

Students Urged to Speak Out on Day of Silence

✖ **April 17, 2009** – Christian leaders encouraged students to raise their voices today on the annual Day of Silence, an initiative promoted by a gay activist group to protest harassment of homosexuals in schools.

Although they said bullying should be opposed, pro-family leaders argued that the event sponsored by the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) promotes intolerance toward those who believe homosexual behavior is sinful. Started 13 years ago at the University of Virginia, the student-led Day of Silence has since spread to 8,000 middle and high schools, according to the group's Web site.

"This day is not about 'tolerance,' as it claims," said Linda Harvey of the Mission America Coalition, "but about forcing propaganda and acceptance of high-risk behavior into the schools with no opposing views allowed."

Mission America is one of 20 pro-family groups that encouraged parents to keep their middle and high school students home today in protest of the Day of Silence, during which students were asked to refrain from conversation or texting. The American Family Association and Concerned Women for America also supported the walkout.

Instead of encouraging a walkout, Warren Throckmorton, Ph.D., a psychology professor at Grove City College in Pennsylvania, urged students to remain on campus and take a biblical stand against bullying.

Throckmorton asked students to take the Golden Rule Pledge and vow to treat others as they would want to be treated, saying students who are perceived to be gay are being bullied at

school. He noted that Carl Joseph Walker-Hoover would have turned 12 today had he not hung himself after enduring almost of year of anti-gay bullying even though he never identified himself as homosexual.

"I think that those kinds of incidents make you think we've got to do a better job of helping our kids understand that their words have meaning and how they treat each other has meaning," Throckmorton said. "Who should be leading that? To me, it should be believers. We want to build bridges with people for the gospel."

"Instead of being self-conscious about whether we're endorsing a certain worldview or not, I think we should be more self-conscious about people viewing us as a source of truth and a source of strength and a source of safety," he added. "It's kind of hard to witness to somebody who's afraid of you."

But many pro-family leaders said GLSEN's political agenda can't be ignored. GLSEN has been a leader in promoting gay-friendly curriculum in public school classrooms and supports gay-straight alliances in schools.

Attorneys from Christian legal groups say many students feel bullied into participating. Mathew D. Staver, president of the Christian legal firm Liberty Counsel, said a Florida student was told he would fail the school year if he remained home on the Day of Silence. And in Indiana, parents who objected to the Day of Silence were told it was illegal to cancel the program and that any absences that day would be unexcused.

In California, attorneys from the Alliance Defense Fund (ADF) said San Diego-area high school student Chase Harper was forced to sit in an office throughout the Day of Silence in 2004 because he refused to change a T-shirt that on the front said, "Be Ashamed, Our School Embraced What God Has Condemned," and on the back read, "Homosexuality Is Shameful, Romans 1:27."

"It is very difficult for kids to stand up today for the truth, especially when they're coming from a Christian perspective because Christianity is not respected in the public school system today," said Alan Chambers, president of the ex-gay ministry Exodus International.

His organization is partnering with ADF to host the fifth annual Day of Truth on Monday to counter what he calls a one-sided message on homosexuality that is prevalent in public schools. The event was founded by ADF the year after Harper was censored.

Chambers said some 5,000 students are signed up to participate, five times the number who joined in last year. Students will pass out cards that say: "I'm speaking the truth to break the silence. True tolerance means that people with differing, even opposing, viewpoints can freely exchange ideas and respectfully listen to each other. It's time for an honest conversation about homosexuality. There's freedom to change if you want to. Let's talk."

"I think kids are afraid to speak up and share their faith and share their beliefs for fear they will be ostracized or even punished," Chambers said. "The Day of Truth really says to them not only can you, but you should feel comfortable to share your faith and perspective on this in a very respectful and tolerant way."

But for Chambers, who once battled unwanted same-sex attraction, the Day of Truth is not simply about defending students First Amendment rights.

"In our culture today, there is a one-sided incomplete message being given to our students and to young people-that it is innate, you're born this way, you can't do anything about it ... and that's dangerous," he said. "We're coming in certainly helping people understand the full aspect of homosexual but giving them a complete picture of the truth about this issue,

the pros and the cons and ultimately the stories like mine, of people who have found lasting freedom.”