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Are Christian Beliefs about Homosexuality “Hate Crimes”?

This May, I was invited by Exodus International to go to Washington D.C. and to speak to Congress and the Senate against impending Hate Crimes Legislation. You may be asking, “What is Hate Crimes Legislation?”

Called the *Local Law Enforcement Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 2007* (HR 1592), this Federal bill would prosecute “crimes of violence...motivated by prejudice based on the actual or perceived race, color, religion, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability of the victim...”(HR 1592 Section 4 [C]) On first glance, this seems totally acceptable. Who would not agree that everyone, including homosexuality-identified people, should be protected from violence?

In addition, the bill claims to prosecute crimes of violence motivated by prejudice based on the “religion” of the victim. Therefore, religious people will be protected against violence perpetrated against them due to prejudice. But will this law protect religious people who do not advocate homosexuality based on religious conviction? Is a Christian who says that homosexuality is a sin committing

a hate crime? Consider the following international and national cases:

In British Columbia, a Catholic city counselor has been ordered to pay a homosexual couple \$1,000 for publicly saying that their lifestyle is “not normal and not natural.” The state interpreted his religious beliefs as “hate speech” under Canada’s hate crimes law.

In Sweden, Pastor Ake Greens read from the Bible at a Borgholm, Sweden church, and gave the Bible’s view on homosexual practices. He was charged with violating Sweden’s strict laws against hate speech, specifically a crime of “expressing contempt... on account of...ones sexual orientation.” He was indicted, convicted, and sentenced to 30 days in jail.

In Philadelphia, eleven Christians peacefully carried signs and sang hymns at “Outfest”, a homosexual street fair sponsored by the city.

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A Father's Story

Is it any different for any of us when it happens? When you are told or when you find out in some other way, isn't the initial feeling the same for all of us? The bottom simply drops out from under us. It is unreal. That was my initial feeling when my 24 year old son, John, told me over 2 years ago that he was struggling with same sex attraction (SSA). I was in the garage doing some chores when he said he needed to talk to me. I listened as he poured his heart out about the struggle he had been in since junior high school. When I could finally feel the ground under my feet again, I put my arms around John, gave him a big hug and told him how much I loved him. We both shed a few tears. I praised God. Wait a minute, praised God??? Yes. You see, John realized that the life-

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"Hate Crimes?" continued

The group was confronted by the "Pink Angels" who blocked the eleven by interlocking arms, shouting obscenities and shoving large Styrofoam angels at them. When police arrived, they arrested the eleven Christians. The group spent 21 hours in jail, and the prosecutor, Charles Erlich, called the defendants message "hateful" and defined their witnessing as "fighting words." Eventually, the charges against them were dismissed, but had they been convicted, they would have faced up to 47 years in prison and \$90,000 in fines each.

In Chicago, a devout Catholic named Mary Stachowicz was murdered by Nicholas Gutierrez, 19, who punched, kicked, stabbed and strangled the 51-year-old wife and mother of four. Gutierrez then stuffed her body into a crawl space under the floor of his apartment, where it remained for two days until he confessed to police. According to Chicago police, Gutierrez told police that he had issues with his mother and that the way Stachowicz was talking to him gave him flashbacks of his mother that angered him." According to Gutierrez, he killed Stachowicz because she had lectured him "about his [homosexual] lifestyle and his lack of direction in life."

Gutierrez' action was not considered a hate crime, and Stachowicz was perceived by some to have committed the hate crime. Gay blogger, James Wagner, said of Stachowicz's strangling:

The woman who did such great evil is dead, but unfortunately the evil and the church and the society which creates it is not, and it will continue to destroy Nicholas Gutierrez and many others.

Another blogger wrote:

Quite frankly, if anyone in this case was being

'persecuted' it was Mr. Gutierrez. Unfortunately for the victim this was a lesson that she learned too hard and too late. Maybe this will give pause to other people who similarly try to 'help' homosexuals." — *"Silence Dogood," on ACLU Online Forum.*

The category "hate crime" is subjective at best. According to journalist, Rod Dreher, "The American media made Matthew Shepard an overnight cause célèbre, and have so far said very little about Mary Stachowicz — just as the media said very little about Jesse Dirkhising, the 13-year-old Arkansas boy raped, tortured, and strangled by homosexuals in 1999."

The question that needs to be asked is "Do we really need a federal hate crimes law? According to Peter Spriggs, Vice President for Policy at the Family Research Council "there is no evidence that local authorities are failing to investigate, prosecute, and punish, as they should, violent crimes against homosexuals. Special Thought Crime laws therefore serve no practical purpose, other than advancing a political agenda for the official government acceptance of homosexual behavior."

As the executive director for OneByOne, I am concerned that a federal hate crimes law would inhibit the Church's ability to minister to those with unwanted same-sex attraction. This should be a concern for all churches who take a stand against advocacy of homosexuality and who stand for the gospel message of grace and transformation.

Already, I am witnessing fear in conservative PCUSA churches (those who even support OneByOne) to engage in local ministry. It is one thing to vocally praise the ministry of OneByOne; it is quite another to

make the very unfashionable decision to engage in ministry in one's own church. I have heard from more than a few conservative churches that "our congregation is just not ready." My response to pastors and elders and counselors and Stephen Ministers is this: "Well, then get them ready."

The conservative churches in the PCUSA need to make themselves ready for what will be a future onslaught on religious freedom in our country, provoked by the issue of homosexual rights. If I were not the director of OBO, I would think my statement might be over the top, but my position has afforded me a direct view into our disturbing future.

Two years ago in Boston, I was attending the Love Won Out Conference hosted by Focus on the Family at Tremont Temple Baptist Church. Over a thousand protesters made up of pro-gay activists and pro-gay and anti-war activists gathered around the church and shouted: "This hatred thing is getting old. This hatred thing has gotta go!" and "Shut it Down!"

The angry protesters were not asked to disperse; instead the police barricaded the doors to the church, and we as participants were not allowed to leave until the protesters chose to leave. No secular media outlet accurately reported what happened on that day.

If you have ever attended a Love Won Out Conference, you would know that there is no hatred preached at these conferences toward the homosexual community. As the executive director OBO, I frequently attend and speak at these conferences. In fact, the main speak-

"May churches not be afraid to reach out to those in their congregations (and staff) who struggle..."

ers are men and women who have struggled with homosexuality in the past and who used to be gay activists themselves. These speakers at the Love Won Out Conferences strongly admonish conservative churches to be more loving and caring toward the gay community.

In addition, some say that this federal hate crimes bill is only limited to acts of violence and would not infringe on our freedom of speech. Recently, Jack Haberer wrote in the *Presbyterian Outlook*: "The bill deals only with violent crimes. It explicitly contains a provision that says nothing in the bill should 'be construed to prohibit any expressive conduct protected from legal prohibition by, or any activities protected by the free-speech or free-exercise clauses of, the First Amendment to the Constitution.'"

Though Haberer is accurate in his statement, Robert Gagnon explains that "free speech rights even in this country do not extend to 'intimidation'; that is, to words or conduct that the alleged victim perceives as threatening. It is through such a loophole that hate crime legislation can be used to override free-speech protections." Gagnon accurately states: "Haberer seems unaware of the extent to which religious rhetoric against homosexual practice has been tied to acts of violence, real and imagined, against homosexual persons." The incidences described in this article attest to this reality.

May the Church open her eyes to what is happening around her and within her. May she refuse to believe that it is hateful to lovingly stand against the advocacy of homosexuality and to reach out with God's grace and truth to those who struggle with same-sex attraction. May churches not be afraid to reach

out to those in their congregations (and staff) who struggle with same-sex attraction for fear that they may be sued or that they may look like hard-line fundamentalists. May pastors be courageous enough to take on "ex-gay" ministry in their own congregations at the cost of losing offended parishioners and at the cost of jeopardizing their budgets.

Jesus said, "Anyone who does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." It is only the churches who take these words of Jesus seriously that will be standing in the end. By God

- Kristin Johnson

1 "Canadian City Counselor Fined \$1000 for Saying Homosexuality 'Not Normal or Natural' January 19, 2007, *LifeSite News*.

2 "Swede's Sermon on Gays: Bigotry or Free Speech?" *The Washington Post*, January 29, 2005.

3 *Worldnet Daily*, October 15, 2004.

4 Allyson Smith, "Gay' Reaction to Mrs. Stachowicz's Murder: Silence to Applause" *Culture and Family Issues*, Concerned Women For America, December 4, 2002, <http://www.cultureandfamily.org>.

5 Rod Dreher, "These Victims are People, Too" *National Review Online*, Nov. 26, 2002 <http://www.nationalreview.com>.

6 Smith, <http://www.cultureandfamily.org>

7 Dreher. <http://www.nationalreview.com>.

8 Peter Sprigg, *In Focus*: "Questions and Answers: What's Wrong with Thought Crime ("Hate Crime" Laws?" Family Research Council Publication.

9 Jack Haberer, "Hate Crimes" *The Presbyterian Outlook*, May 28, 2007.

10 Robert Gagnon, "Putting One's Money Where One's Mouth Is? Jack Haberer's editorial supporting 'Sexual Orientation Hate' crime legislation" May 30, 2007, <http://www.robagnon.net>.

Join the OneByOne Network of Churches

If your church already supports OBO financially, thank you!

However, we still want supporting churches to join our network so that we may be able to help you in ministry. The following churches are OBO Network Churches:

First Presbyterian Church
Milford, PA

First Presbyterian church,
Orlando, FL

Hispanic Church
Farmingdale, NY

Presbyterian Church
Shippensburg, PA

Suffern Presbyterian Church
Suffern, NY

Trinity Chapel, Sarasota, FL

Information and application forms available on-line at www.oneby1.org!

A Father's Story - continued

style he was in was NOT pleasing to God and was seeking help. He had found a group in Dallas called Living Hope Ministries through Exodus International. He was attending small group meetings and counseling sessions.

So how did John get into this lifestyle? What happened to cause this? After all, my wife and I are happily married and raised John, his twin sister and older brother as Christians. We attended church, went to Sunday school and Wednesday night programs. I teach adult Bible study classes. All three of our children were summer interns at the church. How could this happen?

We visited with the pastor who started Living Hope to try to gain some insights. He, too, struggled with SSA, and although he is now happily married, he has “been there, done that.” What did we find out? We already knew that of all our children John was the most sensitive: very much into the arts, did not care much for sports, and very bright. Shortly before John went through puberty, I retired from the Air Force and landed a wonderful job in San Antonio. My wife was still in the Air Force and was transferred to Alaska. We decided it was best for the family for her to go to Alaska and for me to stay in San Antonio. The kids were given a choice, either they could all stay in San Antonio or all go to Alaska. Their choice was immediate – Alaska!

Unfortunately, at the time John needed a father the most, when he was really trying to establish his male identity while going through puberty, I was thousands of miles away. He did not have another man to affirm him as a man. He became attracted to other boys of his age in an attempt to discover who he was. Over the subsequent years his attractions to men became more and more sexual. His best friends, however, were girls. His role model was his mother since I was not there for him. In college he majored in theater where his lifestyle was not only accepted but celebrated. Since he was going to college out of town, we did not know about his lifestyle. It was after college, while he was living in Dallas, that he came to the realization that his lifestyle was not what God intended for him and he began to struggle to get out of it.

When I say “struggle” it is important to understand that is exactly what it is and it is something more difficult than any of us who are “ever-straight” can comprehend. It is hand to hand combat with a mighty foe. But God is stronger than any foe. Probably one of the hardest things John did was to finally tell me and then his mother about his struggle. When he did, I finally understood what Paul meant about his command to “pray without ceasing!” My wife and I, individually and together, pray for him every day. Prayer is a wonderful thing. John is now committed to staying out of the lifestyle.

But it is still a struggle. He needs support not only from family but also from support groups and friends who are willing to help. He has stumbled from time to time, but each time he comes out of it stronger. I don't think I have ever been closer to John than I am right now despite the fact that I am in Texas and he is in New York City trying to make it on Broadway.

Probably the next hardest thing John did was to stand up in front of over a thousand people and give his testimony - to openly discuss his struggle and the cause of it. He was open and honest; bluntly honest. I was incredibly proud of John. For those who are struggling with SSA, please hear what I am saying. John talked in some detail about me being absent at a very important time in his life. But his willingness to be open and to use what had happened in his life to help others understand what the struggle is all about gave me great happiness.

And to those of you who find yourself wondering what you did “wrong,” please don't beat yourself up. There is a great difference between “cause” and “blame.” If we understand the cause we can move forward and help our loved ones. Blame hurts everyone. I refuse to look back unless it helps John move forward.

John's struggle, with me by his side, will continue. The road is not an easy one, but it is getting easier. It can only be done with God's help. We are simply too weak without His strength. The world says a person who is in the homosexual lifestyle can't change. The world also says no one can be crucified, dead and buried and yet be raised from the dead and sit at God's right hand. The world is wrong. God is right.

Larry Forkner is a member of the First Presbyterian Church of San Antonio, Texas.

Mixing Christian Ministry and US Politics (Should We Do It?)

Men and Women from various Christian ministries met in Washington D.C. this May to reach out to the Congress and Senate and challenge them to vote against passing the *Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 2007* (HR 1592).

Should Christian ministries such as OneByOne whose mission is “to educate and equip the Church” get involved in politics? The way to answer that question is to pose another one: “If legislation infringes on the right of Christian ministries to minister to those who want help, should these ministries get involved in

opposing that legislation?” The answer for many of us is “Absolutely!”

What happened on this trip? We walked through the halls of the Congress and Senate, speaking the message of hope and transformation. We even got into Hillary Clinton’s office! It was amazing to see the surprise and sometimes confusion in some of the people with whom we spoke. It was apparent that they had never met anyone who had found freedom from homosexuality or who believed that there could be freedom. Sadly, there are many in our own churches who have never heard

this message and/or do not believe it.

Will you help us spread this good news? Help support and pray for OneByOne. Sign up to receive our newsletters and e-blasts. May God bless those of you who are already supporters and who are a part of our OBO Church Network. May God bless you!

OneByOne

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The leaders of Exodus, OneByOne, and other national ministries visit D.C. to raise awareness with congressional leaders.

Help spread the message of transformation!



Alan Chambers, President of Exodus International, and Kristin Johnson, Executive Director of OneByOne.



Women ministry leaders: Amy Hall, Newsong, Janet Boynes, Called Out, Kristin Johnson, OneByOne, Melissa Coffey, Regeneration, and Christine Sneeringer, Worthy Creations.

High School and Homosexuality

A young girl from our church looked at me with tears in her eyes, “How do I love my friend who is gay while believing that homosexuality is a sin?” Her earnest question is one that many sincere Christians ask in our church and culture today.

As the director of One-ByOne, a national Presbyterian Renewal Ministry housed at First Presbyterian Church Orlando, I get

children, are bombarded with myths about homosexuality, including the myth that to say homosexuality is a sin is being mean – even hateful. Recently, I was in Washington D.C. lobbying the Congress and Senate with Exodus International, the largest referral ministry to those who struggle



opposed to Biblical sexuality, how do we answer the young girl’s question: “How do I love my friend who is gay while believing that homosexuality is a sin?”

My answer to her is this: with boldness and compassion. We as a church must educate ourselves as to why people

“We as a church must educate ourselves as to why people struggle with unwanted same-sex attraction...”

asked this question wherever I speak. It was a privilege to be invited to share my testimony and the ministry of OBO with the youth here at FPCO. The students were receptive and eager to understand the underlying causes of same-sex attraction, and they were excited to find ways to love their gay identified friends and family members while standing firm on the good news of the gospel.

All of us, but especially our

with unwanted same-sex attraction based here in Orlando. We were lobbying against impending Federal Hate Crimes Legislation that could jeopardize the ability of churches and Christian ministries to help those who want to overcome same-sex attraction.

Already, hate crimes legislation in Europe and even here in Philadelphia has led to the fines and imprisonment of Christians. In the face of a culture that is increasingly

struggle with unwanted same-sex attraction and equip ourselves to do ministry in this area. We must not be afraid to talk with people who are gay-identified or who may be struggling with homosexual feelings and offer help - especially to people who struggle in our own church. We must believe that change is possible and share this hope with others at any cost.

Interested in Hosting a Local/Regional OneByOne Conference at your church?

The National 2007 Orlando OBO Conference was a great success! In 2008, we are looking do something new. We would like to put on local/regional conferences around the country, and we are looking for special churches to host these conferences. If you and your church may be interested, please call Kristin Johnson at 407-423-3441 (1489) or Jeff Winter at 215-752-3200 for more information.

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