

Spirit-Filled Miss America Stands Firm on Abstinence Message

Pageant winner Erika Harold, a Pentecostal, says opposition to her stand won't stop her from speaking her mind

Reigning Miss America Erika Harold, a Pentecostal Christian, has a message for young people: The best sex happens if you wait until marriage. Her message of abstinence, however, has been met with opposition by at least one official associated with her new position.

Harold, a member of an Assemblies of God church, said the negative reaction from a person she described as being in the organization but not on the Miss America staff will not keep her from speaking her mind on the subject.

"I find this disturbing because abstinence is the only way to keep young people safe," she told Charisma.

Harold spoke about premarital chastity for years as she traveled in Illinois with the Chicago-based nonprofit group Project Reality, well before winning the Miss Illinois title.

"Hopefully, during the course of the year they will see the benefit there is to share this type of message with young people," she said. Her choice to abstain from sex until marriage has been instrumental in her success. And she said kids who hear her message are "unbelievably receptive."

"I'm really trying to make the idea of abstinence connect with

freedom, with power and with self-respect because the tendency is to think of abstinence as something very passive. It has freed me to achieve many of my goals,” she said.

The wide variety of social gatherings she is required to speak for means that she cannot always acknowledge the Lord verbally, Harold said. But she’s very aware that God is using her at all times in one of the highest-profile roles in America.

Often, Harold said, people will ask if she is a Christian, even if she hasn’t said anything about God. She knows God has a purpose in her winning this honor, and she trusts Him to fulfill it.

“One of the lessons I’ve learned in life is to not figure out what God is doing but just be obedient and do it,” she said. Harold said she simply tries to communicate her authentic feelings with the many audiences she addresses.

Harold and her family attend Urbana Assembly of God in Urbana, Ill., a church with a multicultural appeal. About 50 percent of the congregation is white, one-quarter is African American or African, and the rest are Hispanic, Asian or of other ethnic origins.

Harold’s family fits right in. Her father, Bob, is of Greek, German, Welsh and English descent. Her mother, Donna, is African American, Cherokee, Choctaw and Russian.

Bob Harold said he is impressed with his daughter’s strong faith and gifted intellectual abilities—she has deferred a Harvard Law School scholarship to serve as Miss America.

“She’s a person who can articulate the truth in a passionate way that can change lives,” he said of his daughter’s abstinence platform.

When Harold was in the ninth grade, she suffered harassment by a few boys at the school that was so severe that today she can speak with authority about the problem of bullying. “God gave her the ability to forgive those people and move on,” her father said.

Urbana Assembly of God pastor Gary Grogan describes Harold’s relationship with God as authentic. “Her title is God’s way to spread the message of abstinence,” he said. “Her real destiny is to make an impact on the youth of America.”

Harold challenges Christian youth to go for God’s dream in their lives. “God will use willing hearts and spirits,” she said.

Richard Daigle