

Westboro Baptist Daughters Leave Hate-Mongering Church, Apologize for Harm

The hate-mongering cult congregation Westboro Baptist Church (WBC) has lost two of its members.

Granddaughters of founder Fred Phelps—Megan Phelps-Roper, 27, and her 19-year-old sister, Grace—explained their decision in a joint statement released on Wednesday.

“We know that we’ve done and said things that hurt people,” Megan Phelps-Roper wrote. “Inflicting pain on others wasn’t the goal, but it was one of the outcomes. We wish it weren’t so, and regret that hurt.”

Megan Phelps-Roper was one of the most prominent members of the Topeka, group, and was responsible for the majority of its social media relations. She was frequently seen yelling anti-gay or anti-Jewish slogans at funerals of servicemen. Since the infamous WBC’s first protest in 1991, she has carried a “God Hates Fags” placard to 44 states and around 240 U.S. cities.

“We know that we can’t undo our whole lives,” she added. “We can’t even say we’d want to if we could; we are who we are because of all the experiences that brought us to this point. What we can do is try to find a better way to live from here on. That’s our focus.”

The sisters are among the 11 children of Brent and Shirley Phelps-Roper, who is Fred Phelps’ daughter. She is considered one of WBC’s most outspoken members.

“We know that we dearly love our family,” the sisters continued. “They now consider us betrayers, and we are cut off

from their lives, but we know they are well-intentioned. We will never not love them.”

Shirley Phelps-Roper responded to her daughters the day after the news of their departure went public, saying, “The New Testament is full of people that start right, but then fall away.” Her statement is full of references to the Bible.

Since Megan and Grace’s departure in November, church members have publicly condemned them.

“We can’t control whether or not somebody decides, when they grow up, that they don’t want to be here,” church spokesman Steve Drain told *The Kansas City Star*. “Those two girls were kind of straddling the idea that they wanted to be of the world but that they would also miss their family, the only thing they ever knew. If they continue with the position that they have, those two girls, yeah, they’re going to hell.”

But many are happy about the sisters’ departure, and have been sharing their support across social media. Someone even created a Facebook group Thursday afternoon, titled, “Megan and Grace Phelps-Roper Supporters.”

“We’ve really appreciated the supportive words people have shared with us today,” Megan Phelps-Roper told *The Star*. “The environment we grew up in was very ‘us vs. them’; it’s been nice to see that the ‘them’ have been overwhelmingly kind—as we’d kind of hoped and suspected.”

The sisters are not the first to defect from the church. Their brother, Josh, left in 2003. Between 2004 and 2011, 20 members—most in their teens and 20s—have defected. Among them was their cousin, Libby Phelps-Alvarez, who explained in an emotional interview to MSNBC this week that she left the church four years ago after it picketed the funeral of a friend’s husband. “We started praying for people to die,” she said.

Drain's daughter, Lauren, who will publish a memoir, *Banished: Surviving My Years In The Westboro Baptist Church*, in May, was excommunicated from the church in 2007. "I saw some hypocrisy, and I mentioned them and they hated it," she said in a 2010 interview with . "You're not supposed to question anything."

In an interview accompanying the blog post containing Megan and Grace Phelps-Roper's statement, by journalist Jeff Chu, Megan says her doubts about WBC started after a conversation she had with David Abitol, an Israeli Web developer who's part of the team behind Jewlicious.

"I would ask him questions about Judaism, and he would ask me questions about church doctrine," she explains. "One day, he asked a specific question about one of our signs—'Death Penalty for Fags'—and I was arguing for the church's position, that it was a Levitical punishment and as completely appropriate now as it was then.

"He said, 'But Jesus said'—and I thought it was funny he was quoting Jesus—'Let he who is without sin cast the first stone.' And then he connected it to another member of the church who had done something that, according to the Old Testament, was also punishable by death. I realized that if the death penalty was instituted for *any* sin, you completely cut off the opportunity to repent. And that's what Jesus was talking about."

Megan says her doubts started snowballing after the conversation, and she started to question another Westboro hate-filled sign, "Fags can't repent."

"It seemed misleading and dishonest," she comments. "Anybody can repent if God gives them repentance, according to the church. But this one thing—it gives the impression that homosexuality is an unforgivable sin. It didn't make sense. It seemed a wrong message for us to be sending. It's like saying, 'You're doomed! Bye!' and gives no hope for salvation."

The former WBC member says she hopes to emerge from this season “with a better understanding of the world and how I fit into it, and how I can be an influence for good.”