



## **LGBT Families Ask Six Mega-Churches "Can We Talk?"**

Jay Bakker to Join "American Family Outing" to Create Dialogue Among Evangelicals

Austin, TX - This winter, as the Rev. Joel Osteen graces the pages of *People Magazine*, the familiar image of the old-school, anti-gay televangelist is rapidly being replaced by a new iconography: a younger generation of mega-church leaders with upbeat and inviting messages. Unfortunately, while this generation's tone may seem less harsh, many of their mega-churches still enforce policies of exclusion and teach theologies that label Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) people as sick, sinful, and in need of change.

An "American Family Outing" is taking shape in the spring of 2008 so LGBT families can talk with mega-church leaders and congregation members to share the message that justice for LGBT people is compatible with Christian teaching. Pot lucks, picnics and soulful talk are the order of the day as Soulforce, the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches (UFMCC), the National Black Justice Coalition (NBJC), and COLAGE invite churches to talk-the-talk so everyone is free to walk-the-walk.

On behalf of the four partner organizations, Soulforce Executive Director Jeff Lutes has written letters to:

- \* Rev. Joel Osteen and the Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas
- \* Bishop T.D. Jakes and The Potter's House in Dallas, Texas
- \* Bishop Harry Jackson, Jr. and Hope Christian Church in Beltsville, Maryland
- \* Bishop Eddie Long and New Birth Missionary Baptist Church in Lithonia, Georgia
- \* Rev. Bill Hybels and Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, Illinois
- \* Dr. Rick Warren and Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California

"These pastors are part of a new generation of evangelical leaders in America," says Lutes. "We are calling on them and their congregations to demonstrate a new kind of leadership, one that models compassion and justice for all families, including families with two moms and two dads."

The letters inform each pastor that a delegation of families with two moms and two dads, as well as supportive heterosexual-parent and single-parent families, plans to visit each church. The letters invite their congregations to collaborate in creating opportunities for meaningful conversations. Over the next several weeks, staff from Soulforce, UFMCC, NBJC, and COLAGE will negotiate peaceful forums with members from each of the congregations.

Then, over the weekends between Mother's Day (May 11, 2008) and Father's Day (June 15, 2008), dozens of families with children will travel by air and by bus to engage in dialogue about faith, family, and the harm done by religion-based discrimination to LGBT families.

"It is difficult for mega-churches to claim to be progressive in the area of Civil Rights and at the same time deny the equal dignity and value of LGBT persons," said Rev. Dr. Ken Samuel, pastor of the 5,000 plus, LGBT-friendly, Victory Church in Atlanta, Georgia.

Samuel will join Rev. Jay Bakker, son of Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker, as a clergy leader on the American Family Outing.

"Homophobia and heterosexism directly contradict the principles of equality and justice for all God's children, and I think that the younger generation of evangelicals are beginning more and more to see this contradiction," Samuel continued.

According to a recent Barna study of evangelical youth, 80% said Christians show excessive contempt and unloving attitudes

towards gays and lesbians.

*Source: Press Release*

**Soulforce**

is a national civil rights and social justice organization. Our vision is freedom for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people from religious and political oppression through the practice of relentless nonviolent resistance. For more information go to [www.soulforce.org](http://www.soulforce.org).