

Pro-Homosexual Group Wants to Woo Megachurch Leaders

On June 1 a self-proclaimed gay-affirming Christian organization, visited Eddie Long's Atlanta-based church for worship and an open discussion about homosexuality. The group is also targeting five other evangelical churches including Joel Osteen's Lakewood Church in Houston.



[] This weekend leaders from Soulforce, a self-proclaimed gay-affirming Christian organization, visited Eddie Long's New Birth Missionary Baptist Church in Atlanta for worship and an open discussion about homosexuality.

Soulforce, in collaboration with other pro-homosexual groups, launched The American Family Outing, an initiative in which Gay, Bisexual, Lesbian and Transgender (GBLT) families have visited megachurches around the nation to discuss their views.

Among the churches targeted since Mother's Day have been Joel Osteen's Lakewood Church in Houston, T.D. Jakes' The Potter's House in Dallas and Harry Jackson's Hope Christian Church in Beltsville, Md.

The group met with Long and leaders in his church on June 1 for a dialogue about homosexuality and the church.

A spokeswoman from Soulforce said the meeting was "wonderful" and that both sides were able to dispel myths held by the other.

Dan Rene, a spokesman from New Birth, agreed that the meetings were positive and even "very productive." He told *Charisma* that Soulforce previously viewed Long as homophobic but now many from the group recognize his sincerity toward them.

"He doesn't believe that he's right or they're wrong," Rene said, speaking for Long. "But that he respects everyone's

beliefs.”

Troy Sanders, a leader with Soulforce and an associate pastor at the gay-affirming Atlanta-based The Vision Church, told *Charisma* the purpose of the meetings is to create an open discussion and to stop the tide of hatred against those practicing homosexuality, especially since anti-gay hatred has roots in the church.

“Every church has been hospitable to us, even though there is clearly different theological differences,” Sanders said, adding that the meetings with Osteen and Jakes were productive. “It was not my intention or goal to alter anyone’s theology. This is not an attack against any families.”

Darryl Foster an ex-gay minister and founder of the homosexual outreach group Witness Freedom Ministries, believes that Soulforce is only using these meetings to gain prominence.

“Their intention is to gain credibility and attention,” Foster said. “They don’t want to hear the other side.”

Foster believes that megachurch pastors should not participate in this initiative, as he says it is a violation of Scripture.

“What [megachurch pastors] should do is tell them that they should repent,” Foster told *Charisma*.

Citing 1 Corinthians 5, in which Paul admonishes the Corinthian church to disfellowship Christians willfully living in sin, Foster added: “We are not supposed to have any association with them.”

On June 8, Soulforce plans to visit Bill Hybels’ Willow Creek Community Church and end the initiative on Father’s Day at Rick Warren’s Saddleback Community Church. **—Felicia Mann**