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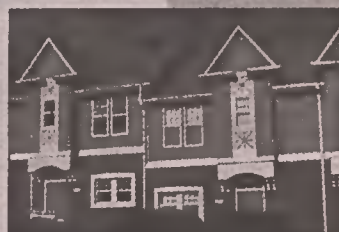
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# Soulforce Equality Ride bus defaced with hate speech

Driver reports seeing a middle-aged woman and a teen-age male leave scene

by Richard Lindsay

CLEVELAND, Tenn. — Soulforce's Equality Ride bus was defaced on March 16 outside the hotel where Riders were in a planning meeting for their action on Friday at Lee University. As the meeting dispersed riders found pink letters scrawled across the side of the bus reading "Fags Mobile." The bus driver reported that he witnessed a middle-aged woman and a teenager drive away from the scene, possibly a mother and son. The vandalism and suspect description were reported to Cleveland police, who are investigating the crime.

The Equality Ride had planned a prayer vigil in front of the president's office to bring attention to the need for the administration to allow more open dialogue in classrooms and on campus about ending discrimination toward lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students.

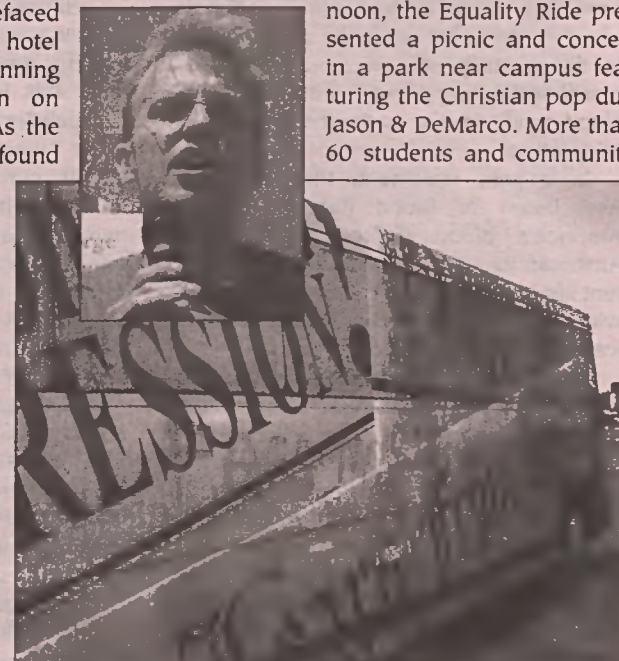
"The attack on the bus is hate speech, plain and simple, spelled out for everyone to read," said Jacob Reitan (pictured), Equality Ride co-director. "But a more subtle form of hate speech happens when students at the schools we are visiting are told they are sick and sinful just for being the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people God made them to be."

The attack on the bus came after Equality riders met with students on the campus of Lee University on March 16, the first time Riders have been allowed onto the campus of a school since the ride began on March 5. Lee University administration allowed only the slightest contact through informal conversation with students on campus. Equality riders were not allowed to address students in classroom forums, formally present let-

ters from closeted Lee students or pass out literature.

On the morning of March 16, several of the Equality riders joined students in the Lee University chapel during the school's morning worship service. At

noon, the Equality Ride presented a picnic and concert in a park near campus featuring the Christian pop duo Jason & DeMarco. More than 60 students and community



Vandalized Soulforce bus at Lee University in Cleveland, Tenn.

members joined the Equality riders for dialogue, and to hear Jason Warner, an alumnus of Lee University, sing with his performing and life partner DeMarco DeCicco. Students enjoyed the concert for almost two hours while on their lunch breaks and appreciated the chance to talk openly with participants about the issues surrounding the ride.

"The dialogue we had here with students was moving and fruitful, despite the extreme limitations placed on us by the administration," said Reitan. "But after we leave, there will still be lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students at Lee University who are living in fear every day that their secret will be found out. If it is, they will be expelled from campus and will lose their scholarships, their tuition investment, and most importantly, the spiritual and community support of their school."



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