

Gay Activists Target Christian Colleges

A group of alumni from Wheaton College have formed OneWheaton, an organization to provide support for the gay community on the conservative Christian campus and to promote the view that homosexual practice is compatible with the Christian faith.

“If you are a student and this is part of your story, your sexual identity is not a tragic sign of the sinful nature of the world,” a letter to Wheaton students posted on the group’s website reads. *“You are not tragic.* Your desire for companionship, intimacy and love is not shameful. It is to be affirmed and celebrated just as you are to be affirmed and celebrated.”

The letter, worded as a response to “a recent chapel message on Sexuality and Wholeness,” is followed with a list of several hundred alumni signatories—all of whom are either homosexual or support the campaign—with their graduation years and cities. The group’s organizers also reached out to students by distributing informational fliers outside a chapel service, prompting an internal email from Dr. Philip Ryken, college president, affirming “the full humanity and dignity of every human being, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity” but restating the school’s biblical position on homosexual practice.

OneWheaton’s campaign is the most recent incident in a string of challenges to Christian colleges’ policies on sexuality. The pro-gay advocacy group Soulforce organizes events to put pressure on Christian colleges and churches to embrace homosexuality. Since 2006, Soulforce has conducted annual “Equality Rides” that have demonstrated at schools such as Oral Roberts, Regent and Lee Universities. Soulforce has also demonstrated outside well-known megachurches and met with

pastors such as Eddie Long and Joel Osteen in an attempt to persuade them to adjust their views on homosexuality.

While some schools have held firm in their prohibitions against homosexual behavior, others have bent to student pressure and allowed gay student organizations. An April 18 *New York Times* article noted the presence of an unrecognized “club to discuss sexuality and fight homophobia” at Baylor University (a historically Baptist school), as well as similar groups at Abilene Christian and Harding Universities.

As many Christian college students receive federal and state financial aid, it remains to be seen if the debate will remain in the realm of public conversation and move toward legal challenges for schools that maintain conservative standards regarding students’ sexual conduct.