

Faith In America

Don't Accept Bigotry As Religious Truth

Brent Childers, Executive Director

Civil Rights Activist Critical Of Rev. Warren's Role In MLK Celebration

Faith In America today released a videographed open-letter to Rev. Rick Warren during which a civil rights activist says Warren's pastoral leadership does not honor the late Martin Luther King Jr.

Warren is scheduled to speak Sunday at a Martin Luther King Jr. celebration service in Atlanta.

The open-letter, which has been posted on YouTube and the nonprofit organization's web site, features Rodney N. Powell, M.D., a member of Faith In America's board of directors and a former student activist during the Civil Rights Movement.

The video can viewed here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=eHmFhTuMpVU

Brent Childers, executive director of the organization, said Powell's open-letter to Warren was released to remind Warren that his religion-based bigotry toward gay Americans is the same kind of religion-based bigotry toward African-Americans that King stood so adamantly against and which ultimately cost King his life.

Powell said he defends Warren's right to hold and express his personal religious beliefs but that he does not respect him for doing so when such action justifies and promotes harm toward gay Americans, particularly youth.

"Your religious beliefs do not give you the right to oppress gay Americans and encode your religious beliefs into customs and codify them into laws that deny equal civil rights and first-class citizenship to other Americans," Powell states on the segment.

"When you seek to enforce your views of intolerance on others, you are no different from racists, segregationists, sexists, antisemites and other bigots throughout America's history of religion-based bigotry."

Faith In America's founder Mitchell Gold on Wednesday hand-delivered Powell's segment to Warren's Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, Calif., along with a series of other videographed letters and printed letters that the organization collected from supporters.

Warren was presented a copy of Gold's new book, "Crisis: 40 Stories Revealing the Personal, Social and Religious Pain and Trauma of Growing Up Gay In America" and a copy of "The Pastor's Daughter," a young adult novel by Tracey Zoeller, who along with Gold also speaks to Warren in a videographed open letter.

Gold said that there was a recent news report that Warren had visited a West Hollywood bookstore and some commentators suggested perhaps he made that visit to obtain materials that would help him better understand why many gay Americans were so outraged over his invitation to give an inaugural prayer. Others suggested the visit was just a publicity stunt.

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“I obviously do not know Rev. Warren’s motive in making that visit but it is my hope that some place within his humanity there is a small voice asking him to consider if perhaps this is yet another case – just as it was when religion-based bigotry was used to justify attitudes of rejection and condemnation toward African-Americans, women or interracial couples – in which traditional church teaching is being misused to justify a social injustice,” Gold said. “We have presented him with material which clearly show the harm is being done. The decision to open his heart and see the harm that is being done is now the decision he must make.”

Powell states in his letter that he is certain Martin Luther King Jr. would in no way condone Warren’s words and attitude toward gay Americans.

“Mr. Warren, I do not believe Dr. King would find your spiritual leadership unifying and I’m certain he would not find it part of his vision for America as a beloved community.

Faith In America also published an ad in the Washington, D.C.-based newspaper Politico this week which addresses Warren and the history of religion-based bigotry. (attached)

The videographed letters by Gold and Zoeller can be viewed here:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=fvHY-Z7Aff0

www.youtube.com/watch?v=KbB6SsrUYzA



- *As a medical student in Nashville from 1957 to 1961, Rodney Powell was a student protest leader in the African-American civil rights movement, where he had the honor and privilege to learn and apply the philosophy and strategies of nonviolent resistance under the guidance of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Powell continues his activism, serving on the board of directors of Faith in America and supporting other organizations dedicated to achieving equality for gay Americans.*
- *Mitchell Gold, a home furnishings business owner and longtime civil rights advocate, founded Faith In America in 2005 to educate Americans about the harm caused when religion is misused to justify prejudice, discrimination and violence against people based solely on their sexual orientation. In September 2008, Gold published “Crisis: 40 Stories Revealing the Personal, Social and Religious Pain and Trauma of Growing Up Gay In America” to help bring awareness and understanding to one of the greatest moral failures of our time: Misusing religion in a way that subjects gay teens to traumatic depression, fear, rejection, persecution and even physical violence. The book offers understanding to parents, teachers, and religious leaders about the harm being done and how society can end it. For more information, visit www.crisisbook.org.*
- *Tracey Zoeller, is the author of the young adult novel, “The Pastor’s Daughter.” Much like the heroine in her book, Tracey grew up on the south shore of Long Island and was raised in a born-again Christian household in which religious rules and regulations governed everyday life. Tracey currently lives with her girlfriend in the south suburbs of Chicago and works as a social worker in a nursing home.*

Faith In America, a national nonprofit organization, was founded in 2005 to educate Americans about the harm caused by religion-based bigotry and prejudice toward gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender citizens by connecting the dots of religion-based bigotry’s history.
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