

## **HISTORIC RELIGIOUS STATEMENT CALLS ON FAITH COMMUNITIES TO PROMOTE SEXUAL JUSTICE AND HEALING FOR ALL**

**NEW YORK (January 18, 2000)** Over 850 of America's religious leaders, to date, have endorsed the *Religious Declaration on Sexual Morality, Justice, and Healing*, a new progressive statement that affirms that sexuality is one of God's most fulfilling gifts and outlines a new paradigm for sexual morality that does not discriminate on the basis of age, marital status, or sexual orientation. Endorsers of the declaration represent a broad range of faith traditions and include two denomination presidents, 15 seminary presidents and academic deans, theologians from more than 32 seminaries, and 14 bishops.

The *Religious Declaration on Sexual Morality, Justice, and Healing* calls for full inclusion of women and sexual minorities in congregational life, including their ordination, and the blessing of same sex unions. It also calls for sexuality counseling and education throughout the lifespan from trained religious leaders, and a faith-based commitment to sexual and reproductive rights, including access to voluntary contraception, abortion, and HIV/STD prevention and treatment.

"In a culture that often seeks to exploit or repress our sexuality, it is critical for people of faith to offer an alternative vision that places sexuality in the context of divine holiness and moral integrity," says declaration endorser Rev. John H. Thomas, president of the United Church of Christ.

The religious declaration was developed by more than 20 theologians from diverse traditions, who came together in May 1999 to create a progressive vision on sexuality and religion.

"Religious people need to think about issues of sexuality from the point of view of justice and equality for all," says Rev. John A. Buehrens, president of the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations, an endorser and one of the creators of the declaration.

"At the dawn of the new millennium, religious leaders are calling on faith communities to heal the mind/body dualism of the past two thousand years," says Debra W. Haffner, president of the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS), sponsor organization for development of the statement. "Our sexuality and our spirituality are inexorably linked."

In addition, the declaration will appear late January in *The New York Times* as a full-page advertisement and in other news publications in the future.

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### **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 sexuality ethic focused on personal relationships and social justice rather than particular sexual acts. All persons have the right and the 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 violence against women and sexual minorities, 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 the humanities.**
- ✦ **Full inclusion of women and sexual minorities in congregational life, including their ordination and the blessing of same sex unions.**
- ✦ **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 sexuality morality, justice, and healing.**



**List of individuals endorsing the SIECUS document "Religious Declaration on Sexual Morality, Justice, and Healing" included**

**Rev. Canon Richard T. Nolan, Episcopal Church, West Palm Beach, FL**