

**FAITH IN AMERICA “CALL TO COURAGE”
CAMPAIGN ANNOUNCEMENT
CALL PARTICIPANT COMMENTS
MAY 3, 2007**

COMPLETE COMMENTS: MITCHELL GOLD
FOUNDER OF FAITH IN AMERICA

Good morning....and thank you for taking the time to be here with us today.

My name is Mitchell Gold. I am the CEO of Mitchell Gold + Bob Williams. We've been manufacturing furniture for 19 years..... If you have a very comfortable slipcovered sofa or Parisian leather club....chances are we made it.

Located in Taylorsville, North Carolina, we have over 700 employees.

This past Tuesday was one of my absolutely favorite days of the year. Each year we award scholarships to our employee's children and have a commencement ceremony for our young graduates leaving our on site 5 star daycare center. This year, the First Lady of North Carolina joined us as we awarded 20 college scholarships and then graduated 26 children. My business partner, Bob Williams, and I share a commitment that we will run our business with the same values that will live in our lives. As a result, we are proude advocates for education and healthcare..

During the 60s, in my early teenage years I realized I was gay. As I look back, those were some of the worst years of my life. Afraid to tell my parents, family and friends.....knowing that I would be an outcast by all of them as well as my synagogue and government....I kept my secret to myself. I remember that almost every time I felt some joy, then the 'black cloud' of my sexual orientation would remind me to get back into my state of depression. And yes, I regularly contemplated suicide. It's a long story....but somehow, I survived.

I also have one other important memory from my youth. It is of Governor George Wallace standing with Bible in hand on the steps of the capitol and proclaiming something like "Segregation now, segregation forever...it says it in the Bible". I remember my mother saying how wrong it was to use one's Bible to justify hurtful acts against other people.

Today...living in the buckle of the Bible belt....not in the bubble of NY or LA....I know first hand that the discrimination that faces the gay community today is a great hardship in my own neighborhood. Whether teenager or people in their mid years, I regularly come across people who feel forced to live closeted, depressed lives because they are rejected by their family and church.

Over the years, I have come to realize that the core of the reasons too many people have for NOT supporting full and equal rights for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender American citizens is their religious beliefs.

Today I will introduce you to Jimmy Creech, Executive Director of Faith In America Former Methodist minister for 29 years, graduate of University of North Carolina's Chapel Hill campus and Duke Divinity School, Jimmy is well versed in what the Bible does and doesn't say about homosexuality. He has also taken the time to study what science advancements teach us. .

Last year Jimmy and I realized that an organization really just didn't exist that was focused on educating people about the religion based bigotry and discrimination that the gay community faces today. Faith In America is educating Americans....be they fundamentalist or simply apathetic.....that using their....and I underline the word 'their'....Biblical interpretations to justify legalized discrimination or lack of protections for any American is just plain wrong. History has clearly shown this. Today the loudest voices against full and equal rights for gay Americans use their Biblical interpretations.

Faith In America is embarking on an ambitious education campaign. Many have said I and we are dreamers...that we can't change people's minds about their deeply held religious beliefs. I would only remind them that Jerry Falwell was once one of America's leading segregationists and he changed when he realized the harm he was causing. .

For the past 6 years, fundamentalist Christians have attacked the gay community through the Republican Party.....and the Democrats have not done such a great job defending my rights. Enough is enough.

It is now my pleasure.....no, my honor....to turn this conference over to Jimmy Creech to share with you what we are doing...and why. Jimmy.....

ABRIDGED COMMENTS: REV. JIMMY CREECH
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF FAITH IN AMERICA

During my twenty-nine years of ministry, it became clear to me that the fundamental reason for discrimination against lesbian, gay, and transgender people is religion. And as someone committed to the Christian church and the ministry, I felt it was incumbent upon me to begin to challenge the misuse of religion. Religion is such a powerful, positive presence, it makes such an important contribution to society and to culture, moving us to compassion, to justice, to respect all people, it is really an offense against religion to misuse it in the name of bigotry and fear and ignorance.

[. . .]

Last year we ran some pilot campaigns working with the National Black Justice Coalition in Baltimore and in Washington DC. We worked with the Metropolitan Community Church in Indianapolis, Indiana, we conducted campaigns in our own neighborhood around the factory in North Carolina, in Taylorsville and Hickory, [and] in Greensboro, North Carolina where the Southern Baptist Convention was held last fall. We did a direct mail campaign in Colorado Springs, Colorado last fall.”

“From these pilot campaigns we learned the power of the message of the history of religion-based discrimination. We learned that when people understand that throughout history, religion has been misused to justify slavery, to justify racial injustice and segregation, to justify the denial of women their right to vote, to justify laws that made interracial marriage illegal. We’ve seen how when people understand how religion has been misused in this way to form public policy to create cultural and social attitudes that stigmatize people, they begin to understand what is happening today against lesbian, gay, and transgender people in a new way. They begin to understand religion-based bigotry.”

“And so we are going to launch this Sunday, May 6th, a national “Call to Courage” campaign that will educate American citizens about the history of religion-based bigotry so that they can better understand how religious-bigothy against gay people is being used to manipulate the American public [and] to take rights and protections away from lesbians and transgender people.”

“This is the national day of prayer in Washington, DC, so I think it’s important to acknowledge how religion and politics have historically a relationship in this country. It’s also important [to acknowledge] that from time to time religion has crossed the line.”

“We have chosen four cities this year that are in early primary and caucus cities where Presidential candidates will be campaigning. We want to create a public discussion about religion-based discrimination so that the candidates will have to be engaged about the question of how religion and policy should be kept separate.”

[...]

“Those four cities are Ames Iowa, we will be there in May, we will then go to Reno, Nevada in August, Manchester, New Hampshire in September, and Greenville, South Carolina in

November. We will then also, a fifth city that is not a primary state, is Colorado Springs. We did a campaign last year, we want to go back to do a follow-up campaign [. . .] there's a tremendous amount of influence that is coming out of that location, so we want to go back there and engage them as well."

"The campaigns will use a variety of media, newspaper ads, billboards, op-eds, yard signs, bumper stickers, direct mail, radio spots, and letters to the editor. We will also be canvassing in various neighborhoods in each of the cities with door-hangers that provide information about Faith in America and a brief survey of each household. We will conclude each campaign with a town hall meeting that will be open to the public where we can have a discussion about the misuse of religion to justify discrimination."

"In each city we will be spending time prior to the campaign organizing, meeting with local clergy, meeting with community leaders, meeting with advocates for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender people, [and] meeting with advocates for justice issues that deal with a broad range of issues."

"We will also be working with national organizations as partners such as PFLAG, Parents, Family, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, Soul Force, the Metropolitan Community Church Worldwide, and the Gay and Lesbian Alliance against Defamation."

[. . .]

"Finally, I just simply want to say that Faith in America has faith in America and the Democratic principles that underlie our Constitutional government and the authentic religious traditions that move us to compassion and justice and respect for the dignity of all people. We have faith in the clear-minded American citizens who when they understand discrimination and when they understand injustice will change their hearts and minds and bring an end to the persecution of lesbian, gay, and transgender people."

COMPLETE COMMENTS: REV. DR. CINDI LOVE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH

Many of our current faith and political leaders say that the United States of America is a Christian nation. If anyone listening today believes this is true, then you will want to support the Faith in America Campaign. This nationwide educational campaign will help you and your pastors and priests, neighbors and co-workers to really focus on the steps required to create a nation where the life and example of Jesus Christ are at the center.

Faith in America takes us on a walk through history so we can “test” the America we know today against the ideal of a “Christian nation.” If we are Christian nation, then we have to look at the behaviors and words of Jesus Christ as our example.

We will know that we are truly a Christ centered nation when we no longer oppress women because Jesus did not oppress women. We will be successful as a truly Christ centered nation when we no longer discriminate against people of color and people who do not identify as Christian---because Jesus did not discriminate against them. In fact, he specifically included those people who were not part of his religious or ethnic communities.

We will be a truly Christ centered nation when we no longer allow our own homophobia---our irrational fear of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people—to stop us from doing what it really right. Jesus would have included gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people at the table with him as his disciples and there are hundreds of thousands of faithful same-gender loving people serving as his disciples today.

Jesus never mentioned homosexuality. The six or seven Bible scriptures used to exclude homosexuals as full citizens have been mistranslated just as surely as the scriptures were mistranslated that allowed our Christian nation to enslave African-Americans and oppress women. We were smart enough as a nation to recognize the error of our ways with African Americans and women. We are smart enough to get it right and stop discrimination against homosexuals as well. We are smart enough to be a truly Christ centered nation.

I regret that we are far off the mark of a true Christian nation today. More than 100 million congregants in Christian churches alone are being instructed by their faith leaders to exclude gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people from full communion with Christ and they are using the Bible to justify this discrimination. Our job as faith and political leaders is to lead people to mercy, love and justice. Our job is to repair the world, not fracture it

Most of us stand by while homosexuals are abused in the workplace, in our schools and in our churches. Most of our government officials are reluctant to even pass hate crimes legislation to protect homosexuals and the disabled from unwarranted attacks. Why? The majority of us don't call them up and say “We care. Do what it right. Let's remember history and don't repeat the mistakes of the past.” I commend Faith in America for trying to bring us to the center of what we really need to do as a nation.

COMPLETE COMMENTS: JEAN-MARIE NAVETTA
DIRECTOR OF PFLAG INTERNATIONAL

One of the first things that PFLAG members hear from new people coming in for support is the conflict that they are experiencing because of their religion.

One PFLAG mom tells that “instead of being overwhelmed by love, we were destroyed by judgment” and how the experience has nearly decimated her faith. Gay people have been told that their lives as they live them are sinful and demand change – and it could happen only if they could accept God’s will

Where communities of faith should be a place of refuge, support, and love, they are too often a source of pain and alienation.

This isn’t to say all people of faith and religious leaders – several major communities have made modifications to their practices. But stories like that of Episcopal Bishop Gene Robinson are few and far between, proving that tremendous work needs to be done.

Powerful religious leaders continue to argue that the acceptance of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) people is a direct attack on the body of Christ, and call on their congregations to oppose equality in the name of Biblical truth.

Because of the persistence of these trends, the Faith in America campaign is critical right now.

The ads in the campaign are provocative – there’s no question about that – but it is time to start having a dialogue on these issues, and the campaign can help get that conversation going. PFLAGers know better than anyone that honest stories and conversations have transformative powers.

The Faith in America campaign highlights how religion has been manipulated – and continues to be manipulated – to achieve the political ends of closing hearts, shutting down minds, and making discrimination acceptable.

This campaign helps put what GLBT individuals, their families, and their loved ones experience in the name of religion. It also helps frame the fact that this trend is part of a long line in history of cases where faith has been used to justify discrimination.

We do not look favorably on examples of religion used to keep women and ethnic groups from full equality. Hopefully, we will look on the discrimination that prevails today against GLBT people the same way.

The campaign very much is a call to courage. It calls on clergy, GLBT people, their families and their straight allies to speak up in their communities and particularly in their places of worship. The hostility that many faith groups show towards GLBT people causes them and their families to not be able to live openly, and this is unacceptable. We hope that Faith in America will help give the courage and entry into the conversations to change this.

Ultimately, we are all being called to look at the history of discrimination by some faith groups and have the courage to say what side of the issue we will all fall on. When people look back at this time, will we have been the ones to call for the bold love it takes for our faith communities to change? Now we're being called on to publicly declare our answer.

PFLAG is filled with people of faith among its 200,000 members and supporters. We know how critical the role of religion is to many of them, and we think there must be much more focus on the positive role that religion can serve to advance the family value that all families, including those of our gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender loved ones, embrace.

This is about ourselves, our families and our loved ones and the courage to speak up against discrimination, and Faith in America is helping start this conversation.