

Faith In America

Don't Accept Bigotry As Religious Truth

Brent Childers, Executive Director

Group Asks Rev. Rick Warren To Begin Dialogue On Harm Caused To Gay Americans

Faith In America today released a series of videos and letters that it hopes will help Rev. Rick Warren and other non-accepting people of faith understand the harm caused to gay Americans by religion-based bigotry, prejudice and discrimination.

The project, entitled "Can You Understand the Harm?", includes videographed open-letter segments from Faith In America Founder Mitchell Gold of Hickory, N.C., who also recently published an expose about the personal, social and religious pain and trauma of growing up gay in America; and Tracey Zoeller of Chicago, Ill., author of a recently published young adult novel entitled "A Pastor's Daughter." Both titles were presented to Warren.

In addition, the organization collected letters from its supporters who address Rev. Warren about the harm that they have experienced as gay Americans or as parents and friends of gay individuals. Examples of those letters, along with the video segments, were hand delivered by Mitchell Gold to Saddleback Church in Forest City, Calif. on Wednesday.

Gold, who founded Faith In America four years ago along with former Methodist minister Jimmy Creech of Raleigh, N.C., said the project is an attempt to assist Rev. Warren in understanding the harm that is caused when his words and actions promote an attitude that gay Americans are somehow unworthy and inferior and therefore undeserving.

"While there has been much controversy over Rev. Warren's invitation to deliver an inaugural prayer, our organization believes these circumstances have created a much greater opportunity for Rev. Warren," Gold said. "He has the opportunity to help millions of gay Americans, particularly gay youth, who are hurting inside because of a societal climate of rejection and condemnation – a climate that his words and actions have promoted."

Gold said the organization has asked Warren to view the material and at some point afterwards conduct a panel type forum at Saddleback Church with Faith In America representatives and several of the contributors of Gold's book "Crisis" to discuss the harm that is experienced in the lives of gay Americans.

"Four years ago, we started this dialogue in communities across America," Gold said. "We are inviting Rev. Warren to begin this dialogue within his community."

"Some individual within the Southern Baptist Convention several years ago, in June 1995, had the fortitude to suggest that the organization apologize for its role in promoting and justifying bigotry, prejudice and discrimination toward people of color," Gold said. "We hope that Rev. Warren will search for that same fortitude in helping bringing about the end of religious communities' embrace of bigotry, prejudice and discrimination toward people who are gay."

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In the video segment, Gold states that such bigotry and prejudice has no place in the soul of America nor the soul of his church.

Tracey Zoeller, in her video statement, entitled “If I Were Your Daughter?”, asks Warren to consider the spiritual violence that is inflicted upon her and others because of their sexual orientation. “If I were your daughter, she asks, could you accept me just as I am?”

In addition to delivering the material to Warren’s Saddleback Church, the organization has posted the video segments and letters on its websites, FaithInAmerica.com. and its blog, EndTheHarm.com.

The segments are posted on YouTube at:

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

www.youtube.com/watch?v=KbB6SsrUYzA

The organization 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)



- *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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