

A PLEA TO POPE FRANCIS

ON BEHALF OF HOMELESS LGBT YOUTH



Your Holiness,

I write to you as a Roman Catholic, a former Benedictine monk and as a gay man who has spent over 30 years serving the homeless, first as a member of the Catholic Worker Movement, and now as the founder and Executive Director of the Ali Forney Center, America's largest center for homeless lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) youth based in New York City.

I write on behalf of the homeless LGBT youths I serve. I ask you to take urgent action to protect them from the devastating consequences of religious rejection, which is the most common reason LGBT youths are driven from their homes. At the heart of the problem is that the church still teaches that homosexual conduct is a sin, and that being gay is disordered. I hope that if you understand how this teaching tears families apart and brings suffering to innocent youths, you will end this teaching and prevent your bishops from fighting against the acceptance of LGBT people as equal members of society.

I hope that you will open your heart to the suffering of our youths. As LGBT youths are finding the courage to speak the truths of their hearts at younger ages, epidemic numbers are being rejected by their families, and driven to homelessness. The number of youths enduring this cruel fate is staggering; last year at least 200,000 LGBT youths experienced homelessness in the United States. LGBT youths make up 40% of the homeless youth population in this country, despite comprising only about 5% of the overall youth population.

A recent study of family rejection found that parents with high religious involvement were significantly less accepting of their LGBT children. Over the past decade thousands of LGBT youths have come to the Ali Forney Center seeking safe shelter, from across our nation and the globe, bearing witness to having been driven from their homes by religious parents who believed they were evil and sinful.

What these youths endure is horrific. They endure the torment of being unloved and unwanted by their parents, combined with the ordeals of hunger, cold and sexual exploitation while homeless. LGBT youths who are rejected by their families are eight times more likely to attempt suicide than LGBT youths whose parents accept them.

The Roman Catholic Church is the largest and most influential Christian organization in the world. By teaching that homosexual conduct is a sin, and that the homosexual orientation is disordered, it influences countless parents and families in societies across the globe to reject their children. In the name of these children, and in light of the love and compassion at the heart of the message of Jesus, I ask that you end this teaching.

Jesus Christ is never recorded as having said a word in judgment or condemnation of homosexuality or of LGBT people. He spoke of a loving, compassionate God, and commanded his followers to act with love and compassion. Jesus spoke of God as a loving parent who would never abandon his children.

There are biblical writings endorsing conduct now recognized as wrong; passages endorsing the rape of enemies' wives and the murder of their children,

endorsing slavery and even genocide. None of those biblical instructions are maintained as church teachings, as they are recognized to be cruel and immoral, and reflective of the ignorance of more primitive times. I ask you to recognize that the condemnation of homosexuality is also cruel and wrong, and rooted in a primitive, obsolete understanding of human sexuality. I ask you to join the growing number of church communities and religious denominations who have chosen to welcome and embrace us with love and acceptance.

A teaching's wisdom and efficacy must be judged in part by its outcome. The teaching that homosexual conduct is a sin has a poisonous outcome, bearing fruit in many Christian parents who abandon their LGBT children to homelessness and destitution. How could a good seed yield such a bitter harvest?

For me this tragedy has many human faces. I see Justin, whose mother, before throwing him out of his home, summoned a priest who held him to the ground and tried to drive the devil out of the 16 year old boy. Or Terry, who was sent to a Catholic religion class where the instructor set him aside as someone "possessed by demons". When his mother threw him out, she said that she would rather he die in the streets than live in her home if he was gay. I recall Maria, whose family drove her to a forest far from her home and abandoned her, throwing her from the car, because being a lesbian made her "evil". I think of the boy whose name I never learned whose father was so disgusted by homosexuality that he threw his son out of his home and said he would kill him and bury him in the backyard if he tried to return.

I greatly respect you as a leader who has shown deep concern for the plight of the poor. I invite you to the Ali Forney Center, to meet our abandoned youths and see for yourself how their lives have been devastated and made destitute by religious rejection. I believe that there is no more compelling witness to the harmfulness of the condemnation of homosexuality than the consequent suffering plainly visible in the eyes of our homeless LGBT youths.

We share a belief in a God of love. I know in my heart that what my kids have suffered is ultimately a violation against love. How tragic it is that the church, through it's teaching, would contribute to such a violation. Surely God loves his children more than teachings.

I hope that you will take up my offer to come to the Ali Forney Center and meet the youths we serve. And I hope that we can find common ground in seeking that they be protected and loved.

Sincerely,



Carl Siciliano
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As we celebrate our 25th Anniversary, we're hosting events in our Signature Stores to benefit a wide variety of life changing non-profit organizations. Please consider making a contribution to the important work of the Ali Forney Center www.AliForneyCenter.org described above; to www.FaithInAmerica.org whose mission is to educate about the harm to LGBT people and especially youth from outdated, ill-informed and misguided religious teachings; to www.NationalLGBTMuseum.org, a national museum dedicated to preserving the history and culture of the LGBT communities.



Mitchell Gold
+ Bob Williams
CELEBRATING 25 YEARS OF COMFORT

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