

## If you can't change the book, buy the congregation

Grant Aims to Expand Pro-Gay Churches

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A \$1.2 million grant has been awarded to expand the efforts of gay and lesbian groups in increasing the number of churches that fully welcome and affirm homosexuals.

**The grant from the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund was given to the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Foundation's Institute for Welcoming Resources and five partner organizations for a joint collaboration on strengthening the capacity and voice of Christian organizations that support gays and lesbians.**

For Kermit Rainman, social research analyst for Focus on the Family, the move violates Scripture.

"Gay activists and their allies have made no secret of their strategy to convince Bible-believing Christians and Jews that homosexual behavior is no longer sinful in God's eyes," said Rainman, according to Citizenlink, a publication of Focus on the Family. "This false doctrine is playing out in denomination after denomination, with increasing discord."

"Christians are not called to rewrite the Bible in order to love our gay friends and neighbors. True love does not sacrifice the truth," he added.

The initiative includes the pro-gay "welcoming church movement" in which congregations, through a formal vote, offer "an unconditional welcome to people of all sexual orientations and gender identities."

**Currently, more than 3,100 congregations throughout the country have explicitly welcomed lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people to full inclusion, according to the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, which merged with the Institute for Welcoming Resources in 2006 in efforts to "increase the number of people of faith supporting equality for LGBT people."**

**"The more than 2.5 million individuals in the 3,100 congregations supported by the Institute for Welcoming Resources and these partner organizations are some of our movement's most valuable advocates in promoting understanding, reclaiming what unfortunately has become a narrow view of 'moral values' espoused by those who seek to divide, and advancing LGBT equality," Rea Carey, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, said in a statement this week.**

More and more churches are moving away from judgmental attitudes toward homosexuality and making efforts to respond to gays and lesbians with compassion and redemptive love. But they are doing it while still affirming homosexuality as sin.

Many churches are still ill-equipped in terms of ministry to homosexuals, but progress is being made, including within the Southern Baptist Convention, the largest Protestant denomination in the country.

After establishing a task force in 2001 that would inform, educate and encourage Southern Baptists to be proactive and redemptive in reaching out to homosexuals, the denomination shifted their homosexual outreach into higher gear this past June.

"Our biblically-based opposition to the normalization of homosexuality and the affirmation of homosexual behavior should not hinder us from ministering to homosexuals and offering them the love and healing environment they need to leave this destructive and unbiblical lifestyle," said Richard Land, president of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, earlier.

The Institute for Welcoming Resources currently works with the "welcoming church movement" in 30 Christian denominations including The Episcopal Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (USA), the United Methodist Church, and the United Church of Christ.