Religion and Sexuality: What’s the Connection
Wednesday, May 23, 2007
at the University of San Francisco
Sponsored by the
Religious Institute on Sexual Morality, Justice and Healing

Agenda

Hosted by the Joan and Ralph Lane Center at the University of San Francisco.

The colloquium is being funded by the Ford Foundation to encourage dialog and collaboration among the leaders of sexual and reproductive health organizations, religious scholars, and progressive clergy. This is the fifth colloquium of its kind. Others have been held in Washington, D.C., New York, Chicago, and Atlanta. Two panel presentations address “Lessons Learned” and “Sexuality, Religion, and Research” from the perspectives of religious leaders, theologians, and social science researchers. The panels provide grounding for the discussion and network building sessions.

The goal of the colloquium is to explore how participants can work together to achieve change in public and policy makers' understanding of mainstream and progressive religious perspectives on sexual health and sexual rights issues and to motivate sexual and reproductive health organizations to more proactively engage the faith community.

The event is by invitation only. To request an invitation please contact Kate Ott, Associate Director of the Religious Institute at 203-884-2083.

The speaker list includes:

Rev. Ignacio Castuera, President, Clergy Network of Planned Parenthood
Rev. Steve Clapp, Christian Community
Rev. Dr. William Countrymen, Sherman E. Johnson Professor in Biblical Studies, Church Divinity School of the Pacific
Dr. Gil Herdt, National Sexuality Research Center, SFSU
Rev. Anne Jefferson, Director of Worship at the Pacific School of Religion and Associate Pastor at City of Refuge
Rev. Dr. Jay Johnson, Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies, Pacific School of Religion

http://www.usfca.edu/lanecenter/events/rel_sex_conf.html
Dr. Kate M. Ott, Religious Institute on Sexual Morality, Justice, and Healing
Rev. Lisa Sargent, Chaplain, Planned Parenthood Golden Gate

Location
McLaren 250 & 251
University of San Francisco Main Campus
2130 Fulton Street
San Francisco, CA 94117
Local Contact Telephone: (415) 422-2531
Campus Map

Directions from local hotels:

**Stanyan Park Hotel**
**Walking directions** (approx. .6 mile): Proceed up Stanyan Street 6 blocks to Fulton Street. Turn right on Fulton and proceed one block to Parker Avenue. Turn left on Parker. St. Ignatius Church will be on your right. Enter the USF campus halfway down this block. Pass Gleeson library and the University Center on your left. McLaren will be on your right just across from the University Center.

**Driving directions**: Proceed up Stanyan Street 6 blocks to Fulton Street. Turn right on Fulton and proceed one block to Parker Avenue. Turn left on Parker. St. Ignatius Church will be on your right. Follow Parker one block to Golden Gate. Turn right on Golden Gate and follow three short blocks. The main visitors' entrance to USF is on your right. Obtain a parking pass from the visitors' entrance. McLaren is straight ahead. Proceed up the road from the visitors' entrance. The entrance to the building is on your left across from the University Center.

**Laurel Inn**
**Walking or driving directions** (approx. 1.2 miles): Follow Presidio Avenue south, toward Pine Street. At Pine bear right on Presidio. Presidio turns into Masonic. Follow Masonic about 1/2 mile. Turn right on Golden Gate Avenue and follow for 3 short blocks. The main visitor's entrance to USF is on your left just pass the Memorial Gym. Obtain a parking pass from the visitors' entrance. McLaren is straight ahead. Proceed up the road from the visitors' entrance. The entrance to McLaren is on your left across from the University Center.

**PARKING ON CAMPUS**
Parking passes may be obtained for $15 from the visitors' entrance on Golden Gate Avenue between Roselyn and Kittredge Terraces. The parking attendant will direct you to the appropriate parking lot. McLaren Complex is straight ahead from the visitors' entrance. Proceed up the road from the visitors' entrance. The entrance to McLaren is on your left across from the University Center.

Campus Map
Religious Institute on Sexual Morality, Justice, and Healing

SEXUALITY AND RELIGION: WHAT’S THE CONNECTION?
San Francisco – May 23, 2007

Agenda

10:00 – 10:15 Welcome

10:15 – 10:45 Introductions

10:45 – 11:00 Overview: Rev. Debra W. Haffner

11:00 – 12:30 Panel: Lessons Learned
  • Rev. Steve Clapp, Christian Community
  • Dr. Gilbert Herdt, National Sexuality Research Center, SFSU
  • Rev. Lisa Sargent, Chaplain, Planned Parenthood Golden Gate
  • Rev. Anne Jefferson, Director of Worship at Pacific School of Religion and Associate Pastor at City of Refuge
  • Rev. Ignacio Castuera, President, Clergy Network of Planned Parenthood

12:30 – 12:45 Lunch Break

12:45 – 1:45 Panel: Religion, Sexuality and Research
  • Rev. Dr. Jay Johnson, Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies, Pacific School of Religion
  • Rev. Dr. William Counrymen, Sherman E. Johnson Professor in Biblical Studies, Church Divinity School of the Pacific
  • Dr. Kate M. Ott, Religious Institute on Sexual Morality, Justice, and Healing

1:45 – 2:30 Small Groups
  • What Can Be Done to Change Policy Makers’ Understanding of Sexuality and Religion?
  • What Can Be Done to Change Public Understanding of Sexuality and Religion?
  • How Can Scholars, Progressive Clergy, and Sexual and Reproductive Health Organizations Work Better Together?
  • Recommendations for Action

2:30 – 2:45 Break

2:45 – 4:00 Moderated Discussion, Plan of Action
Rev. Haffner appears on The O'Reilly Factor

Rev. Haffner discusses age-appropriate sexuality education for kindergartners. To see interview.

Religious Institute seeking Special Assistant to the Director. Read more.

Established in 2001, the Religious Institute is a multifaith organization dedicated to advocating for sexual health, education, & justice in faith communities and society.

Rev. Haffner explores the connection between sexuality, religion, and spirituality on her daily blog. Read more.

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Position Available
Religious Institute seeking Special Assistant to the Director. Read more.

In Her Own Words: Sexuality and Religion: What’s the Connection
Rev. Haffner explores the connection between sexuality, religion, and spirituality on her daily blog. Read more.
AN OPEN LETTER TO RELIGIOUS LEADERS ON MARRIAGE EQUALITY

As religious leaders, we are committed to promoting the well-being and moral and spiritual integrity of persons and society. Today, we are called to join the public discussion about marriage equality. There are strong civil liberties arguments for ending the exclusion of same-sex couples from the legal institution of marriage. Here we invite you to consider religious foundations for securing the freedom to marry for same-sex couples. Marriage equality is about more than gaining equal access to the legal protections and responsibilities of marriage. It raises fundamental questions about justice and power, intimate relationships, sexuality and gender, respect for diverse families, and the role of religion as well as the state in these matters.

AFFIRMING SEXUALITY AND THE CENTRALITY OF RELATIONSHIP

Our religious traditions celebrate that humans are created in and for relationship and that sexuality is God’s life-giving and life-fulfilling gift. We affirm the dignity and worth of all persons and recognize sexual difference as a blessed part of our endowment. There can be no justification for discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. As religious leaders, we believe that all persons have the right to lead lives that express love, justice, mutuality, commitment, consent and pleasure, including but not limited to civil and religious marriage.

AFFIRMING MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

From a religious perspective, marriage is about entering into a holy covenant and making a commitment with another person to share life’s joys and sorrows. Marriage is valued because it creates stable, committed relationships; provides a means to share economic resources; and nurtures the individual, the couple, and children. Good marriages benefit the community and express the religious values of long-term commitment, generativity, and faithfulness. In terms of these religious values, there is no difference in marriages between a man and a woman, two men, or two women. Moreover, as our traditions affirm, where there is love, the sacred is in our midst.
Marriage is an evolving civil and religious institution. In the past, marriage was primarily about property and procreation whereas today the emphasis is on egalitarian partnership, companionship, and love. In the past, neither the state nor most religions recognized divorce and remarriage, interracial marriage, or the equality of the marriage partners. These understandings changed, and rightly so, in greater recognition of the humanity of persons and their moral and civil rights. Today, we are called to embrace another change, this time the freedom of same-sex couples to marry.

The biblical call to justice and compassion (love neighbor as self) provides the mandate for marriage equality. Justice as right relationship seeks both personal and communal well-being. It is embodied in interpersonal relationships and institutional structures, including marriage. Justice seeks to eliminate marginalization for reasons of race, gender, sexual orientation, or economic status.

We find support for marriage equality in scripture and tradition in their overriding messages about love, justice, and inclusion of the marginalized. Even so, we cannot rely exclusively on scripture for understanding marriage today. For example, biblical texts that encourage celibacy, forbid divorce, or require women to be subservient to their husbands are no longer authoritative. At the same time, there are also many biblical models for blessed relationships beyond one man and one woman. Indeed, scripture neither commends a single marriage model nor commands all to marry, but rather calls for love and justice in all relationships.

In our nation, families take many forms. All families should be supported in building stable, empowering, and respectful relationships. Marriage equality is a means to strengthen families and is especially beneficial to children raised by same-sex couples. The state should not deny same-sex couples access to civil marriage. Many such couples are in long-term committed relationships and yet remain without legal and, in many cases, religious recognition. Conversely, because the emotional and spiritual bond of marriage is precious, the state should not compel anyone to marry (e.g., in order to qualify for public assistance).
RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

The United States is one of the most diverse religious countries in the world. No single religious voice can speak for all traditions on issues of sexuality and marriage, nor should government take sides on religious differences. Therefore, religious groups must have the right to discern who is eligible for marriage in their own tradition. In addition, all clergy should be free to solemnize marriages without state interference. We also note that many religious traditions already perform marriages and unions for same-sex couples. We call on the state neither to recognize only certain religious marriages as legal nor to penalize those who choose not to marry. The benefits and protections offered by the state to individuals and families should be available according to need, not marital status. The best way to protect our nation’s precious religious freedom is to respect the separation of church and state when it comes to equality under the law.

A HIGHER STANDARD

We call on religious and civic leaders to promote good marriages based on responsibility, equity, and love, without restrictions based on the biological sex, procreative potential, or sexual orientation of the partners.

Good marriages:
• are committed to the mutual care and fulfillment of both partners
• increase the capacity of the individuals to contribute to the common good
• assure that all children are wanted, loved, and nurtured
• are free of threats, violence, exploitation, and intimidation.

IN CLOSING

The faiths we affirm challenge us to speak and act for justice for all who seek to express their love in the commitment of marriage. Some people of faith differ with us; others may be undecided. To each and all, we reach out and seek to promote what is best for individuals, couples, families, children, and society. Our commitment is not only for the legal rights of some, but relational justice for all.

The Open Letter was developed at a colloquium of theologians sponsored by the Religious Institute on Sexual Morality, Justice, and Healing and funded by Freedom to Marry. Participants included Rabbi Dr. Rebecca Alpert, Temple University; Rev. Steve Clapp, Christian Community; Rev. Marvin Ellison, Bangor Theological Seminary; Rev. Dr. Larry Greenfield, Protestants for the Common Good; Rev. Debra W. Haffner, Religious Institute; Dr. Mary Hunt, WATER; Rev. Barbara Lundblad, Union Theological Seminary; Rev. Michael Schuenemeyer, United Church of Christ Wider Church Ministries; Rev. Dr. Traci West, Drew University.

The Open Letter was funded by a grant from Freedom to Marry. For ideas on how clergy can actively promote marriage equality, see the Action Kit, www.freedomtomarry.org/taking_action.asp.
Many denominations are considering their policies on holy unions and the legal right to marry. As of fall 2004:

- Several religious denominations have endorsed their clergy performing commitment or union ceremonies for same sex couples. These include the Central Conference of American Rabbis (Reform Judaism), the Ecumenical Catholic Church, Ohalah, Alliance for Jewish Renewal, the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association, the Unitarian Universalist Association and the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches.

- The United Church of Christ, the American Baptist Churches, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and various Quaker groups leave the decision to perform same sex unions to their clergy, congregations, or local governing bodies. The Presbyterian Church (USA) and the Episcopal Church in the United States of America allow their clergy to bless same sex unions, if their clergy do not call them marriage.

- Several denominations have endorsed the rights of same sex couples to legally marry and/or opposed federal and state efforts to deny marriage equality.

- In 1996, the Unitarian Universalist Association passed a resolution in support of marriage equality. The same year, the Central Conference of American Rabbis passed a resolution supporting the “right of gay and lesbian couples to share fully and equally in the rights of civil marriage.” The Executive Council of the United Church of Christ in April 2004 affirmed “equal rights for all couples who seek to have their relationships recognized by the state.” Other religious organizations that either support civil marriage for same sex couples and/or who are on record opposing the denial of equal rights to same sex couples include the American Friends Service Committee, Dignity USA, Ecumenical Catholic Church, Interfaith Working Group, Presbyterian Church (USA), Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association, and the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Churches.

- More than 2250 religious leaders have endorsed the Religious Declaration on Sexual Morality, Justice, and Healing, which calls for full inclusion of sexual minorities, including their ordination and performance of same sex unions.

- More than 4000 religious leaders have endorsed the marriage resolution sponsored by Freedom to Marry.