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FAITHFUL VOICES ON SEXUALITY AND RELIGION

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For Immediate Release

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Leading Sexuality and Religion Organization Decries New Report on Catholic Priest Sexual Abuse

May 18, 2011—The just-released report on sex abuse in the Catholic Church completed by John Jay College of Criminal Justice, titled *Causes and Context of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Catholic Priests*, includes findings and conclusions that may be surprising to church critics and apologists alike. Rev. Debra Haffner, Executive Director of the Religious Institute, made the following statement concerning the report:

“The conclusions of the John Jay report are based on a lack of understanding of child sexual offenders, the dynamics that lead to clergy sexual misconduct, the crippling lifelong effects of sexual violation by a religious leader, and the long-term willful disregard of the Catholic hierarchy for the safety needs of children. The priests who violated children and teens—and the Catholic hierarchy who ignored them or worse moved them to other parishes—violated the sacred trust of the people they serve as well as their own vows. The conclusion that that permissiveness of the 1960's and 1970's led to sexual misconduct is reminiscent of that period's refrain ‘The Devil Made Me Do It.’

“Our studies have found that most seminarians and clergy in the United States have not been adequately prepared to deal with sexual attractions, to recognize appropriate boundaries and power dynamics, or to assure that their congregations are free of abuse, harassment, and misconduct. Sexuality courses are largely absent from most seminary curricula, and students often graduate without studying sexual ethics or taking a single sexuality course. Fortunately this is slowly changing, as denominations like The United Methodist Church and the Unitarian Universalist Association have made training of clergy in sexuality issues a priority. It is far past time to assure that all clergy receive sexuality education as part of ministerial formation, and that every child, youth, and vulnerable adult is safe from clergy misconduct.”

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Rev. Haffner is the Executive Director of the Religious Institute, an ordained Unitarian Universalist minister and certified sexuality educator, and the author of *A Time to Heal: Protecting Children and Ministering to Sex Offenders*.

The Religious Institute (www.ReligiousInstitute.org), based in Westport, CT, is a nonprofit, multifaith organization dedicated to advocating for sexual health, education and justice in faith communities and society. More than 5,200 clergy, seminary presidents and deans, religious scholars and other religious leaders representing more than 70 faith traditions are part of the Religious Institute's national network.

The *Sex and the Seminary: Preparing Ministers for Sexual Health and Justice* study is available here: <http://www.religiousinstitute.org/research-report/sex-and-the-seminary-preparing-ministers-for-sexual-health-and-justice>