



## **Pastors say Obama can pick the reverend he wants**

National gay rights group opposes selection of Warren

By Rob Cullivan, The Gresham Outlook  
December 19, 2008

President-elect Barack Obama can pick who he wants to give the invocation at his Jan. 20 inauguration.

That's what at least two East County ministers said after a national religious group criticized Obama for selecting the Rev. Rick Warren, author of the best selling book, "The Purpose Driven Life." Meanwhile, another minister said Obama "could not have made a better choice."

Warren is an outspoken opponent of gay and lesbian lifestyles, contrary to President-elect Obama's strong support of gay and abortion rights.

### **Local response**

Despite his support for gay rights, the Rev. David Maynard of Eastrose Fellowship Unitarian Universalist Church in Gresham called the selection of Warren "just fine," noting the selection exemplifies Obama's attempts to reach across party lines to unite the country.

"Rev. Warren has refocused many evangelicals on a broader Christian social agenda beyond the litmus-test issues of abortion and same-sex relationships," Maynard said. "While I am as liberal on those two issues as Rick Warren is conservative, I do trust that President Obama is keeping his eye on the prize of social change. If he is comfortable with having Rick Warren – and if Rick Warren is comfortable being on the platform with such an outspoken supporter of abortions rights and same-sex rights – then I think the choice to deliver the invocation is just fine."

The Rev. Larry Jorgenson, pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Gresham, expressed similar sentiments. Although past presidents have selected clergy more in line with their politics, "to my knowledge there is nothing that says things have to be done that way," Jorgenson said.

He added that Obama also disagreed with his own former pastor, the Rev. Jeremiah Wright, who was blasted for his reputedly anti-American sermons.

"I believe this to be a healthy stance for a lay person to have regarding the preaching and teaching of a pastor," Jorgenson said. "I hope that the people I serve feel that they can disagree with me and that we can still pray and reason together."

Having a respectful discussion with someone who doesn't completely agree with you is "much healthier than simply dismissing a person with whom one disagrees," Jorgenson said.

"Being in sync is not a prerequisite for praying for someone," Jorgenson said. "It's Obama's call, and he's made it."

Pastor Jason Albelo of East Hill Church in Gresham called Warren "an excellent choice."

"Not only is he widely respected by a vast majority of Americans, but also he is a man who has really served God in his generation," Albelo said. "He really lives the message of Jesus in action"

both at home and around the world. He's leading efforts to end AIDS in Africa and is radically touching the lives of thousands in Orange County.

"His books and Bible studies have sold millions of copies, and he represents the best of the American religious community," Albelo added. "Not only is he a gifted communicator of the love of Jesus, but he lives out his faith in his everyday actions."

### **National response**

**The National Religious Leadership Roundtable, convened by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, released two statements by leaders criticizing Obama for selecting Warren.**

**"As a Christian pastor and a lesbian, I am deeply troubled by President-elect Obama's choice of Pastor Rick Warren to pray at his inauguration," stated the Rev. Rebecca Voelkel, adding: "His words and actions have solidified the impression that Christian equals bigot when it comes to the (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender or LGBT) community. And his leadership was one of the factors in (Proposition) 8's passage."**

**California voters recently approved Proposition 8, which defined marriage as between one man and one woman, and banned same-sex marriages.**

**Voelkel did credit Warren and his church, Saddleback in Lake Forest, Calif., for helping to fight HIV/AIDS. "And through this work they are coming to know many LGBT persons and our real lives – as opposed to the lies they have painted us with." Voelkel's statement also called on Warren to "repent of his hatred and harm to the LGBT community."**

**Task Force Executive Director Rea Carey also issued a statement saying in part, "President-elect Obama campaigned on a theme of inclusivity, yet the selection of Rick Warren to give the invocation is a direct affront to that very principle."**