

# Faith In America

Dear Rev. Rick Warren,

**Faith In America is a nonprofit organization that works to educate Americans about the harm caused by religion-based bigotry and prejudice.**

**Several weeks ago we began collecting examples of that harm as it exists in the lives of gay Americans, their families and their friends. Most are from people who have experienced the pain of rejection and condemnation but some are straight allies who, like more and more Americans, understand why it can no longer be allowed to flourish in our society.**

**We hope you will take the time to read these examples and open your heart to an understanding of why we can no longer allow religion to be used in a way that exacts such a horrific human toll on the lives of so many Americans.**

Sincerely,

**Mitchell Gold, founder**

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Dear Pastor Rick Warren,

As a pastor of a church when we found out our son was gay, we could not tell our church friends for fear of losing my position. I was fortunate in that I found a small group of accepting ministers. It was particularly hard for my wife since she had no one to talk to. Nor did she feel that she could even go to the library to find out information, because it was a small community and she feared that someone would find out that she was searching for information about homosexuality, and make the assumption that we had someone in our family who was gay. We were in the closet for 10 years before we finally felt comfortable to share our story. Those 10 years were often very miserable, hiding this "dark" secret.

Jerry W. Miller

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Dear Pastor Rick Warren,

Our family has been harmed and adversely affected by the "anti-gay" rhetoric that you and other church leaders claim as being "the word of God". My son has been teased, bullied, even threatened because of who he is. His uncle, "a devout Christian", labels gay people 'sinners', unworthy, even criminal. These messages have been passed onto his children (our cousins), who have made hateful and bigoted remarks at family gatherings. Individuals must take personal responsibility for their attitudes, words and actions so I am not blaming you, Pastor Warren, for the bigoted beliefs of people such as my brother. However, religious leaders who have the ear

of the nation are presented with an opportunity to set a different tone, to teach, to enlighten and educate. Your position on homosexuality is quite clear. I do not expect my story to change your mind or your beliefs. I only ask that you give pause to the words that you continually put forth to the nation regarding homosexuality. There is a misguided affect to your anti-gay message. Calling individuals like my son a “sinner” perpetuates the violent attitude that fuels the remarks made by my brother, one who calls himself a devout Christian.

Every parent experiences a measure of concern for the well being and safety of their children but parents of gay children have an added concern that their son or daughter may be the victim of a hate crime. The fear that our son may be shot or beaten to death has been and continues to be part of our daily life. Attitudes behind hate crimes are rooted in ignorance and prejudice. When religious leaders spout their interpretations of the scriptures regarding the gay and lesbian population to the masses, the potential for harm is put forth in the larger community, thus resulting in attitudes of bigotry as those hosted in my brother and his children. Ignorance, prejudice and bigotry are perpetuated by you and other church leaders who also claim that to “sit in judgement of others” is wrong. Do I detect hypocrisy?

Gay and lesbian individuals have parents, brothers, sisters, grandparents, etc. They are no different than other Christians and non Christians. They are not sinners and their way of life are is not a “lifestyle”. My gay son did not choose to be gay just as his brother did not choose to be straight. The ripple effects of anti-gay rhetoric especially by religious leaders is far reaching and will continue to have a harmful and destructive outcome for many, unless it is stopped. I strongly urge you to stop your message of religious based bigotry against the gay and lesbian population.

Sincerely,  
Corinne H. Cooper

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In 1972, a beloved, extremely talented cousin of mine, Mary Lou Ingerson, committed suicide by hanging herself. Her personal daily diary documented her inner struggle with, on the one hand, her knowledge that she was homosexual, and, on the other, the open, explicit, condemnation of homosexuality by Campus Crusade for Christ, a group to which she belonged. She kept her identity as one with a homosexual orientation a secret until her death. She wrote of her struggle, her feelings of worthlessness, and of considering herself damned in the eyes of God.

As one now retired from a half century of ministry in the United Church of Christ, this pivotal event in the life of our extended family has always stood as a tragic example of the bigotry and violence of fundamentalist religion. It is religion that has blood on its hands and an ignorant and small god in its heart. So, to have Barak Obama, the new Preseident of these United States invite Rick Warren to give the Invocation at his Inauguaration, is an affront to our sensibilities as citizens and as devoted Christians to a God whose love breaks down the artificial cultural barriers that breed hatred and violence. We hope that Rick Warren, in these days of new beginings, will see the error of this part of his theology, that his purpose driven life might lead him to seek to liberate people from the oppression of his kind of bigotry, and that our new President will seek to undo the terrible harm his choice has caused.

Rev. M. Michael Morse  
Gaithersburg, Maryland

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Pastor Warren, My husband and I have attending a bible believing church for 27 years. Our son

use to attend until he came out gay . He was told he is an abomination in God's eyes, and we as his parents were told to get on our knees and pray that God will show our son his sin. Our prayer is that God will use our son to show God's love to the Gay Community who are oppressed by Christians. Our son is a wonderful blessing and a child of God who we cherish, support, and love. As you pray to God to keep our son from having the same rights that you enjoy, We as his parents pray to the same God to open the eyes of the Christian Community to see the oppression they cause. We know that God has a plan and purpose for our son.

In His Service, Rick and Diane Kaufman, Fort Collins, CO

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### Walk in My Shoes for a Day

As a Christian Lesbian, I can whole heartedly share that my life has been a struggle. Most of my life was denying the fact that I am a lesbian; I ran from the attraction I felt for my friends in high school, I married right after I turned 20 to a well respected church leader, I viewed myself as broken and repressed the "sinful lust" I had in my heart.....the list goes on and on. Through this there were many tears, many hours spent crying out to God to heal me, to make me "normal". Everywhere I went, my self loathing was encouraged by the dogma of the faith I loved so much. I didn't really accept the fact that I am a lesbian until I was in my 30's, and the pain of this was unbearable at first. I was angry at God for not "fixing me", ashamed of the fact that I was not "faithful enough" to fight this cross that I bore, I was truly broken.

So, when I hear others - especially Christians - flippantly say, "well, you need to pray that God saves you from your sin. Your faith is not strong enough!" I now get pretty irritated. They make so many assumptions with that phrase! And I am learning I am not alone in my irritation!

A new book is out to share some of these struggles, written by Mitchell Gold. He's now the co-owner of Mitchell Gold + Bob Williams, a \$100 million furniture company, but Gold has not forgotten his tormented childhood and the struggles of growing up gay. Gold is giving back to the community with a new book he edited: "CRISIS: 40 Stories Revealing the Personal, Social and Religious Pain and Trauma of Growing Up Gay in America." Read the full article about this book [here](#) .

As an excerpt:

*LGBT youth face persecution every day, not only in schools, but in religion as well.*

*Although many religions believe homosexuality to be a sin and explicitly condemned in the Bible, Gold is committed to teaching the truth—that it is not a choice.*

*"Until we say loud and clear that it's not a sin, no one will believe it," Gold said. "It's a wonderful and essential part of the way you were born."*

*In 2005, Gold created Faith In America, a nonprofit dedicated to stopping religious-based prejudice against the gay community. Gold sees religious beliefs as the main reason for unequal rights, and he finds parallels to the civil rights movement for women and African Americans because religions justified denying these minorities equality.*

*"We need to remind people of those historic moments and connect the dots, and that's what's happening in the gay community."*

*Gold himself grew up believing there was something wrong with him. “For me, being a gay teenager meant being two people all the time,” he said. “I thought about suicide often. I made a pact with myself: If I could not change and want to be with a woman by the time I was 21, I would commit suicide.” He was convinced his family would send him to a mental hospital if they discovered his secret.*

*“Homosexuality was considered a mental disorder—you didn’t see that you could become a lawyer, a doctor, a banker, a journalist.”*

*While attending college in Rhode Island, Gold sought help from a psychiatrist. “I finally got the words out and said I was gay, and I needed cured,” Gold said. Instead of trying to repair the struggling teen, a therapist helped Gold understand himself and appreciate his sexuality.*

*Since then, Gold has served on the Human Rights Campaign’s board of directors; Out magazine nominated him to its Top 50 Most Powerful Gay People in America list; and numerous advocacy and outreach organizations have honored his work.*

I can so resonate with the struggles shared by Mitchell Gold! And what was even more difficult for me, in my growing up in the church, was that OTHER sins - or, specifically, OTHER SINNERS - were welcomed with open arms and brought into the fold. If and when these sinners “back slid” and failed in their recovery, they were loved on, encouraged, and prayed for. Some of these “sins” were sexual (but heterosexual) in nature. But I personally witnessed a man come out as gay and be seriously kicked out of the church family! Whoa, that sent a message I have never forgotten!

So, even as a Christian, if you still believe homosexuality is a sin, what is the deal? Again, if you really CARE about someone, shouldn’t you love them and help them?

But that leads to my next struggle - now that I am out and that I accept that I am what I am and even embrace it, I still get hurt and/or irritated when my Christian friends give me information on how to be “saved” from my lifestyle. One such church is the church Sarah Palin used to attend, as noted in this article:

The insert at Wasilla Bible Church, which Palin has attended for six years, promotes a conference for gays and lesbians. This conference promises that through prayer and God’s love, gays and lesbians can become heterosexual. “You’ll be encouraged by the power of God’s love and His desire to transform the lives of those impacted by homosexuality,” reads the insert, which seems insulting to so many people on so many levels.

Let me clarify something - I believe in prayer. I believe in God’s power, His omnipotence. I pray often, and I have faith that He hears me and that His will can and does alter lives, situations, and calms hearts. But how would YOU feel if I told you out of love, “Well {enter name here}, I noticed that you are 60 pounds overweight and I love you too much to let your sin affect your life that way! I am going to pray that, by the power of God’s love and His desire to transform your life, you will be saved from your gluttony and obesity!” Or how about, “”{enter name here}, I know you are living with your girlfriend and that she is divorced. I love you too much to let your sin of fornication and adultery affect your life that way! I am going to pray that, by the power of God’s love and His desire to transform your life, you will be saved from your sin!” Well, actually, a better example of this would be, “{enter name here}, I noticed that you are left handed, and well, everyone knows that represents the devil! So I am praying that, by the power of God’s

love and His desire to transform your life, you will be made into a right hander!”

Don't tell me the last part is so far fetched; my maternal grandmother was born left handed and was forced to write with her right hand because of the belief that the left hand was “sinful”!

All I am saying is this - it is not my job to convince you that homosexuality is not a sin, although that is my belief. It is not my job to shove my lifestyle down your throat. It is not even my job to speak for God! But I ask this - try to walk in my shoes, or ANY shoes of a homosexual, before you condemn us or decide we are sick or diseased or mentally unstable. Consider that maybe we have prayed in earnest for years to be changed and that our faith is very strong. That we have had God-given miracles in our life, and our homosexuality is NOT a stain for a failure. That the Bible is clear that you should love and NOT judge.

Just think about it. That's all I am saying.

And my job, for the day, is done!

Gina Minard

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Dear Rick Warren,

I am the 34 yr old daughter, niece (multiple times), cousin and granddaughter of Methodist ministers. I was raised in the church. I am grateful for that wonderful start to life; and for the people who took seriously their vows at my baptism to help raise me in the life of the church.

However, since high school, I have had to struggle with both my love for the church and my own mental and spiritual survival.

I realized, to my horror, that I really was G-A-Y when I fell undeniably in love with Shelley, my best friend in college.

I was sick at having to even think about this. I didn't want to be gay. (and frankly, given the: negative stereotypes, awful stories of that lifestyle, and believing that it was a sin, shameful and perverted- on par with pedophilia/beastiality/drug abuse/etc, knowledge that there would be rejection by family, friends and church... who would?)

And, if The Church was right about homosexuality being a sin, then how could I trust my own moral compass? This love was love.... but The Church says, “Nooooo, it's a sin.”

I felt isolated, sick at heart, ashamed and unable to trust even my closest friends with this piece my self.

The words of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., upon describing his young daughter's blossoming understanding of prejudice, now applied to me as I could feel:

“...ominous clouds of inferiority beginning to form in her little mental sky, and see her beginning to distort her personality by developing an unconscious bitterness toward white (bigoted & Christian) people.”

Additionally, Shelley and I (both church-goers... and how rare is that in college anyway) strug-

gled with our relationship b/c of our misunderstandings that we learned in church. We grieved that one of us couldn't have just been born a man. We were tortured with the conflict between head and heart. I wish we could have KNOWN back then that Love isn't wrong.... it's exactly what we need more of. As Christians, it is our prime directive. Love God, Love Neighbor.

Then, tragically, we were involved in an accident just after college and Shelley died. I have grieved this loss now for almost 12 years. I miss her every day.

Had we been a heterosexual couple, we would have been engaged or married. People would have recognized our commitment to each other. I would have received the support and help that I so desperately needed. Instead, I felt like I had to hide this from almost everyone I knew, and especially The Church, my church. Born, raised and abandoned in my time of need... not to mention, being kicked around as a political football.

I'm frustrated and broken hearted by the numbers of good and "nice" church people who remain neutral or completely apathetic to the misery left in the wake of "homosexuality is a sin."

So, The Church, has lost a lot of moral authority with me. I'm bearing the brunt of their convenient hypocrisy.

Fortunately, Jesus has always been there.

Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them saying:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
Blessed are those who mourn,  
for they will be comforted.  
Blessed are the meek,  
for they will inherit the earth.  
Blessed are the pure in heart,  
for they will see God.

The Church could learn a thing or two from how that fellow treated outcasts.

I would like us to be the Body of Christ, reunited.

We are family.

I love you as you are, but I'm hopeful that you will spend time re-examining this "issue." So many lives and relationships are at stake.

May God grant you the eyes to see.

Your sister in Christ,

Tina Ciampa  
6 Brook Valley Dr.  
Harrison City, Pa

My Partner and I retired to Tucson, Arizona.

For four years we were subjected to extreme gay harassment and gay hate. We tried legal means for our own protection. Things simply got worse.

Neighbors attempted to allude that we were child molesters. Finally we got a veiled death threat.

We simply wanted to live in peace and were tired of fighting. In August, we moved from Tucson.

Rick Sours

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Some may recall Truman Capote's story by the same name, and his recollections of growing up in the south at Christmas during the depression. My story is a little different. In fact, it is a very brief story of a man and one of the most important pieces of his failing memory. It's a story that meant a great deal to me at Christmas time with family this year.

My partner and I have been together nearly 15 years. We are both close to his parents, Bob and Elizabeth (though we call her by her nickname, "Pud"), who are retired and live nearby Newport, Rhode Island. My "father-in-law" is a retired Naval submarine commander, and in fact, served as an officer in the 1950's when his sub, the Sargo, became only the second nuclear submarine to reach the North Pole.

As an Annapolis grad, Bob loves submarines and the Navy, and his decades-long career as a naval officer. But much much more, he loves his family, including his gay son, his lesbian daughter and their non-gay brother and his two grandsons. He simply gave everyone including me his unconditional love, respect, closeness and unique sense of humor.

Now that he has reached the age of 78, it gives us the chance to do more for him than he can do for us, including just spending some time together over the holidays. A couple days into our December visit, it occurred to me how much of his memory truly has faded. He briefly asked the whereabouts of a member of the family, wondering whether she already had left town - even though she had never come to join us in the first place.

One afternoon, nonetheless, I had the chance to take him out to fit him and to buy him a couple pairs of trousers and afterwards at lunch, to enjoy a hot cup of soup while we talked to the young mother in the next booth, and the tiny little girls accompanying her to find out whether they were naughty or nice. Each task comes a bit harder for him now, remembering how and when and why. Conversations are more halting, as he searches for words and answers before he fully expresses himself.

On our drive home together, however, he began sharing with me a rambling anecdote about Trinity Church, the historic old Episcopal church in Newport - where he had served for years as a member of its congregation as well as tour guide. He spoke enthusiastically and warmly about Paul, one of Trinity's deacons whom he felt was one of the "best" at church, and someone that he and Elizabeth had come to know and to like very much.

Then he added that one of his fellow parishioners, however, just did not like Paul. Worse, she also decided to leave the congregation simply because of him - and because of his partner. She served notice that she did not approve of the church welcoming and supporting an openly gay deacon,

and therefore could no longer support and belong to Trinity Church either.

He looked at me, rolled his eyes and said, "Good riddance." He really wondered what is possibly wrong with her, and I could see that it really puzzled him crossing the path of a person who is unable to find the good and humanity in everyone, including the gays and lesbians around us - including his own children.

Enough said. Even a very simple story like this one does not come easily to him now to re-tell - even though he has long been popular for his jokes and stories. I realized, even though his memory now is leaving him, some powerful fragments last longer than others - especially the most meaningful ones. What a great Christmas gift he gave his family and to me, without even knowing it.

Bob Witeck

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I once lived next door to a couple in a small southern town whose two adopted children were extremely dear to my husband and me. We watched them grow up, experiencing all the developmental hurdles all kids do, but always grounded in the strong principles their family gave them. They were the kids we all hope to have one day.

Over the years my husband and I often engaged in civil debate with our neighbors regarding their literal interpretation of the Bible, presenting our own belief in multiple ways to "find God." They thought we were a little goofy, but we genuinely liked each other, and they seemed to take pride in our enjoyment of their children who babysat our son. All of this changed when their son, truly one of the most intelligent, kind, handsome, and well-rounded individuals I've ever known, announced that he was gay and had a partner. When we offered him our total support and welcomed his partner into our home, his parents were horrified. Granted, this took place in the early 80's when we were all terrified of HIV/Aids. Our friendship couldn't withstand the gulf of our differences. They succumbed to the Baptist teaching of homosexuality as sin and resented our connection to their son. His poor sister was devastated on all fronts.

I was never sadder than when I learned that their precious son and his partner had AIDS. Until his death in the late 80's we remained close and always offered any support we could. I still cry when I think of a son dying without the support of parents, not to mention the pain the parents felt and the pressure they were under to yield to irrational theology. Though attitudes have changed somewhat, we still have much work to do to eliminate the bigotry associated with literal Bible interpretations.

Thank God for people like Mitchell Gold and others who bravely challenge those would be Christians to live as Christ taught us. I know that my gentle friend's life, short as it was, lit a fire in me to speak whenever I can against religion-based bigotry. Thank you for the forum!

Lynn Foes

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In 1978, when Librarian of a theological seminary, I added some Unitarian material on sexuality, including homosexuality, to the library collection. At the same time, I gave a talk to students which received above masthead report in the student newspaper based on that material. My employment came to an abrupt end.

I came home one day soon after to find the material in my front hall.

J. McRee (Mac) Elrod

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To Rick Warren:

I am the mother of a gay child who is presently experiencing religion-based bigotry.

He is not allowed to visit the parents of his partner because of their religious beliefs about gays. Family celebrations, holidays, births, funerals can not be shared by this loving couple because of the religious beliefs of the parents. His parents have sent him for help to “cure” his homosexuality and those have been religion-oriented meetings. He has come away from them distraught and self-hating because homosexuality can not be “cured” -- a person is born straight or homosexual or lesbian or bisexual or transgender -- it is God’s decision, not ours. Would a person choose this life of pain??

Try to imagine yourself being told that you are an abomination and that you can not live the life that God intended for you. You can not love the person you love, you can not be a part of your birth family and share the joys of being with family in good times and in bad. Imagine the strain it puts on a relationship between two people who love each other but must choose to stay away from parents who cause such pain by not accepting their child or his partner -- because of religious beliefs. This what my son and his partner are experiencing.

Religion has caused our society to hate our fellow man and that’s not the role religion should play in our lives. I am straight and was raised Catholic and the God I know loves all of his children equally.

Please understand the power of your words and what it does to the lives of our brothers and sisters. Those words cause emotional and often physical harm. Please do your part to make this world a loving and accepting place for our children!

Sincerely, Joan Sangiovanni

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My story is not a tragic one, nor is it fill with violence or hatred. However, my story is like millions around the world, where my love is denigrated and denied. I love my partner Ron. I love him so much that I committed my life to him in the presence of my church family and God. God is very important to us. We attend church every Sunday. We tithe our 10% to our church and we support our church through our various ministries that we participate in. Naturally, when we decided to commit ourselves to each other, it was in that Church we asked God to bless us and our relationship. God has not turned God’s back on us. God has not stopped loving us. God has blessed us abundantly and has blessed our love. It hurts when my own Christian Brothers and Sisters, who love God as much as I do, state my love is “an abomination”. That my love can not equal their love for their opposite-sex partner. That my love can not and should not be defined legally as equal to the state definition of their love.

I know that God is working in this land. That God is working to change lives. That God has sent Jesus to all of us so that we may understand the love that has been given to us freely. Jesus stated that we were to love God with all our hearts, with all our minds, and with all our souls and to love each other as we love ourselves. I pray the day will come, when we stop using God as the

reason for denying the love I have for Ron. I pray the day will come, when God's plan for this world comes to fruition and we all recognize the rich and beautiful diversity God has created in our world and in each other.

Jonathan Hollander

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If you don't believe same sex marriage is right then don't marry someone of the same sex. For me it is the best moral option I have, yet you fought to take that away. But the bible is very weak on that issue with 6 or 3 or 0 references depending on your interpretation. (Clearly violent homosexual gang rape is condemned, but marriage between loving adults, not at all.) Why don't you be a good steward of the Word and put your energy where it belongs, on working for justice? The bible has 3000 references to God's concern for the poor and the sin of greed.

This whole culture war about sexual purity and against homosexuality and marriage rights for gay people as if it were God's main concern provides such a wonderful distraction for the media from the real sin and crisis of the century: the extreme excesses of greed going on right under our eyes and the injustice, war and carnage that creates. The carcass of the American economy and treasury are being picked to the bone by corporate compensation and wall street excesses while a third of the world's children starve.

"The Love of Money is the root of all evil," yet your Christian cultural warriors put the republicans in charge of our Congress who in the last decade, together with Bush have almost completely decimated the regulatory system overseeing wall street, allowing such incredible greed and profit taking the world has never known while lowering taxes on the wealthiest Americans. Then after banks award hundreds of billions of dollars to their management in bonuses, more greed than the market could bear, they now have been spoon fed more billions of borrowed taxpayer money, without strings and continue to pay themselves even more billions of bonuses, obscene at half their former amounts.

This is business as usual and is what should be receiving the possessed fervor of informed cultural warriors. To the extent that Rick Warren is concerned about poverty and HIV AIDS and the extreme excesses of greed and environmental devastation, you are doing God's bidding. However your warrior stance against millions of same gender loving Americans is a distraction from God's work and poor stewardship. God made me to love another man, and as St Paul says if I am unable to maintain celibacy, it is better for me to marry and be in a stable committed relationship than to burn with desire.

God calls you to work for justice by putting your full energy to fight the rampant greed and inequality of our day and stop beating down the least in the Kingdom, our gay brothers and sisters, in His Name. It sullies the Name of God.

Sincerely in Christ

Greg Satorie

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I am the mother of three almost grown children - a married older daughter, an engaged middle daughter and a gay teen son in his freshman year of college. My own childhood family was very difficult and I resolved that my children would experience a home in which they were each affirmed as individuals and assisted in growing into their own personal potential. We are a family of faith, very active in a contemporary United Methodist Church. My children were raised in

the church and highly involved. I trusted that our church would help us in communicating a God who loves each person like they are the only one; a God who so desires a relationship with his children that he personally suffered and physically died to bridge the space between us; a God who embraces us just the way we are today.

Early in my son's life I suspected that he might be gay. However, it was not until his senior year in high school that he shared that with us. By that point too much damage was done to his developing view of himself and his relationship with God. Our church rarely openly spoke about gay, lesbian and transgender issues. However, the current stance of the UMC was well known and discussed on more than one occasion. Those are the things that he remembers. The unspoken message has been that of "love the sinner, hate the sin", and God's dissatisfaction with homosexual behavior. Because I always encouraged open discussion, asking the hard questions, and taking nothing at face value, I always believed that I would know when one of my children was under emotional distress or in crisis. However, that proved not to be true. I fully believe that gay children are born gay because I have seen it with my own eyes, and lived it in my child. Gay children have an incredibly difficult time understanding their internal emotions and conflicts and don't have the skills needed to resolve those issues. The position of those in our faith community greatly contributed to my son's confusion, denial of self, and inability to reconcile a loving God with what he came to accept in himself. Since our family is highly identified with our church, he came to also identify us with the things that caused him pain as an adolescent and, in his view, ultimately destroyed his ability to approach God. His current belief is that the church simultaneously teaches that God makes us as he desires us to be but also that God does not accept homosexual individuals. Those two things cannot exist together. He is a gay young man, so in order to be true to himself he has decided that God does not actually exist or have any relevance to his life. We supported this environment, so we are also suspect and denied as relevant. The anger that he feels toward the church, and us, will take a long time to turn around.

This is very painful for our family. Not only my son's denial of God, but I am more hurt by the damage done to his life in his growing years, that he kept to himself. It was our job to protect and affirm him. Instead, I feel that we regularly subjected him to messages that did just the opposite. Messages, spoken and unspoken that came from our faith community. All I can do now is love him as God does, and take a stand about the judgmental message of many denominations that does not represent the nature of God. I hope that my son will forgive the ways that I failed him and come to know a God who loves him just as he is, and a nation that fully accords all citizens equal rights under the law.

Ann Nichols  
Raleigh, NC

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God is love, God loves everyone, God loves Chanette.

My daughter Chanette, now 25 years old, faced at a early age, her sexuality and the fact she loved for lack of a better word, "differently". Chanette at 15 years of age was scared, misunderstood, feeling alone thought that no one would love her if others found out her "secret", that she was gay, a lesbian. Church taught her that being gay was bad and a sin and that God wouldn't love her. Chanette, my beautiful, biracial (father black, I am white), lesbian child thought suicide was her only out. She thought the world would be a better place without her in it. Years of inner turmoil and pain led her to finally be out to who she is because of the love of her family. Chanette was born to be who she is, to love who she loves. And that her family, her friends love her just the way she is, who she is and I as her mother am filled with love and pride for my child, my

lesbian daughter.

Chanette is a beautiful loving person, and the the world is a better place for having her in it.

Denita Purser  
Proud PFLAG Mom  
Garner, NC

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I was brought up as a Christian, and was ashamed of being gay as a young man and married a wonderful woman who thought she could change me in order to try to be “normal”. But neither she nor I were happy in such a passionless marriage. Although we had 2 wonderful sons and stayed together for 17 years, both of us knew something important to a happy marriage was missing. We did not share a passionate love for each other. I was always running away from my gay nature and had to constantly suppress my desires and longings. I was guilt-ridden with my interest in other men. She felt lonely and unloved.

We finally divorced and I had to learn to accept being who I am. I met my partner of 26 years (who had also been in an unhappy marriage and had 2 children of his own), and we found what had been missing in my married life to a woman. The thrill of loving and passionately caring for the person you are with makes all the difference in the world. The wonderful comfort of wanting to take care of the person you love beyond all else cannot come from artificial attempts to force it. This is what life is about, and what heterosexuals take for granted. They don't realize that that does not happen between a man and a woman when one is a homosexual. It is even unfair to the wife to have to feel unloved in such a passion-less marriage. I tired to love my wife, but she was only like a sister to me, not a soul-mate. My ex-wife also is MUCH happier now with a husband who can truly love her.

So, to try to force gays to live a straight life is not only unfair to the gays, but it is an abomination to the poor spouse who has to live a life of passionless marriage.

Gerry Parchman  
Riverton, New Jersey

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Let me share a bit of my personal story with you. When I was nineteen years old, I had some sense then that I was called to the ministry. The church was central to my life. In fact, all of the primary aspects of my life were due to my involvement with the church. I was working as an Associate Music Director and moving toward a vocation in Music Ministry. I was active in the youth group and was wildly spiritual; I actually felt as if I had a personal relationship with God, as I knew “Him” then. And best of all, the church was where my community of friends hung out. In fact, it was during a Youth Services Retreat were where I met my first love. It seemed that the heart of my life was in the church. There was just one problem. I was raised Catholic, where women are not allowed to be priests. And, then there was another problem . . . My first love was another woman. And, lesbians were not only disallowed from the ministry, they were not welcome in the community of believers unless they tried to ‘cure’ their sexual orientation. I didn't even really know what was wrong or why it was wrong. I just knew that others thought it was wrong and that they thought I was wrong. Being Gay was somehow a sin . . . some horrible disconnection from God. It was at this point that my feelings of love were teamed up with feelings of shame. And, I had no sense of inherent worth, just a deep sense of fundamental depravity. At 21, I was forced out of the closet. I simultaneously lost my lover, was disowned by

my original family and disenfranchised from my faith tradition, which led to separation from my community of support, my vocation, and ultimately to separation from spiritual source. At once, the essential pillars that hold were dismantled in a swirl of fear, hatred and bigotry. The grave impact of these losses on my life was enormous, the ripples of consequences extending out for years. Maybe, I'll write a book someday.

But, for now I share this bit of my story because part of the awareness that I bring to ministry is a felt understanding of the colossal amounts of extra life-energy it takes to live within an oppressive culture from a position of disenfranchisement. I know that the threat of violence is real, the restrictions are real, the losses are real, the cost to emotional and physical health is real, and the barrier to becoming is real. And, I know the extra pain of alienation, when that oppression is substantiated on the basis of God's rejection.

Yet, I can also acknowledge that there are intersections of oppressions. I know what it is like to be steeped in self-denial, to hide, and to separate myself from my true-nature. Yet, I do not know what it is like to wear the source of my oppression on my face - to not be able to hide or separate myself from the color of my skin even if I might want to. I know what it is like to lose the love of my primary support system; but, I do not know what it is like to be followed in a department store or wonder if the rejection of my loan application is racially motivated or not. I know what it is like to lose the privilege of being able to marry, and I know the costs to relationships that are not sustained by the support of family and friends; but, I do not know what it is like to be wrapped in a family of others just like me who help me understand and strengthen my resolve to resist the atrocities of hate. Truth is - some people know all of this. And, others like myself sit on both side of the coin - being both the oppressed as well as having a stake in the culture that is doing the oppressing.

After my seminary education, I intellectually understand oppression and racism as emerging from a complexity of sociological, psychological, political, scientific and religious constructions based on the exploitation of an 'other.' The origin of the concept of race and racism as we know it in the United States today emerged during the 16-19th centuries and was tied to European expansion worldwide. The development of a capitalist society by brutal Euro-invasion and the piracy of territories, resources, and peoples for material advancement - to the detriment of those stolen and stolen from - constitutes racism. Currently, a post-modern view of racism holds that even though racism was initiated in the practice of slavery and continued on in segregation, contemporary racism occurs as we collectively continue to operate within a conditioned racialized system, even as we act unknowingly.

In Post-colonialism, institutionalized racism has become illegal. In the 20th century, we have witnessed the fall of the major racist regimes of the world: Hitler and Nazi-ism, segregation dismantled by the Civil Rights movement in the United States, and Apartheid in South Africa. But, the reality of segregation still exists, and we may now lack the cultural awareness that was at the forefront during the fall of these racist regimes. Now in the 21st Century, we still see major segments of society having an imbalance of resources, benefits, and opportunities at the expense of the life and dignity of others. But, these acts that result in reducing the livelihood of those that are marginalized are often difficult to identify and expose. Human trafficking often happens where we are not aware.

Economic exploitation and political control as motives for maintaining the status quo may have recently begun to fragment with the your campaign. I feel privileged to have witnessed this movement in our culture in my lifetime. But, I am intimately aware that your election is a result

possible only after hundreds of years of work, by thousands of people in hundreds of thousands of different acts of commitment and resolve who have worked to fight oppression. And, of course there is endless work to be done. I am curious to see how your presidency is supported or possibly undermined by a power of racialization that may be more insidious than we imagine. I have concern for both your safety and your integrity.

Right now it is your integrity that I am concerned about. Is not sacrificing the gay community and the rights of LGBT people in order to pacify the Religious Right, a blatant form of bigotry equal that of inviting a racist pastor to speak the invocation? (I hesitate to say prayer, because how could any form of invocation that does not include ALL people be considered prayer?)

It is hard to comprehend the gargantuan impact of the hundreds of years of deadly oppression that the world has experienced. Even more difficult to understand, is the general impotence that religion has played in abating these wild cruelties on the very existence of human life. Most difficult to understand is the active participation of religious institutions in blatant acts of oppression. Religious rhetoric is the primary impetus of homophobia and heterosexism, similar to the way that religious rhetoric was used to justify American-slavery and Nazi-genocide. It is the God-culture that is actually separating people from the mandates of God.

If we expect religious voices to be an equalizing factor for corrupt politics, an even more disturbing development is the rise of conservative politics coupled with the emergence of fundamentalist religious rhetoric and today's mega-churches. Instead of bringing people into the realm of God, religions are creating separation from God for whole segments of the population.

It is significant to note that we see the Christian (especially evangelical) treatment of racial conflict throughout history voiced in terms of changing the individual spirit through conversion. The idea that social problems will dissipate through personal repentance to God is a rationalization that goes clear back to slavery.

Instead, we know that religion has true power when it can be harnessed for right relationship, called to uphold the inherent worth and dignity of every being. The force of the black church as a religious institution in the civil rights movement is a great example of this. Individual acts were ultimately given power only by the institutions of faith.

Religion is about transformation. So, if you are going to use Rick Warren's particular form of religion to forward your agenda, you must call that religion to a higher ground. Jesus dined with the tax collectors and the religious leaders - who were playing into the hands of the Roman political elite - so that he might reform their hearts from the abuses they were causing the common people who made up 90% of the population. If you have hired, Rick Warren in order to transform his heart toward righteousness, then more power to you.

With hope and respect,

Julia McKay, MA, MDiv  
Unitarian Universalist Ministerial Candidate  
Intern Minister, Shoreline UU Church

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Dear Pastor Warren,

I am 47-year old white male bisexual US citizen, living in San Francisco. After decades of

searching I have finally found the person whom I deeply love and want to share the rest of my life with. He is a 25-year old male citizen of the Philippines who is HIV-positive. For various reasons, both related to his health status and not, he cannot even visit the USA. Although I love my country as much as any other American, I now plan to move to the Philippines because that is the only way I can live with him. It was hard for me to face the fact that the freedoms in my country are inadequate for me and do not allow me to live the life I choose. Why should you get to vote on my right to marry the person I love? The genius of America is that we repeatedly demonstrate to the world that the expansion of freedom leads to greater success. Stop holding us back.

Sincerely,  
Barry Charles Saiff

Dear Pastor Warren,

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Faith-based bigotry blindsided my family in Spokane, Washington. At the new member orientation my mother and I attended, the pastor stated the Presbyterian denomination's position against gay people serving in the church. Hurtful joking about gay people immediately erupted and instead of being intervened by the attending leadership, it was sanctioned with silence. This left my family shocked and bitterly disappointed to have to seek a new faith home. We ask your help. Please be an agent of change so that the church is no longer a place for God's gay children to be hurt. We want a faith home and we want to serve the church.

Respectfully,

Amy Starr  
4029 S. Best Ct.  
Veradale, WA

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I was an ordained United Methodist minister who left ministry and surrendered my credentials when I decided to come out of the closet and to live in love with my partner. I did not find an accepting religious community until introduced to the UU fellowship in my area. Perhaps the "stork" made a grave error when I was delivered to a United Methodist family 57 years ago! I immediately felt at home in this UU congregation and have been accepted and loved and supported by them without reservations or any unreasonable expectations that I be celibate or renounce my sexuality or love for another woman, etc.

I am not happy with Obama's choice of Rick Warren. I would have preferred Obama had chosen someone who is openly gay and/or supportive of gays. But, I understand Obama's need to be more of a centrist in his governance and will trust Biden's public statements that he and Obama will move forward on civil liberties and civil rights for the GLBTQ community. Time will tell...

At least Warren has been exemplary in his AIDS treatment/prevention programs and potable water projects around the world and esp. in Africa. That's nothing to sneeze at and something to be recognized.

Thanks for the chance to write a few words.

Dot Everhart

Eleven years ago, when I applied to serve this congregation, a number of people took me aside to ask where I stood on the subject of homosexuality and religion. At first I was stunned to hear that question in a Unitarian Universalist church. Wasn't the answer obvious given our tradition's vocal commitment to the affirmation and full participation in our faith—including the ministry—of BGLT people?

Then I listened up. One by one, I heard members of the church confide, "My son, daughter, grandchild, sister, brother or someone else close to me is homosexual. I've heard people in this congregation say terrible things about gay people that broke my heart. I can't have a minister who does that." Often the person saying this fought back tears. The realization that homophobia was still alive and nastily well in a Unitarian Universalist religious community broke my heart.

Nearly eight years later, after a lengthy required process, this fellowship was certified by the Unitarian Universalist Association as a "Welcoming Congregation", the first such in South Carolina. The path to overcoming people's fears and entrenched misconceptions about BGLT people—and BGLT people's fears and entrenched misconceptions about straight people—was awkwardly painful, if also comical at times, but above all deeply, satisfyingly, religious in the best sense of the word's Latin root "religio", meaning "to bind together". In other words, to connect, not thrust apart.

In faith,  
Rev. Cynthia Prescott  
Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Clemson (South Carolina)

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The Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Clemson (UUFC) became a Welcoming Congregation in 2005, after a series of programs, films, and meetings. I was a leader in that transformation of our congregation. This passage from our church web-site at UUFC.com will help you understand the important procedures that we went through as a congregation to earn that designation. I am very proud of our accomplishments and I thought you might like to see this before you write your Invocation for President Barack Obama later this month.

Thanks,

Carol Ward

U.U.F.C. A Welcoming Congregation

In 1987 a UUA committee was formed to collect information about how welcomed and accepted gay, lesbian, transgender and bisexual persons felt in their UU congregations. Many individuals reported that they felt unaffirmed, unwelcomed and unsupported in their liberal religious communities. Though much of this exclusion was very subtle and most of it was quite unintentional, many people felt that they didn't really belong and either drifted away or stayed "in the closet," hiding basic aspects of who they are from other members of their congregations. This finding troubled many UU's who have committed to making our congregations welcoming and inclusive places for all people, especially minority groups who have traditionally experienced exclusion, discrimination, and misrepresentation within our society.

Citing the principles of our UU faith—especially the first, that affirms the inherent worth and dignity of every person—the 1989 General Assembly voted to initiate the Welcoming Congregation

Program, a process of study and reflection to prepare to become a recognized Welcoming Congregation. A few other faith traditions have similar programs. A congregation that is designated a Welcoming Congregation commits to being inclusive and expressive of the concerns of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons at every level of congregational life-in worship, in programs, and in social occasions-welcoming not only their presence, but also the unique gifts and particulars of their lives as well.

In the summer of 2004, the UUFC Board agreed to begin the adult education curriculum of the Welcoming Congregation program, from August through May. The monthly workshops involved people from the larger community, including other faith traditions and representatives of Clemson University, exploring the issues and questions through discussion, films, exercises and testimony. Following a three week written advisory vote (Parish Poll), which indicated by a vote of 108 in favor, three abstentions and one negative vote, the decision to become a designated Welcoming Congregation was affirmed on September 25, 2005 at a congregational meeting with a vote of 74-0.

Being a Welcoming Congregation means that we commit to the following efforts:

1. A Welcoming Congregation does not assume that everyone is heterosexual. Vocabulary of worship reflects this awareness, and worship celebrates all types of diversity through inclusive language and content.
2. An understanding of the experience of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons is fully incorporated throughout all programs, including religious education.
3. A Welcoming Congregation seeks to nurture ongoing dialogue between lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and heterosexual persons, and to create deeper trust and understanding.

The Welcoming Congregation is important to all of us, regardless of sexual orientation. Gay, lesbian, transgender and bisexual persons are not the only ones who may feel alone in our community. Persons of color, the physically challenged, various ethnic and national minorities, persons of low income or educational status, those recovering from addiction or suffering from mental illness, and other groups may feel excluded by some congregations. Although each group experiences the "chill" in a congregation differently, and the steps required to warm the chill will vary from one congregation to another, there is a universal imperative to end the pain and exclusion. Only when our congregations are truly open to the diversity of all persons who come to our doors will the principles of Unitarian Universalism speak with a large and lasting voice.

(This statement was adapted, with appreciation, from the UU Church of Augusta web site)

There is one kind of very serious harm done to gays by the inflexible and irrational moral stand of so many anti-gay Christians which seems not to be discussed very much.

I was never gay bashed. My parents never abandoned me. I was never the recipient of any single act of acute bigotry.

However my life was seriously and adversely affected by religious-based bigotry -- because for so many years I BELIEVED all their immoral 'moral-codes.' I believed that I was not allowed to engage in any intimate relationship. I believed that those couple times I'd fallen in love with someone, that it was 'wrong' to pursue any relationship.

THIS is the real serious harm. Teaching children error. Teaching children that they are not allowed to love. Teaching children that if they do not or can not 'change' they are morally cul-

pable.

Ignoring the real truth about homosexuality that is right in front of them. It is the death to one's soul where the serious harm lay.

Rocco Paperiello

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In 2004 as a 43-year-old conservative-minded Christian, I was railing about how homosexuals were out to destroy America one Sunday while having dinner with my family and parents.

At one point my mother stopped me mid-sentence with a question: "Was the attitude I held toward gay men and women truly a Christ-like attitude?" I had often stated how I "loved the sinner but not the sin" but I never stopped to consider if I really meant that. More importantly, what did the gay co-worker actually feel when I spoke those words.

It seems consistent with God's message of love and forgiveness that I should treat everyone with love and compassion. But I was taught that the Bible says homosexuals are engaged in sinful behavior and how they want to bring about moral decay within our society. Yet, can any student of the Bible say that the overall message - from beginning to end - is not one of forgiveness, love and redemption? God calls upon us as Christians to love as Christ did. God forbids us from judging or condemning people based on what we consider sin. That, the Bible says, is God's job.

As I pondered these questions, God began to slowly open my heart and mind to what I know as truth today - gay men and lesbians are not wicked and evil individuals but people like you and me - and their sexual orientation is simply how God created them. They have jobs, homes, families and many desire a meaningful relationship with God just like you and I.

While I'm no theologian, I believe deeply that God grants us the ability to discern spiritual truths.

One truth that God allowed me to discern is that judging a group of people as wicked and evil because of their sexual orientation - and deeming them as unworthy of my association and unworthy of a relationship with God - was wrong. It didn't reflect a Christ-like love toward gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people.

Certain religious leaders who espouse an attitude of discrimination or condemnation when it comes to the issue of homosexuality are quick to say they love the homosexual - it's just their sexual orientation they have a problem with.

We cannot have it both ways. Christ accepts us just as we are? Shouldn't we do the same?

Over time I have had the opportunity to speak with numerous of my gay and lesbian neighbors — some Christians, some of other faiths and some who profess no particular faith. They tell me how the harsh and condemning language coming from certain conservative Christian organizations causes them great psychological and emotional distress.

When they hear Christians espousing a condemning and judgmental message, they feel no love, compassion or respect.

Each time I hear this from a gay or lesbian person it reinforces what I came to realize about my past attitude toward homosexuals - condemning people as sinners because of their sexual orienta-

tion prevented me from showing the type love and compassion that Christ calls us to exhibit in all our relationships.

Sometimes we accept certain biblical teachings as truth without placing those teachings up against God's overall message of love, forgiveness and redemption.

It often takes a step out in faith to question a long held religious belief. Perhaps we're afraid that changing our belief on something we've accepted as truth will lead us to discard other truths found in God's Word. It reminds me of how Christ was perceived as a threat by religious leaders of his time because he challenged many of their long-standing religious beliefs and practices.

At the end of the day, this is what I know in my heart: As I discarded my attitude of discrimination and condemnation toward homosexual men and women, my faith was strengthened as I realized the difference between genuine love and insincere words.

It's ironic. After years of wanting to change what I perceived as the hardened hearts of homosexuals, God changed my heart instead.

I'd like to close with a question: If a gay couple visits your church this Sunday and takes a seat next to you and your family, would you feel uncomfortable.

And if at that very moment you shared with the couple what was in your heart and mind, would your words cause them to feel hurt and unwelcomed or unconditionally loved and accepted?

Brent Childers  
Executive Director  
Faith In America