

Annual Report 2019

From the Founder

Dear Friends,

In the beginning of this year when we began to prepare our report of 2019, we never suspected that the entire world would be changed by mid-March. All our lives have changed - some more drastically than others - and far too many have been lost. We shelter-in-place as jobs go up in smoke, incomes dry up, and Covid-19 leaves a wide swath of suffering and death behind it. A natural consequence of this turmoil is a re-ordering of our daily routines as well as a reordering of our life priorities, for this global pandemic has hastened what was already inevitable: the world must and will be changed.

Mother Nature will not be mocked. There are consequences for our mistreatment of creation. And here in the US, as wealth flows increasingly to the top 1%, the growing discontent, fear, and potential for violence and brutality increases for the “have nots.” Our way of living and believing is not sustainable.

It is my contention that there is a direct correlation between our disregard for Mother Nature’s “body” and our disregard for our own bodies. As Western societies have increased our emphasis on intellectualism and abstract principles, we have diminished our connection to our bodily intuition. As we have celebrated (or resigned ourselves to) the toxic masculinity of war and unfettered capitalism, we have thwarted the feminine voice that calls for nurturing and compassion - especially for the “least of these.” Thus, we are severed from our own humanity, not to mention our sexuality. In *Uses of the Erotic*, Audre Lorde writes that the erotic is the “assertion of the life-force...creative energy empowered,”... “that has the potential to change the world.” In other words, living in the fullness of the erotic energizes us to become agents of social transformation! And yet, due to the Christian Church’s sanctioning of the Platonian mind/body split, we denigrate the flesh, and all our needs, desires, and pleasures along with it.

And so here we sit: on the cusp of destruction or reconstruction. We have a choice to affirm life and all its goodness, or continue our death-dealing ways. So much good is possible. When we value sensuality and compassion, and acknowledge our shared goals to live in a peaceful and just world, we remember our humanity. When we cultivate empathy and build trust, we remember the pleasure of compassionate sharing and respecting one another’s bodies and lived experiences. Our survival depends on deconstructing the walls that divide us, and joining hands as allies in the struggles ahead. We must remember our oneness. One global family. One body. Our body is sick - but not because of the virus. It is sick because we have not cared for the body well. As a global organism, we have not protected the bodies of others or our own. We have failed to laugh and play enough. But we can now. We must now. And we do it in the name of one who summarized all the rules and regulations into a single word, “Love.”

We at IISF are full of gratitude for those who have joined us in our efforts to proclaim the message of Christian body-positivity, and are thrilled to report on another great year. IISF has entered a new maturity in 2019: Journalists have taken initiative to seek us out for interviews, and a new generation of our Certified Sex and Faith Educators are taking on responsibilities at IISF, teaching Level #1, and carrying the message to their own communities. Thank you for celebrating 2019 with us!

Stay well in 2020,



Founder and Executive Director



Mission

Our mission is to teach people to love their bodies (& the bodies of others) as God does, by teaching an inclusive, science-friendly, and sex-positive Christianity. We believe:

- Sexual diversity is a natural trait to be celebrated.
- Sexual pleasure is a sacred gift to be treasured.
- Sexual freedom is a human right to be personally discerned and morally exercised in the context of one's faith community.

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#Churchhurt is real!

by Jennie Brogan, IISF Board Member and Trainee

Religious trauma and abuse are real. The wounds they create on people's mental health and functioning are real. I see this firsthand as a community mental health counselor in rural/suburban Virginia. A client once described actually being struck by Bibles during a church service, as punishment for kissing someone of the same gender. Some of my clients believe they are going to Hell for living their truth as a gay, lesbian, bisexual, and/or transgender person, but know that not living their truth would be Hell as well. Sometimes, clients would rather be dead than continue facing the pain of being rejected by their families, who use rigid scripture interpretation to shun them. Clients struggle with self-worth, and have to choose between "keeping the peace" / "not being a problem child" and living authentically. Clients are afraid to set and maintain boundaries in abusive family relationships, and believe they cannot find a chosen family who will love and support them unconditionally. God's children should not be subjected to this trauma and abuse. These wounds should not exist.

In my practice, I am privileged to help clients work through obstacles and heal these wounds. I do my best to plant seeds of insight, hope, and strength, and to give support and comfort to my clients. IISF's Professional Leadership Training, as well as my experience as a board member for this organization, has uniquely equipped and encouraged my work. IISF gives me tools to help clients live the truth of who they are, without giving up their deeply held religious beliefs. IISF also addresses the problem from another angle, by training pastors to be sex-positive and affirming, which gives me hope for a future where fewer people will be subjected to religious abuse. God loves all of us for who we are, and who we hope to become as we live with increasing freedom to honor our authentic selves.



2019 IN REVIEW

Increased Visibility

This year brought continued attention from writers and podcasters who are fascinated by the unique perspective of a sex-positive, inclusive Christianity.

Sexologist, podcaster, and writer Timaree Schmit interviewed Rev Bev and IISF trainee Naomi Washington Leapheart for her piece in the Philadelphia Weekly titled, [“LGBT clergy, representing the new face of faith, speak out dangers of systemic spiritual abuse.”](#)

Ken Lear featured Rev Bev’s new co-authored book in his article [“Mt Airy cleric authors sex-positive Christianity book.”](#)

Other podcasts that featured Rev Bev and IISF Certified Sex and Faith Educators in 2019:

[“Ready for Love”](#) podcast with Nikki Leigh

[“The Trouble with Sex”](#) podcast with Tammy Nelson

[“Better Sex Podcast”](#) with Jessa Zimmerman

Sex Coach University (founded by Pattie Britton) recorded an interview to be used for staff training.

“The Unashamed Body” Podcast - Spiritual Directors International

“Breaking Glass Podcast” with Kelly McDevitt

Radical Programming

IISF Leads Sexologists in an Embodied Spiritual Ritual

In June of 2019, Rev Bev and Rachel Keller (LCSW-C and IISF Certified Sex and Faith Educator) led an experiential spiritual ritual at AASECT (the annual meeting of the American Association of Sex Educators, Counselors and Therapists). The embodied service began with stretches, and included offerings of flowers, affirmations of the body’s goodness, circle songs and movements of peace and joy. Rev Bev recited “A Place to Sit” by the Sufi mystic, Hafiz. In this poem, he writes: “Don’t go outside your house to see flowers,/My friend, don’t bother with that excursion/Inside your body there are flowers.” Rachel Keller asked participants how long it had been since they looked at their bodies and recognized the miracles there, or gave thanks for their seamless functioning? Professionals (with various faith traditions or none at all) laughed together, enjoying being embodied spirits for a moment, in the midst of a hectic conference schedule.



IISF Hosts “Sex and Faith” Panel Discussion

IISF gathered key professionals who were assembling in Philadelphia for the AASECT conference, and presented a panel discussion entitled, “Countering Christian Sex Negativity.” Facilitated by IISF-Certified Sex and Faith Educator Rev Lacette Cross, the panel included Rev Bev, IISF trainees Jeremiah Gibson and Rev. Naomi Washington Leapheart, and Intimacy Firm sex educator, Brittany Broadus. Panelists (and attendees!) had a spirited discussion, and arrived at the conclusion: We don’t have to be sex-negative if we are Christians – and neither do we have to give up our faith to enjoy our sexuality!

Rev Bev Goes On the Road

In November, Rev headed to Baraboo, Wisconsin for a special weekend of preaching and teaching. She preached a sermon titled, "The Church's Mission? A Pleasure-Centered World," and led an Adult Forum on "Finding a Pleasure Centered Faith." Did they get it? You bet they did. This progressive congregation was inspired to explore offering faith-based sex education in their town, as a gift and as a mission. By the time Rev Bev departed, members were discussing becoming trained leaders with the Our Whole Lives sexuality curriculum (developed by the UCC and the UUA).



Expanding Trainee Leadership

One of our goals at the end of 2018 was to integrate trainees and Certified Sex and Faith Educators into future programs and events, so that instead of the one-woman crusade that is Rev Bev doing all of the programming, we have a small (or large!) team of preachers, teachers, and therapists ready to take the message of a sex-positive Christianity to the world. It is essential to the sustainability of IISF to continue to train and integrate the next generation of leaders. Throughout 2019, we saw our trainees teaching classes, presenting events, helping therapy clients, creating online programming, publishing writings and even receiving awards for their outstanding work!

Rev Lacette Cross is YWCA's Woman of the Year

She has been selected as a 2020 YWCA Outstanding Woman of the Year in the area of Faith in Action/Human Relations! "Rev L" is the pastor of Restoration Fellowship RVA. She is the owner of Will You Be Whole, and co-founder of Virginia's 1st Black Pride festival weekend, celebrating the Black LGBTQ community. We honor Rev L's outstanding successes in her local community! Rev Lacette Cross is also providing leadership here in the IISF community, as a Certified Sex and Faith Educator, and as a board member. She moderated our panel discussion in June of 2019, and will be co-facilitating our Professional Leadership Training Level #1 in 2020!



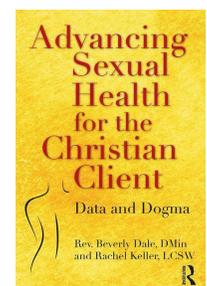
Professional Leadership Trainees Create Study Guide

Led by Jennie Brogan, sexologists and religious leaders combined their expertise to create a study/group discussion guide- a companion for Rev Bev's 9-part video series "Sex is Good" (available on YouTube). The guide includes questions for discussion and individual reflection, as well as scriptural references and scientific data for each video topic. It will be sold on the IISF website, and marketed to church groups and individuals looking to explore how theology and sexual science intersect on topics such as Sexual Diversity, Sexual Happiness, Kink, and Self-Pleasure.

We Celebrate the Release of a New Book by IISF Trainee Rachel Keller and Rev Bev!!

Our founder Rev Bev collaborated with Rachel Keller (IISF Certified Sex And Faith Educator, Therapist) to write the textbook "Advancing Sexual Health for the Christian Client," a resource geared toward therapists who work with those who are struggling with the effects of religious sex-negativity, but which can also be enjoyed by non-professionals. This year was the official book launch and release, and 2020 will be the first year it can be used as a text for Professional Leadership Training Level #1!

For your copy, be sure to use Promo code BSE19 for 20% off at www.routledge.com



LOOKING FORWARD

Documentary to Feature IISF Work

[Angels and Saints](#) (set for 2020 release) is a documentary about people who are challenging religious sex-negativity. Three of those featured are affiliated with IISF: Rev Bev, Rev L (board member and trainee), and Chris Paige (advisor). The filmmakers suggest that “Angels” and “Saints” are those evolving human beings who have learned to integrate Eros or “the Life force” with wisdom or spiritual awareness - oftentimes through suffering. This integration with the compassionate and sensual Spirit earns them the title of “messengers of awe.”



ALL-VIRTUAL Professional Leadership Training LEVEL #1

This summer, in light of the pandemic, IISF will present its first-ever all-virtual version of Professional Leadership Training Level #1. After many requests, we have also made a couple of seats available for highly-motivated non-professionals to join this training. We are exceedingly proud to be able to use “Advancing Sexual Health for the Christian Client” as a main text for this training, for the first time! This book was written by IISF’s own Rev Bev and Rachel Keller.

The series takes place every Thursday evening from July 9 - September 3. Applications and more information available at www.incarnationinstitute.org.

Thank You, Rachel Keller, for Six Years of Service

We have been blessed by the energy and commitment of board member Rachel Keller, who has served as treasurer and in many other capacities since the beginning of IISF. Rachel kept our finances, social media, and organizational resources in order, even as she participated fully in our programming. She even co-authored the textbook “Advancing Sexual Health for the Christian Client” with Rev Bev. She has stepped down from the board to devote herself more fully to expanding her therapeutic career. While she is missed on the administrative end of things, she will continue with the IISF as a Certified Sex and Faith Educator. We wish her success and blessings!



During Rachel’s transition off the board, she was kind enough to find us a replacement: We welcome Hsuan Wang as our new Treasurer! She is a CPA and stay-at-home mom in Taiwan, and was looking to use her skills to help a non-profit like ours. Perfect timing. We are happy to have her on our board!

How You Can Help

Honor someone special with a donation: For example, one of our regular donors always contributes to honor a friend who is an IISF board member.

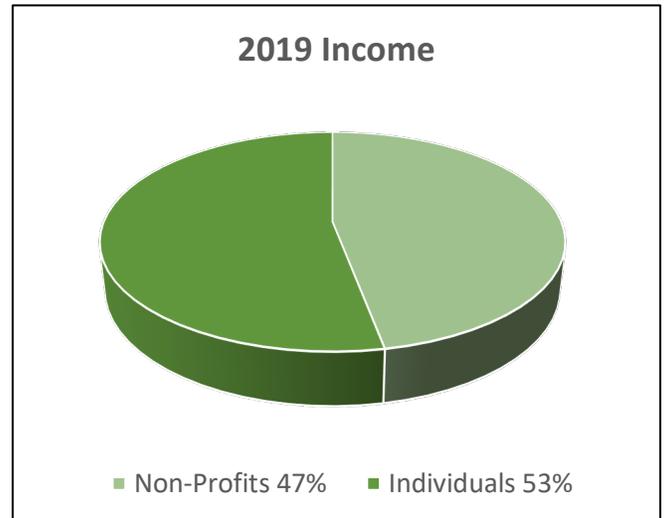
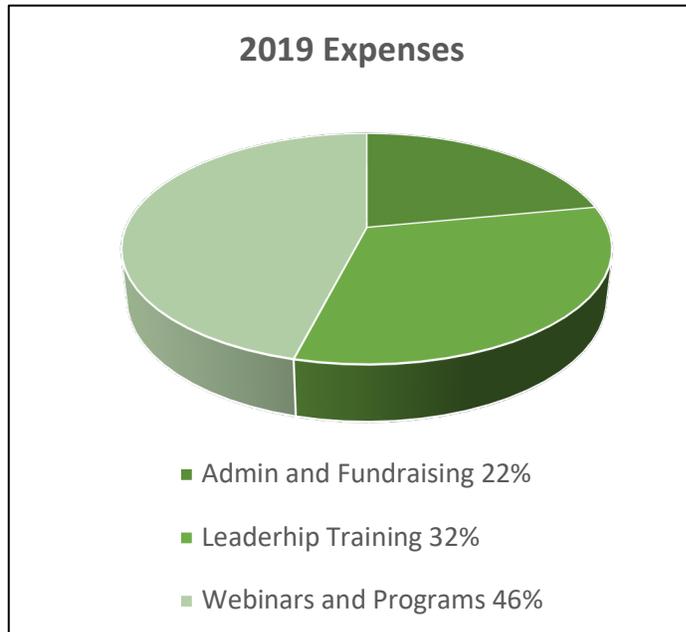
Make a purchase with Amazon: Simply go to <https://smile.amazon.com> and designate the Incarnation Institute for Sex & Faith as your choice. We'll receive a percentage of your purchase price, at no extra cost to you. How easy is that?

Make a donation of \$100 or more and become a "Missionary of Pleasure" with your own membership card and pledge card for your wallet and a button (if you want to show off to your friends)!

Make a monthly pledge through our PayPal account: The dependability helps us with our planning.

Donate anonymously through [Network for Good](#). While IISF does not receive 100% of the gift, this is a good option for donors who are concerned with anonymity.

Financial Report



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