education in faith communities, and to educate the public and policy makers.
- § The **Moriah Fund** for research and development of a new

Study Note on Assisted Reproductive Technologies.

• § The **Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr Fund** for a research project in collaboration with [Progressive Christians Uniting](#), on increasing support for LGBT persons in Christian faith communities.

We are very grateful for their support.

The [Women's Ministries](#) of the Episcopal Church featured Religious Institute summer intern, Katey Zeh. In "**We asked a young feminist . . .**", Katey discusses her understanding of feminism, generational ties, and how feminism can empower faith.

[To read the article . . .](#)

New Resources

Jewish SexEd, Religious Action Center Podcast, features Rabbi Jack Abramowitz (Orthodox Union) and Rabbi Laura Novak Weiner (Union for Reformed Judaism) speaking about the need for sex education to be taught in faith communities. The podcast includes discussion on denominational stances, advocating for legislative changes, and a review of resources. Abramowitz has a website on [Jewish perspectives on abstinence](#). Weiner has helped to develop the URJ's [Sacred Choices curriculum](#) available for download.

[To listen to full podcast . . .](#)

A Place in God's Heart . . . A Place at Christ's Table is a new welcoming (GLBT) worship resources edited by David Lohman. The resource is dedicated to Rev. Ann B. Day & Donna Enberg in honor and celebration of their twenty years as leaders of the Open and Affirming Program of the United Church of Christ Coalition for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Concerns. Published by the [Institute for Welcoming Resources](#), a program of the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force, the guide can be reprinted for congregational use.

[To download worship resource . . .](#)

Sexual Abuse Policy Training and Implementation is a new and free online course from the Unitarian Universalist Association and the New England Adolescent Research Institute (NEARI). The course is based on the UUA handbook called [Balancing Acts](#) developed by Rev. Haffner. The course takes approximately 2-3 hours to complete and presents basic information that every congregation needs to know about: educating adults, teens and children; creating appropriate prevention policies; and responding to allegations of sexual abuse or the news that a former offender wants to join or re-enter the congregation. The course was featured in an AP story in newspapers across the country this weekend.

[To take this free course . . .](#)

[To read the AP story . . .](#)

Mapping Faith: The Strength, Diversity and Growth

of Faith Groups Seeking Justice and the Common Good, a project of [Faith and Public Life](#), maps progressive religious leadership in all fifty states. The map enables activists and reporters to search for progressive faith leaders and organization by issue and by state.

[To view the Mapping Faith Database . . .](#)

Upcoming Events and Presentations

What's So Bad About Abortion?, the NY Salon and the New York Society for Ethical Culture, 2 West 64th Street at Central Park West, New York, Thursday, August 9, 7-9pm. The panelists will discuss abortion as an issue in electoral politics in the US compared to Europe, seeking middle ground, and the 2008 presidential campaign. Panelists include Donna Crane, Director, Government Relations, [NARAL Pro-Choice America](#); Ann Furedi, Chief Executive Officer, [British Pregnancy Advisory Service](#) (UK); Kirsten Moore, President and CEO, [Reproductive Health Technologies Project](#); Vicki Saporta, President and CEO, [National Abortion Federation](#); with Moderated by Jean Smith, Director, NY Salon.

[For more information . . .](#)

Being Well, Staying Well: Sexual Health for All Ages, [FutureNet/](#)

Family Planning Annual Conference, the Gateway Hotel and Conference Center, Ames, IA, September 18 -20, 2007. Rev. Haffner will give the keynote address on September 19, 2007.

[For more information . . .](#)

From Diapers to Dating, [Planned Parenthood Hudson Peconic](#), Friday, September 28, 2007, 11:30am - 2:30pm. Rev. Haffner will keynote the affiliate's annual luncheon.

[For more information . . .](#)

Sexuality Issues for Ministers, Union Theological Seminary, NY, November 30-December 1, 2007 [Part 1], April 18-19 [Part 2]. Rev. Haffner with Dr. Ott will teach an intensive weekend course on sexuality issues for religious professionals, offering students both practical opportunities and theological study in sexuality issues. Enrollment limited to 30 students, alumni and practicing clergy are welcome to attend as auditors. Students may register for Part 1 only, but may not register for Part 2 (spring semester) without having completed Part 1.

[For more information . . .](#)

Tribute



Letty Mandeville Russell, one of the world's foremost feminist theologians died Thursday, July 12 at her home in Guilford, CT. She was 77. As colleagues and friends of Dr. Russell, those at the Religious Institute would like to share their sympathies with her partner Shannon Clarkson and many others around the world. Dr. Russell was a leader in ecumenical movements of the World Council of Churches and the World YWCA, and she reached out to theologians across the globe in Asia, Africa, and South America. Dr. Russell was also one of the first theologians to endorse the Religious Institute's Religious Declaration.

Dr. Ott, Religious Institute Associate Director was Dr. Russell's student and friend. She writes, "Letty was a rare person who actually lived what she preached and expected others to do so as well. If we indeed inherit our mother's gardens, those of us who are daughters and sons of Letty's teaching and mentoring have the phenomenal task of nurturing a global landscape, rooted deep in biblical tradition, bearing fruit of a mended creation. I hope to carry on a small piece of her amazing vision for a just world -- and to do so in partnership with many of you. The world is different because Letty is gone from it. By the guidance of her spirit, my hope is that the world will continue to be different through our work."

[To read the full obituary . . .](#)

[Forward email](#)

SafeUnsubscribe®

This email was sent to kott@religiousinstitute.org, by kott@religiousinstitute.org
[Update Profile/Email Address](#) | Instant removal with [SafeUnsubscribe™](#) | [Privacy Policy](#).

Email Marketing by



Religious Institute on Sexual Morality, Justice, and Healing | 304 Main Avenue, #335 | Norwalk | CT | 06851