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Inter-faith group condemns "Love Won Out" conferences

by David Elliot
 Special to Q-Notes

WASHINGTON, DC — The National Religious Leadership Roundtable responded April 24 to the latest anti-gay "Love Won Out" conference, held April 20-22 in Philadelphia, declaring the program to be "misguided and dangerous."

The conference is part of a series of events held around the nation sponsored by Focus on the Family, a conservative religious organization. The events are aimed at convincing gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) people, as well as their clergy, family and friends, that sexuality can and should be changed through reparative therapy and a conversion to Christianity.

The National Religious Leadership Roundtable, which represents leaders from 40 faith-based traditions, denounced the anti-GLBT message being promoted by Focus on the Family. The Roundtable is convened by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and was founded with Equal Partners in Faith.

"These discredited attempts to change sexual orientation are really only suppressing behavior, not changing the natural attractions that are in a person's heart," said Rev. Bob Gibeling, program executive of Lutherans Concerned and spokesman for the Roundtable. "Any ministry that uses fear, guilt and shame to try to change someone's sexual orientation is not only unethical, but is also putting themselves and their ministry in legal jeopardy because of the professional medical associations' clear stand against it."

"Many individuals in houses of worship, denominations, and religiously affiliated organizations throughout the United States, believe that gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender individuals do not need to be repaired or saved from their sexual orientation or gender identity," the Roundtable said in a statement. "On the basis of medical opinion and our various religious beliefs, personal testimonies and first hand experience, we believe that reparative therapy is not appropriate for gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgender individuals. The effects such practices have on the majority of people range from useless to extremely harmful, and may be a contributing factor to self-destructive behavior and many suicide attempts by GLBT individuals."

According to the American Psychological

Association statement on homosexuality which was released in July, 1994, "The research on homosexuality is very clear. Homosexuality is neither mental illness nor moral depravity. It is simply the way a minority of our population expresses human love and sexuality. Research findings suggest that efforts to repair homosexuals are nothing more than social prejudice garbed in psychological accouterments."

The assessment of the American Psychological Association is shared by the American Psychiatric Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the American Medical Association.

Despite repudiation from virtually the entire psychological and medical community, Dr. Joseph Nicolosi, a speaker at the conferences and president of the National Association for the Research and Therapy of Homosexuality (NARTH), tells parents to tell their kids that "homosexuality is really a psychological problem and that many of them, if they really work hard at it, can overcome their homosexuality, get married and have families. This is basically what we want to teach our kids."

The National Religious Leadership Roundtable contends that ex-gay testimonies featured at the "Love Won Out" conferences are "based not only on the misguided belief that everyone should be heterosexual, but also that everyone should belong to the same narrow religious view." These conferences, according to the Roundtable, deny the reality that a broad array of religious traditions throughout time and across the world embrace GLBT people and celebrate their unique sexuality as a divine gift.

Roundtable members are leaders of over 40 faith-based organizations. They are Christian (Catholic, Protestant and Mormon), Muslim, Hindu, Jewish, Unitarian, and other religious and spiritual traditions. Together they work in partnership with other justice-seeking groups to: amplify the voice of pro-GLBT faith organizations in public discourse; promote understanding of and respect for GLBT people within society at large and in communities of faith; promote understanding and respect within GLBT communities for a variety of faith paths and for religious liberty; achieve commonly held goals that promote equality, spirituality and justice. It is convened by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and founded with Equal Partners in Faith. For more information, visit <http://www.nglrf.org/pi/nrlr>. ▼

Bob

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Bob Anderson is still at large and still making calls. Thelma and Louise told me they received a call from him at 4 am one night recently. We have adopted a policy at our house that we will not give out anyone else's telephone number to anyone, but will take a message and relay it.

Many of the people who make up support-and-advocacy organizations such as PFLAG are good folks who give the best of themselves. They tend to assume that everyone else's intentions are the same. On Easter weekend, our PFLAG members had a wake-up call. We're still good

people, but maybe a little less gullible and trusting. It's part of living in a not-so-nice world.

But then, if the world were that nice to begin with, there would be no need for groups advocating a better quality of life for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people. Having to put up with the flaming Bobs of the world may, in the long run, be a small price to pay for the positive work groups like PFLAG are trying to accomplish. ▼

[Clifton Spires is a journalist and freelance writer living in Norwalk, Ohio. He and his wife are the parents of two sons - one of each. The names in this tale have been changed to protect the good, the innocent and the embarrassed.]

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