

National Religious Leadership Roundtable Members Speak Out Against Jamaican Anti-Gay Psychosis

March 6, 2008

"If the suffering we are seeing in Jamaica were happening in Ft. Lauderdale or Chicago or San Diego, there would be an unbelievable outcry not only from the LGBT community, but from many of our spiritual and activist allies. To date, the silence of our community about atrocities so near our shores is overwhelming. We must speak up and not shut up until we know the tide is turning towards justice and safety for our brothers and sisters in Jamaica!"

-- Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson
Moderator
Metropolitan Community Churches

"Is there no end to injustice? Is there no shame among religious people who would use their faith as an excuse to mistreat, exclude, yes, even murder others? Is there no force in the world to stop these barbaric acts, to soften these hard hearts, to teach these misinformed people that same-sex love is simply love? We of the progressive religious community have work to do and no time to waste as our children die. God help us."

-- Mary E. Hunt, Ph.D.
Co-Director, WATER
Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual

"The National Black Justice Coalition stands in spiritual solidarity with the powerful message of the Article of Faith: A call for people of faith to stand against anti-LGBT violence. We are called to speak truth to power and vigorously speak out against violence. The violence that is inflicted upon God's LGBT children is a global disgrace. It is a phenomenon that receives too little notice and apparently, scant concern. This can't go on. Indifference to human suffering dishonors all people. We have to speak out loudly in a chorus of protest against the unholy, treacherous maiming of body and soul."

-- Sylvia Rhue, Ph.D.
Director of Religious Affairs
National Black Justice Coalition

"Violence against people on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity is the last, cruelest and most reprehensible act of an oppression that fails to get its way by other means. This violence is so far removed from religion and God that its perpetrators can lay no claim, offer no Scriptural defense, proffer no justification that removes their guilt. Such violence is abhorrent to all right-minded people, of any community of faith, and those who use it are rightly called what they are - criminals."

-- Emily Eastwood
Executive Director

Lutherans Concerned/North America

"Thank you Rev. Schuenemeyer for bringing our awareness again to the increasing horror and pain of hate crimes and our responsibility, in any and all communities, to combat it.

"Righteousness and indifference are as malicious and dangerous as any fist or voice raised against another human being, and how subtly and sneakily can they creep into our daily lives.

"Righteousness gives us 'permission' to do or say things that are hurtful to others while standing on high ground. Indifference gives us 'permission' not to care about others suffering, allowing us to stand by and do nothing. It is hard to keep our hearts open and have real empathy for others; it is hard to have humility and acknowledge that we may not always be right, and may not have answers for everything. But just because these things are hard to do, doesn't mean that we should stop striving every moment of every day to be the compassionate warriors we were born to be."

-- Swami Dhumavati
Kashi Ashram
Member of the Roundtable Steering Committee

"It is a tragic truth that stories of anti-LGBT violence are so common. A few years ago a grade-school-age child was beaten to death here in Georgia, because he acted too 'feminine.' As people of faith we are called not only to loudly condemn these actions but also to challenge the misuse of Scriptures that motivate such violence. From a personal perspective I will work to see that faith-based refugee resettlement efforts through Lutheran Services in America, the largest social service agency in the United States, recognizes the need to provide asylum and resettlement services to people whose lives are in danger simply because of their sexual orientation or gender identity."

-- Bob Gibeling
Lutheran Services of Georgia
Member of the Roundtable Steering Committee

"You cannot get more basic than, 'Thou Shall Not Kill.' There is no religious tradition, Christian, or other spiritual path that condones such behavior. And while religious teachings have often been used to incite terrible acts, preaching hate and violence is not the word of any God that I know. As religious people, as LGBT people or any person with a connection to a moral tenet, what do we need as a call to action? The atrocity in Jamaica is thousands of miles away so perhaps I can ignore it. How can I also ignore the murder of 15-year-old teenager Lawrence King which took place 40 miles from my home? It should not be the proximity or number of people injured or the level of atrocity that moves me. As a human being created in the image of God, I have a duty to speak out against the corruptions of God's teachings that let some people think that they can attack and kill a neighbor and that this is somehow acceptable behavior. If I do not speak out, I have failed as a divinely created being. So I am speaking, and asking others: What we can do together to address this? And, I am asking them to ask others as well. If we both ask and take action, we have a chance to restore communities where we can recognize that of God in each of us. Shalom."

-- Joel L. Kushner, Psy.D.
Director
Institute for Judaism and Sexual Orientation
Hebrew Union College -- Jewish Institute of Religion

"Faith In America calls upon Jamaicans to recognize and understand the immense harm caused when a social climate of rejection and condemnation against its gay and lesbian citizens is justified with religious teaching.

"History has proved it wrong -- from the time when Gentiles were treated as second-class citizens in the early church to the persecution of Reformation leaders in the 15th century and still today as gay and lesbian individuals are rejected and condemned as immoral by the church.

"It should not be difficult for everyday Jamaicans to recognize bigotry and discrimination in all its ugly forms. A poll of Jamaicans last year living in Britain showed that 96 percent of those of polled believed they were the target of racism.

"We believe the majority of Jamaicans can recognize the harm of social injustice.

"There is no greater injustice than justifying rejection, condemnation and violence with religious teaching and we ask Jamaicans to denounce those church leaders who seek to disguise bigotry as religious truth."

-- Brent Childers
Executive Director
Faith In America

"In a time when war rages in Iraq, in Afghanistan, in Sudan, in Sri Lanka... and the list goes on and on, it is critical that people of faith make it emphatically clear: religion at the end of the sword is blasphemous. At a time when LGBT people are executed in Iran, murdered in the United States and viciously attacked in Jamaica...and the list goes on and on, it is critical that people of faith make it emphatically clear that hatred cloaked in religious garb desecrates God.

"The God we worship celebrates the humanity of ALL God's children. The God we worship rejoices in the diversity God has created. Islam, Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism, Voodoo, Paganism, Hinduism, Sikhism, Taoism; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, straight; African, Asian, European, North American, South American, Australian -- all give rise to a different voice, a different perspective, a different praise. But, together, they only begin to articulate the grandeur, the beauty, the creativity of God.

"Our religious traditions should inspire our awe in this kind of a God and in this kind of a creation. Praise, not killing, ought to be our work of faith."

-- Rev. Rebecca Voelkel
IWR and Faith Work Director
National Gay and Lesbian Task Force

"DignityUSA strongly condemns religiously motivated violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people everywhere in the world, and especially the recent attacks in Jamaica. We call on all people of faith, and especially religious leaders, to respect the diversity of God's creation, to remember that faith is rooted in love, and to affirm the rights of all people to live in safety and in peace. We pledge our support for Catholics in Jamaica working to create a climate of respect and tolerance that is consistent with the message of the Gospel, and Jesus' call that all may be One."

-- Marianne Duddy-Burke
Executive Director
DignityUSA